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New administrative region in Brazil recognizes growth, financial independence

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Variance for North American, Trans-European Division constitutions fails Annual Council Vote

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Oct 13, 2011

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12 Oct 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States....Mark A. Kellner, Adventist Review

Thirty years after its last stint at hosting a Seventh-day Adventist Church world business session, Indianapolis, capital of the state of Indiana, will welcome the 61st General Conference Session in 2020. The Lucas Oil Stadium, home of the Indianapolis Colts football team, and the Indianapolis Convention Center, will host the event.

"It's important to have groups that are quality people come into Indianapolis," declared Leonard Hoops, president and chief executive of the Indianapolis Convention and Visitors Association. He led a delegation of Hoosiers, as the state's people are known, in making an earnest presentation before delegates to the 2011 Annual Council at the movement's Silver Spring, Maryland, headquarters.

Hoops, a Presbyterian, was born in Trinidad and said he has Seventh-day Adventist relatives, including an aunt who is a church member. "I know enough about Adventists to be dangerous," he quipped.

The convention is expected to bring approximately $28 million in revenue to Indianapolis, a 372 square-mile city with a 2011 metro area population of 1.7 million. It is the 34th largest metropolitan area in the United States, according to the federal Office of Management and Budget.

A similar team from Atlanta, Georgia, site of the 2010 GC Session, also presented and asked for delegates for a repeat visit.

After world sessions in Utrecht, Netherlands (1995) and Toronto, Canada (2000), the last two General Conference sessions have been in the United States -- St. Louis (2005) and Atlanta (2010). The 2015 General Conference Session will also be in the U.S., in San Antonio, Texas, July 2-11. According to Sherri Clemmer, the world church's top meeting planner, several factors come into play in recommending that the 2020 General Conference session again be held in a U.S. city.

To have a successful GC Session, she said, it's important to have a stadium staff that is fluent in English; a location where food safety can be assured; a nearby airport large enough to handle delegate travel; hotels close to the convention venue, and an enclosed stadium with seating for 70,000 adjacent to a convention center. Very few venues can meet all those requirements, Clemmer said, and they tend to be in the United States.

The session, held every five years, is expected to draw as many as 100,000 people on the peak convention days, as well as approximately 3,500 voting delegates, their family members, church employees and others during the event, in which world leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are elected and policies are decided.

A "Parade of Nations," in which Adventists march in national costume, carrying their country's flags, is seen as a highlight of the meetings. These meetings also usually feature service projects in the local community, cultural and musical events for the public, as well as outreach programs offering educational services on health and other matters.
New administrative region in Brazil recognizes growth, financial independence

Top Seventh-day Adventist world church leadership today voted to split the Northeast Brazil Union Mission into two administrative bodies -- the Northeast Brazil Union Mission and East Brazil Union Mission.

The move recognizes burgeoning membership and impeccable handling of finances in the region, church leaders said. It comes on the heels of a similar realignment of the church's administrative structure in Brazil last year.

The former Northeast Brazil Union Mission is home to almost 340,000 Adventists and a growing network of churches and church-run schools. Membership there has more than doubled since the union was established in 1996. As of July this year, the church in the region welcomed more than 20,000 new believers, or about 3,000 ascensions per month.

"This region for us has a strong potential for growth," said South American Division President Erton Kohler. "The people there are very receptive. We believe that a new union there can give strong support to our church in the region and help fulfill the mission."

The newly formed Northeast and East Brazil union missions will each begin in 2013 with more than 100 percent of ideal working capital, said world church Undertreasurer Juan Prestol. Neither region is saddled with debt, he added, and both are in "exceptional" financial condition.

The Adventist Church in Brazil has undergone numerous administrative realignments since it was organized in the country in 1895. Church leadership regularly reorganize church administrative structure to accommodate membership growth. Most recently, delegates at last year's General Conference Session voted to recognize the split of the former North Brazil Union Mission into two entities, creating the Northwest Brazil Union Mission.

"We praise the Lord for the dynamic growth in South America and especially in this region of Brazil," world church President Ted N. C. Wilson told Annual Council delegates.

Also today, church leaders voted to rename the current East Brazil Union Conference. To avoid confusion with the newly formed East Brazil Union Mission, the region is now called the Southeast Brazil Union Conference.
A request to allow commissioned ministers in the North American and Trans-European divisions -- those who have not been formally ordained as Seventh-day Adventist pastors -- to serve as conference presidents sparked more than six hours of debate October 11, 2011, during the world church's Annual Council.

In the end, the controversial measure was defeated by a written vote of 167 to 117. The 50-vote margin defeating the NAD proposal also effectively ended the TED request, which would have permitted commissioned ministers to head church unions as well as conferences.

Adventist Church President Ted N.C. Wilson took the rare step of relinquishing the chair during the morning session to speak in opposition to the NAD proposal.

"My thoughts and convictions are just those," Wilson said in introducing his comments. "They are not the collective decision" of the General Conference's administrative committee, known as ADCOM.

Wilson said he objected to the proposal on several grounds: First, he said, "the church is an ecclesiastical body, which is organized for the church. Leadership has been based, in the past, on trained leadership, on spiritual leadership." He said he wasn't suggesting commissioned ministers were not trained or not spiritual, but he did note a difference in those who are ordained: "According to scriptural injunction and our own history, we have a particular mode which we have followed in terms of top spiritual leadership."

Second, Wilson noted, since only ordained ministers can unite congregations and ordain local church elders and deacons, there was a question of a commissioned minister fulfilling all the tasks of a conference leader.

Third, he said, "whatever we vote, will have some impact on the world church. We have taken the position in the past that ordination is recognized around the world. We are not here in the