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April 10, 2011

It's Sabbath morning, and members of the Templo Auditorio Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, rush for the 8 a.m. Family Ministries worship. They meet in the church for the "Power Hour," a program rich in singing and prayer.

Together, they read a selected reading and share their blessings from the week. No one slips out early, because the best part happens at the end: one family takes the church Bible home.

The recently elected leaders of Family Ministries for the Templo Auditorio decided to try something new. They came up with a project called, "With the power of His Word," which began last October. The project's main objective was to promote the study of the Bible and connection to God through prayer, leading to spiritual revival in the church.

The project involves families in reading two chapters of the Bible a day during the week, and two chapters in church during the "Power Hour." Other activities planned include a spiritual retreat with all families, seminars for young couples, and an in-depth seminar that analyzes the Bible chapters read every two months.

"We bought a large new Bible that would circulate among the church families and, when we launched the project, we invited any family to take the Bible home and read two chapters a day from it," says Israel Jimenez, Family Ministries director at the Templo Auditorio Adventist church. "Now, after four months, every Sabbath morning that we ask which family wants to take the Bible with them. There are usually four or five families requesting it."

When a family is picked, they share any particular requests they want the church to pray for during the week. The next week during the "Power Hour," this family will bring back the Bible and share with the church the blessings they enjoyed during the week.

"[We've had] a child who was so attached to the church Bible that she didn't want her parents to give it back next Sabbath, or a father crying in thankfulness to God as he recounts how the Lord increased ... his income because the family decided to start off the day reading the Bible," Jimenez said.

The Reynoso family experienced a spiritual renewal when they took the Bible last year. Sadly, they had neglected their spiritual life, but after returning from the Family Ministries spiritual retreat, decided to ask for the Bible. They had their family worship with their two kids in the morning, singing and reading the selected portion of the Bible. When the time came to return the Bible, they told of the peace and spiritual awakening they now experience.

"In five years as church members, we had never felt this confident -- we are secure in the arms of the Lord now," Mr. Reynoso said.

Luis Aguilar shares a similar story: "When I began to read the Bible at 5 a.m. with my kids, I experienced the love of God. I saw clearly that the Lord wants both me and my family to be faithful. As the owner of a car repair shop, I decided to read the Bible with my employees before doing anything. The blessings of the Lord began to pour in. Then I took a step further and made a pledge to return to the Lord a given percent of all sales. After three months doing..."
Wilson Opens Spring Meeting Sermon with Call to Christ

Capping a morning of joyous singing, scripture contemplation and heartfelt prayer, Pastor Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist world church, delivered a call to seek Christ's "all-encompassing righteousness" at the Oakwood University Seventh-day Adventist Church in Huntsville, Alabama, United States today.

The message came during Sabbath worship at the start of the Adventist world church's spring leadership meetings, being held at the Oakwood campus this year, instead of its usual location at the church's Silver Spring, Maryland, headquarters.

"Christ's all-encompassing righteousness is our only hope as we rapidly come to the close of earth's history," Wilson said to an onsite congregation of approximately 2,100 as well as a live global television and Internet audience. "Seventh-day Adventists have been called to proclaim the truth as it is in Jesus. He and He alone is our salvation," he added.

Wilson said Christ "calls us to accept His righteousness and to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the last great work of proclaiming Christ, His righteousness, and His soon coming. This is the message that has been entrusted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as His last-day remnant people."

He added, "At this critical moment in earth's history, with the world collapsing around us, let us humble ourselves before the Lord realizing that our only hope is in Christ and His righteousness."

Wilson quoted Ellen G. White, a pioneering co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist movement and the founding influence behind the establishment of what is now Oakwood University, who wrote, "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work." (Selected Messages, Book 1, page 121)

Referring to the Church's current theme, Wilson said, "This call for revival and reformation is not some legalistic, 'pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps' kind of religion. It is centered in Christ and Him alone."

He added, "The voices of Seventh-day Adventists should be the foremost in proclaiming that salvation is through Christ and Christ alone! The two great provisions of salvation -- justification and sanctification -- cannot be separated for they constitute the fullness of Christ's all-encompassing righteousness."

The message followed a service that highlighted the musical talents of many Oakwood University students and staff, particularly its orchestra and the Aeolians, the school's renowned choral group. Following a scripture reading in English and Koine Greek, the latter by a student, the Aeolians presented a praise number, "It Pays to Serve Jesus," which brought many in the congregation to their feet praising God at its conclusion.

"We've already had the sermon," Wilson said as he took to the podium following the rousing musical appeal, offering affirmation to the University and its constituency: "Here at Oakwood University, you are a vital part of God's worldwide family."

That "worldwide family" was also a key target of Wilson's message, with the leader telling his hearers the conversion process "is only something that God can produce."

When conversion happens, Wilson added, that is "why drunkards become sober. That's why loose-living people become moral. That's why mean-spirited individuals become peacemakers. That's why liars become honest. That is why filthy-minded people become pure. That is why evolutionists become creationists. That is why selfish, self-centered people become selfless, generous benefactors. That is why the unconverted become converted. ...

Again quoting Ellen White, this time from her book Steps to Christ, Wilson read, "Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more
Seventh-day Adventist leaders highlighted church mission, both within and outside its own walls, at the Friday night opening of Spring Meeting, one of the denomination’s two major annual business meetings.

Delegates also approved the meeting agenda as Sabbath began, before holding a spiritual service at McKee Auditorium at Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, United States.

Executive Secretary G. T. Ng called for mission efforts to not neglect people who are already members. Without many choosing to leave the church, world membership would now likely be 24 million instead of the nearly 17-million at present, Ng said.

"Nurture is part of our mission. We just read that in our mission statement, unless I need new glasses," Ng said.

Other leaders also challenged the church to include a variety of people in mission. Ministry magazine Editor Derek Morris and called for the church to increasingly include specialized professionals in assisting pastors with ministry. He read from the sixth chapter of Acts, in which a growing church called for other Spirit-filled people to assist with the work, allowing pastors to focus solely on ministering.

Friday night’s service opened the weekend meeting of the denomination’s Executive Committee. Business sessions will be held Sunday and Monday.

The committee is meeting this week at Oakwood University, an institution directly affiliated with the denomination’s world headquarters.

The Friday evening service also featured testimonies and music from students of the University, a historically Black institution.

The service was broadcast on Hope Channel, the denomination’s television network.

Business sessions are periodically held at sites away from the church’s world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Beginning Sunday, delegates are expected to address agenda items that include:

- Transparency and accountability measures in financial reporting.
- A review of compensation.
- Confirming upcoming international Bible Conferences.
- An update on a Middle East and Mediterranean Survey commission, which is studying a possible realignment of church administrative structure in the region.
- Electing an associate director of the Stewardship department at the world headquarters.

Spring Meeting is one of two major annual meetings of...