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In Japan, Adventist Church intensifies earthquake relief effort

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ANN staff

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The California-based non-profit organization -- a supporting ministry of the Adventist Church -- has operated in 17 Spanish-speaking countries throughout Latin America. Recent efforts include building hundreds of One-Day Churches throughout Ecuador and Mexico.

The convention marked a deliberate move to involve more of the United States' Hispanic community "right here at home" in such outreach, said Kyle Fiess, Maranatha vice president for Marketing and Projects.

"With such a large Hispanic population within [the U.S.], we're realizing an opportunity that will help grow the Adventist Church and provide more houses of worship," Fiess said.

Maranatha's One-Day Church program, launched in 2008, provides quality, easily-assembled church kits for $3,000 each. A steel frame and roofing materials arrive in the back of a pick-up truck, and members use local resources, such as brick or bamboo, to complete the walls. So far, the program has housed more than 1,600 congregations worldwide, Maranatha officials said.

Maranatha has already operated in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico and Venezuela.

By familiarizing Hispanic Adventists in the U.S. with ways they can impact their Spanish-speaking friends at home and worldwide, Maranatha hopes to inspire a new enthusiasm for mission, Fiess said.

"We find that the long-term support comes from people who have previously been involved as volunteers," he said. "They come back and they're invariably more involved in their own community."

Last month's convention was a joint effort between Maranatha and Adventist Church administration in Florida. Abel Paulin, vice president for the church's Spanish-language ministries in Florida, said the event -- which drew members from nearly 90 local congregations -- sparked a renewed interest in outreach with its focus on "church planting, growth and baptisms."

Mark Finley, special assistant to the Adventist world church president for evangelism, told the 5,000 attendees that Maranatha is "one of the most significant things that is happening within the Seventh-day Adventist Church today."

Adventist evangelist and author Alejandro Bullón, who also spoke at the convention, challenged attendees to get involved. "It doesn't matter how much money you have. All of you have time," he said.

Bullón is expected to contribute to a forthcoming Spanish language television program produced by Maranatha highlighting the organization's mission projects worldwide.
The Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to rally support in the wake of the 9.0-magnitude earthquake that struck northeastern Japan March 11, spawning a tsunami and widespread devastation.

The Adventist Church's Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD) voted last week to send $50,000 to the church in Japan for emergency relief, and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency is expanding its response by supporting an evacuation center in Miyagi Prefecture, one of the hardest-hit regions.

The pledge is part of what church leaders in NSD called their "long-term support" as Japan recovers from its worst natural disaster in recorded history.

"When we think of the suffering and damage Japan is going through ... [all] we can do is to humbly ask God to stretch out his healing hands," said Jairyong Lee, Adventist Church president for NSD. "There is an urgent need for the prayers of the world church for our members in Japan."

Lee visited the country yesterday to better assess damage to Adventist-owned churches and institutions. Early reports indicated that 13 churches, 10 schools and five other church institutions were located in earthquake-affected areas.

Meanwhile, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency sent a two-ton truck loaded with food and emergency supplies to assist the approximately 1,300 displaced persons currently housed in an area evacuation center. ADRA has previously provided hot meals for those staying at evacuation centers.

"I was so happy to have [traditional Japanese] miso soup today because it was the first hot meal we had since the earthquake," one young girl at a center told ADRA last week.

Cold weather, snow, empty grocery stores and the fear of nuclear radiation are complicating many survivors' efforts to return to their homes and begin cleanup, an ADRA press release said.

Last week, Adventist world church President Ted N.C. Wilson issued a statement in response to the earthquake, noting the church's initial relief efforts in the region and urging Adventist worldwide to pray for Japan "during this time of intense need."