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April 12, 2011

World leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist world church stressed a continuing need for transparency and accountability in financial reporting during an April 10 business session of the denomination’s Spring Meeting.

Adventist world church Treasurer Robert E. Lemon reports that tithe topped $2 billion for the first time in 2010. The announcement came during his report at the denomination’s Spring Meeting at Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, United States.

The 12-page document on transparency -- the product of a task force composed of Lemon, Douglas, North American Division Treasurer Tom Evans and GCAS associate director Robyn W. Kajiura -- stressed concerns raised by the GCAS Board and its chairman, Jack L. Krogstad. Krogstad, a layman who holds the Union Pacific Endowed Chair in Accountancy at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, is presently an Academic Fellow in the Office of the Chief Accountant at the United States Securities and Exchange Commission. Those concerns followed a GCAS report "which included the frequency of certain audit findings and the recurring unresolved nature of those findings," as stated in the document.

The GCAS document, "Transparency and Accountability in Financial Reporting," suggested a need to improve church leadership culture at all organizational levels, that better controls result from a better culture, that "communication is at the core of effective governance," and that the result would be greater confidence from all church stakeholders, or constituents.

"It's not an auditing issue; it's a character issue," said Juan Prestol, Adventist world church undertreasurer, during discussion of the matter. "An audit is too late," he explained to Adventist Review after his remarks, since audits only discover issues after the fact.

What is needed, he added, are "changes in the DNA of Adventist leadership."

Wilson said board members should be unafraid to question items presented to them. "On committees, ask questions. Don't assume somebody else is going to take care of it," he said.

Added North American Division President Dan Jackson, "There ought not to be friends in boardrooms ... if I sit on that board and respond to issues on that board because I'm a friend, I really have no business being on that board. You need to challenge me and do it with a smile."

Ella Simmons, a world church general vice president, stressed the need for an even higher approach. "I would challenge us to total commitment to holistic stewardship. Of course we focus on financial operations; but how can we operate [with] integrity and [in] ethical ways if we do not value ethical behavior in every area of our work, of our being, our relationships, our quality in performance. It must be holistic," she said.

Wilson promised further discussions on the subject at the 2011 Annual Council, to be held in October in Silver Spring, Maryland.

In an earlier address, Lemon said the church's finances showed improvement in 2010.

"Worldwide tithe passed the US$2 billion mark in 2010," Lemon said. "In spite of the recession..."
Evangelism reports begin Spring Meeting business sessions

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12 Apr 2011, Huntsville, Alabama, United States...Ansel Oliver/ANN

Top regional leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist world church shared reports on evangelism efforts in their territories during the Council on Evangelism and Witness, which lasted throughout the first morning of business at Spring Meeting on April 10.

Presidents of many of the denomination's 13 world divisions highlighted how coordinated outreach approaches are leading people to join the church, while others supported an initiative to widely distribute versions of the book The Great Controversy, written by church co-founder Ellen G. White.

One president shared the results of a public perception survey in his region. "That's risky if you're not secure," said Mark Finley, assistant to the president for evangelism.

Finley led the presentations at McKee auditorium at Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, United States, where some 130 members of the world church's Executive Committee met for two days of business meetings.

Finley reiterated the concept that evangelism should be a "process, not an event," a point he and other leaders have repeated in recent years. Indeed, most presentations highlighted month's-long small-group ministry leading up to public evangelism or large-scale meetings instead of a one-time public event. Leaders have said a "process" system of evangelism leads to greater retention of new members.

Israel Leito, president of the church's Inter-American Division, shared how a recent division-wide program lead to 15,000 baptisms in one day last month. More than 60,000 people have joined the Adventist Church in the division so far this year, he said.

Finley said slower-growth areas are also seeing renewed support for evangelism.

Dan Jackson, president of the North American Division, said a recent initiative comprising 130 small groups in the city of Houston in Texas led to 400 baptisms there in February. A similar meeting series will launch in New York soon and will include some 400 small groups leading up to a September decision invitation meeting.

"We're hoping to generate a huge blessing, a huge reaping for God," Jackson said.

He added that having more lay members supporting pastors in evangelism yields greater success.

Because of that, the Sabbath School/Personal Ministries department announced the launch of "Go 7 Million," a name reminiscent of the discontinued initiative "Go One Million." The initiative encourages the denomination to identify 7 million lay members to get involved in local outreach programs.

Leaders of the Miami-based Inter-American Division hope to reach a target of 1 million people for Go 7 Million. The division's Sabbath School/Personal Ministries associate director Samuel
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April 12, 2011 - Santa Lucia del Camino, Oaxaca, Mexico...IAD Staff

Administrators and teachers at the 44 Seventh-day Adventist schools in the Inter-Oceanic region in Mexico put aside their academic curriculum earlier this month to spend a day in spiritual enrichment and prayer. The special activity, which took place April 6th, was part of Constant In Prayer, a spiritual revival and reformation initiative taking place throughout the Inter-American Division (IAD). The initiative stresses constant prayer and study of the Bible as indispensable ingredients for spiritual growth.

The Constant In Prayer initiative launched this month in Adventist schools throughout the IAD territory.

At Cinco de Febrero Adventist School in Oaxaca, Pastor Roberto Herrera, coordinator of the initiative in the IAD, spoke to teachers and faculty first.

"We want you to know that your church leadership is concerned with your spiritual life, your salvation, and that of your family as you educate," he said. Later he spoke to the hundreds of students during a series of general assemblies.

Students and teachers also participated in praise and worship, submitted prayer requests, and divided into prayer sessions under a large tent erected for the special activities. They also wrote on a prayer mural. The event was carried live on the internet and seen throughout the dozens other schools in the Inter-Oceanic region.

"This was a truly wonderful activity," said Pastor Herrera.

Leaders of the church headquarter office in Puebla traveled to the school to emphasize the importance of a prayerful life to students ranging from pre-school to high school.

"Adventist schools are available to be a spiritual refuge, that is why prayer is key to being a part of every activities of the school," said Pastor Herrera. "I am more and more convinced that God is calling His people to pray and He is giving that vision to our church leaders."

Hundreds more Adventist schools throughout Inter-America will engage in special prayer activities in the coming days and on April 26, 2011.

To view a photo gallery of the Cinco de Febrero Adventist School Constant in Prayer event, click here http://www.flickr.com/photos/interamerica
To learn more about the Cinco de Febreoro Adventist School, visit http://cocife.edu.mx/
To view the webcast of the program go to http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/13814442