Adventists in North America make strides in curbing childhood obesity

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Church officials and members ran, walked and bicycled their way through Let's Move! Day on September 25. They played sports, planted community gardens, offered health screenings, cooked healthy food and logged steps toward a goal of one million collective miles of physical activity.

In Maryland, world church President Ted N. C. Wilson contributed to the goal by joining more than 130 other Adventists -- including multi-marathoner and world church Vice President Delbert Baker -- for a 5K on the grounds of the Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Sponsored by Vibrant Life, the race drew government officials to Hagerstown, including United States Representative Roscoe Bartlett and Joanne Grossi, regional director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Grossi applauded Let's Move! Day activities to promote fitness and nutrition nationwide and called the Adventist Church "one of [the department's] best partners with our faith-based office."

The Adventist Church is among some 50 other faith and community organizations that pledged last year to support Let's Move!, a national initiative of U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama to fight the epidemic of childhood obesity.

Reports indicate the nearly one in three children in America are overweight or obese, increasing their chances of getting asthma, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and other health risks.

Judy Palfrey, executive director of Obama's initiative, was among government officials in Hagerstown Sunday to help launch the run. Reading a letter from the first lady, Palfrey extended Obama's gratitude for the church's efforts in promoting community health, specifically in reversing the trend of childhood inactivity and poor nutrition.

"I truly believe our strength as a country and our ability to responsibly shape our future depends on solving this challenge, and people like you are vital to our success," Obama said in the letter.

Church health officials are hoping the day of activity extends into a lifetime of healthy choices for church and community members and their families in North America.

"Promoting small, simple changes in physical activity and food choices in our daily and family lives can make all the difference in preventing childhood obesity," said Katia Reinert, Health Ministries director for the church in North America.

The national Let's Move! Day is part of Adventists InStep for Life, an initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America to promote exercise and better nutrition.

Dan Jackson, president of the church in North America, added miles toward the goal yesterday when he took a break from a meeting with church officers in Canada for a walk.