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The top leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Euro-Asia Division said at Spring Meeting in April that one of his chief priorities was training employees. That's why earlier this month President Guillermo Biaggi and his team of leaders brought together all 1,300 of the division's pastors for a six-day training forum at Zaosky Adventist University in Russia's Tula Region. Leaders from the Adventist Church's world headquarters offered workshops on family life, biblical doctrines, and even basics such as delivering effective sermons, giving Bible studies and visiting members -- things that he says may seem common in some parts of the world.

The division hosted a similar event in 2006.

By population, Euro-Asia is the second smallest of the denomination's 13 world divisions. It has about 140,000 members, more than 40 percent of whom live in Ukraine. The division includes 12 countries of the former Soviet Union and covers 11 time zones.

Biaggi, 58, is originally from Argentina and previously served as the division's treasurer. He's a Certified Public Accountant, holds bachelor's degrees in business and theology, and has a master's degree in administration.

Following this month's conference, Biaggi corresponded by email with ANN. He discussed some challenges the Adventist Church faces and why reviewing the basics is necessary in his part of the world. Some excerpts have been edited for clarity:

Adventist News Network: What training did you feel was necessary to bring all 1,300 local pastors together?

Guillermo Biaggi: We need to have pastors connect with Jesus if they are going to be used by God. Not hustling to get home after work, but connecting with Jesus. It should be about mission and creating centers of influence, not getting caught up in movements that aren't biblical. We need them to remember the importance of their own family and to become strong speakers of God's word.

ANN: What kind of challenges is the church facing in your division?

Biaggi: There is a significant rate of apostasy, and there are several factors. One is that during the 1990s the Church experienced symptoms of a newly organized church structure. It enjoyed religious freedom and rapidl growth, which made these factors more evident. Two, many pastors aren't well trained and aren't able to offer proper nurture and support. Then there is the lack of chapels, or you would say "temples" or "churches." Many of our congregations have to rent, and then a landlord will not rent to them anymore and they have to find a new place to worship. It doesn't offer much security when that happens. And another thing, too, is that people are migratory. People want to go to the United States or Canada or Europe.