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Inter-American Division   >   Communication Department

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May 17, 2011 - Miami, Florida, United States....Libna Stevens/IAD

Top church leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Inter-American Division (IAD) honored scores of former regional administrators today. The special ceremony kicked off the first day of business meetings held at the IAD's headquarter office in Miami, Florida.

"Inter-America has never been happier to see hundreds of years of service combined in one place as you gather here," said Pastor Israel Leito, president of the church in Inter-America as he addressed the packed auditorium.

"I see many who were my leaders when I was a student," he continued. "We are still holding firm the faith you left, we still have the same hope you gave us, and we are still looking for the Second Coming of Jesus."

Former union presidents, secretaries and treasurers traveled from throughout Inter-America in response to the special invitation to sit and have a voice during the first of two annual executive committee meetings.

"It is because of you that we are here," said Pastor Leito. "We have followed the example you have left us, and we have one thing in common: the same Lord that led you is leading us today."

It is because of the efforts of committed Seventh-day Adventists that the church has more than 3 million members today, said Pastor Leito as he reflected on when the IAD had only six unions. Today it has 21 unions. "I remember when the Inter-American Division had 60,000 church members and today it has 3.4 million," he added.

Before plaques and special greetings were given to the honorees, Pastor George W. Brown, former IAD president and former union administrator, spoke via telephone to the assembled group and congratulated former and present leaders for the significant strides on the growth of the church in Inter-America.

"Inter-America has continued to mark the pace for the Adventist World Church," said Pastor Brown. "From its record peak year of 1987 when the IAD for the first time reached one million members, from that time onward, the whole world has been on fire because of the example of Inter-America."

Pastor Brown urged leaders to keep Inter-America in the forefront through a suggested four-point formula. "The Division must stay in faith and doctrines, be Christ-centered, spirit-led and be mission driven," said Pastor Brown before congratulating the team for the outstanding growth seen so far in the IAD.

It's a growth that has placed the church Inter-America at the top of the Adventist world divisions in membership and the leader in mission offering giving, said Pastor Leito.

Pastor Robert S. Folkenberg, former Adventist World President, who also served as president of the then Central American Union in the 1980s, was among the honorees.

"I feel so at home here in Inter-America," said Pastor Folkenberg. "The years that Anita and I served in Inter-America were the best."

Image by Libna Stevens/IAD

Pastor Israel Leito, president of the church in Inter-America gives a commemorative plaque to Etzer Obas (right) former president of the church in Haiti, during a special ceremony today in Miami, Florida. Obas was among more than 25 former church leaders
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17 May 2011, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States...Arin Gencer/ANN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's risk management and insurance organization is on a mission to ensure church-owned properties throughout North America are valued by current standards.

Adventist Risk Management is working with the denomination's local administrative conferences in the region to update property evaluations so that church and school facilities' insurance values reflect the actual cost of replacing damaged property, said Gideon Dayak, a risk control consultant with the organization. The alternative could mean not having adequate funds to restore a lost building.

"To go out and insure a group of churches and suggest that the possibility exists that if they have a total loss there may not be enough value there to rebuild a church...to me, is an ethical issue," said David Rawson, senior field service representative for Adventist Risk Management (ARM).

"There was an ethical mandate to get out and get this done."

Rawson and his fellow field representatives in the region are engaged in "a constant process that we've pushed aggressively" to update files, he said, going into the field to evaluate facilities for the details required for a fresh appraisal. He estimated that ARM has completed about half of the project, which began about seven years ago.

Adventist Risk Management's efforts in the North American region follow a multiyear effort to address a similar issue in the world church's East-Central Africa, West-Central Africa, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean and Southern Asia divisions, Rawson said. A decade ago, property lists for those parts of the world were seriously outdated -- not just in terms of property values but also having an accurate list of existing facilities, including the GPS coordinates for each location, he said.

"We'd have two properties on a piece of land sitting next to each other -- one building was obviously ancient and no longer needed to be insured; a brand new building sitting next to it had absolutely no insurance coverage," Rawson said, describing some of the scenarios encountered.

"If you don't list the property on your insurance statement of values, and you have a loss, you have no coverage. So it was really important to get that cleaned up."

Dayak -- who conducts property appraisals and safety/risk control analysis -- said he has assessed some 300 North American properties in the past six months. The process involves a close inspection using an established property-insurance standard, and taking photos of the building. Dayak then enters the building's data into the Marshall & Swift commercial property estimator, which provides replacement costs based on zip code.

"You wouldn't believe the sense of appreciation and relief that they feel to know that they're valued correctly," Rawson said of the conferences he has worked with.

Since January 2011, ARM has conducted over 25 risk-management and insurance-coverage training seminars for church administrators, including those in North America's Southern Union Conference and South Africa's Zimbabwe Union Conference, said Arthur Blinci, ARM vice president for Marketing and Field Assessment.

Such sessions cover an array of topics, Dayak said, including the best way to care for properties; avoiding potential hazards inside buildings; having and following an emergency evacuation plan; and an inspection that identifies the cost of replacing lost property. The seminars help church administrators better understand their insurance coverage and learn how to report losses on a timely basis when an accident occurs, Blinci added.