IAD News

Inter-America: Church to evangelize cities both large and small

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Aggressive attention to ministering to major urban areas will be the main focus of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Inter-America in the coming months and years. It was a decision taken by top church leaders of the Inter-American Division (IAD) during the church's second annual business meetings held in The Bahamas last week.

As of July 2011, the IAD territory membership stands at 3.5 million. There are also more than 80,000 active small groups and a new, comprehensive education strategy designed to improve Adventist schools and institutions. What's more, church leaders recently committed to evangelize the millions in isolated populations who still have not heard the gospel message. But church leaders say efforts must be stepped up in the large cities, as well.

"We have put this on the fast track, where we can be more involved in the cities," said Pastor Israel Leito, president of the church in Inter-America, as he reflected on the decisions and initiatives taken during the recent executive committee.

**Major Urban Areas**

There are three cities in the IAD territory with a population of five million or more: Mexico City, Mexico, Caracas, Venezuela, and Bogota, Colombia. In recent years, the church has established a union office in all three cities: the Central Mexican Union, East Venezuela Union, and the South Colombian Union.

"We sought to establish a presence in these cities in order to create the infrastructure, provide adequate financing, and move towards evangelism initiatives," explained Pastor Leito.

The new urban initiative, which was approved by a unanimous vote during the business meetings, is in reply to the Adventist World Church, which recently challenged each of the 13 world divisions to minister to its urban areas. The world church identified some 650 major cities around the globe to be targeted.

In addition to the three most populous cities in the IAD mentioned above, each of the 21 IAD unions is working to identify its respective target cities, beginning with cities of one million or more, but also to include suburban areas of as little as 5,000.

Church leaders said they want to reach every neighborhood and devise a plan to establish at least five new congregations in each target city per year.

Strategies already voted to begin in 2012 include church planting initiatives, one-day church building sites, evangelist support from other union territories, and using existing churches to become active centers in the community.

"Our church buildings are under utilized," said Pastor Leito. "We want our churches to become centers of influence throughout the week, not just on Sabbath and Wednesday nights."

A number of evangelistic initiatives were voted to involve children, young people, and...