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Parchment, man of laughs, helps Adventist president with Inter-American Division

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8 Feb 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States...Ansel Oliver/ANN

It's not rare to hear Orville Parchment's laugh echoing over the cubicles.

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He delivers sermons in Asia, welcomes ambassadors at the denomination's headquarters and speaks to groups about the president's emphasis on Revival and Reformation.

Usually though, Parchment is plowing through e-mails in his office, which overlooks Highway 29 in Montgomery County in Maryland. As the assistant to Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the Adventist world church, Parchment acts as an extension of the president's office, speaking on behalf of Wilson and fielding requests as varied by subject as they are by locale.

"I'm here to lighten his [Wilson's] load so he can look at the bigger picture and cast a vision for the church. When he's in town he has very little time," Parchment said one recent morning in his office.

Wilson, currently visiting denominational leaders and institutions in the South Pacific, will be in the office less than 30 business days from January 1 through the end of September, said Marilyn Perez, Wilson's scheduler and executive administrative assistant.

Parchment, 63, originally from Jamaica, served as president of the church in Canada and the U.S. state of Arizona before then-President Jan Paulsen asked him to serve as his assistant in 2003. He said Paulsen valued his "grass roots" experience leading conferences and a union, two of the local mid-level administrative units comprising the denomination's structure.

Wilson requested that Parchment continue his service following the administration changeover last summer, Parchment said. He continues to serve as chair of International Crisis Management Committee, which monitors major international crises and advises local church administrations on the safety of missionaries. Most of the committee's actions go unreported because of safety issues for employees in some world regions.

Parchment also chairs the world headquarters' Human Resources Committee, which can sometimes involve his least favorite part of the job: disciplinary actions.

"We rarely have problems, but remember: we're staffed by Christians, not angels," he said.

Around the office he handles requests from the undersecretary regarding meeting agendas, assisting the nine vice presidents with the president's requests and field's questions from employees and members worldwide, some of them revealing frustrations.

A local church pastor has just been fired and is appealing the decision to the president of the denomination. "We have to tell them this is a local issue and we refer it back to local administration," Parchment said.

The requests can often pour in.

A person in North America wanted to fly in and talk with the president about a "confidential" matter. No deal, Parchment said. Two people in Asia wanted Wilson to come and encourage people to read their Bibles every day. More information needed, Parchment told them. Independent pastors and groups regularly request a video greeting from Wilson. Get aligned with the church, Parchment tells them, and then we'll see.

Six months ago a person claiming to be a prophet wanted to share something with Wilson. Another person wanted to tell Wilson some reoccurring dreams they had.

"I say to myself, if I were living in church co-founder Ellen White's day and she wrote a letter like that to me..."