Colombia: Adventist Church celebrates 90 years with territory-wide evangelistic efforts

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Church missiologist brings Adventist perspective to new book on Christian mission

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Themed "Time for Hope", leaders organized evangelistic campaigns in large centers throughout the main cities in South Colombia as they culminated a series of activities to commemorate the 90 years of Adventist presence in the region.

"This was a great opportunity to show this part of Colombia that the church is alive in this region of the world and each member wants to spread the message of salvation," said Pastor Eliseo Bustamante, president for the church in South Colombia.

In Bogota, a city with more than 7 million, the church held a four-day televised campaign Nov. 2-5, led by Pastor Robert Costa, It is Written speaker and associate ministerial secretary for the Adventist World Church. More than 12,000 gathered and some 520 people were baptized as a result of the joint efforts of ministers and laypeople.

"I am so happy to have participated in this such important program for our church in Bogota," said Pastor Costa. "It was surely a far reaching project and I am amazed at the magnitude of this celebration."

The program was broadcast live through 3ABN Latino, via the internet and local station IPTV.

A series of activities leading up to the campaign event took place throughout Bogota earlier in the year, including special taxi cabs offering prayer throughout the day, participation in Bogota's international half marathon, a massive blood donating campaign, a health expo, and more.

Elsewhere in the region, the church organized a series of evangelistic meetings headlined by renowned keynote speaker Pastor Alejandro Bullon. The meetings covered the cities of Villavicencio, Cali, Pereira, Ibague, and Sogamoso from Nov. 6-12.

More than 34,500 people attended the evangelistic series in various centers and auditoriums and some 985 new believers joined the church, leaders reported.

"It was a week filled with great blessings as leaders and members took to the territory," said Pastor Aicardo Arias, personal ministries director for the church in South Colombia. "We saw so many people truly searching for hope."

At the end of the evangelistic caravan journey some 120 church leaders and pastors met for a spiritual revival enrichment seminar led by Pastor Melchor Ferreyra, personal ministries director.
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21 Nov 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States...Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

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Ganoune Diop brings the Adventist Church’s perspective to "Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age: Christian Mission Among Other Faiths" (Regnum Books). The book, a product of last year's Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, also includes perspectives on mission from Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Pentecostal church representatives.

The first Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, held in Scotland more than a century ago, is still considered a watershed in the collaborative shaping of mission ideology and methods. Diop, an academic and theologian who currently serves as the church's representative to the United Nations, spoke at last year's conference as co-chair of the Foundation of Mission session.

In his essay, "An Adventist Perspective: Mission to World Religions and Contemporary World Views," Diop calls Christ the "ultimate criterion" for assessing a religion's need for mission.

The idea that Christ motivates Christian witness lies at the core of Scripture, Diop says. The Bible is abundantly clear that "fellowship with God" is restored only through acceptance of God's love and Jesus' incarnation, life and teachings, sacrifice, victory over death and priestly ministry, he says.

"Nowhere but in the Bible do we find this whole chain of truth. What we find is Jesus -- who he actually is, his divinity," Diop says. "The Bible provides a comprehensive diagnosis of human problems and a comprehensive solution. Ultimately that solution is Jesus, who came to cancel all the negatives. He defeated evil and death, and he is coming again to restore peace, justice and righteousness. And that we don't find anywhere else."

The distinctiveness of the Adventist faith stands out as some Christians may be tempted to dilute what sets Christ apart to better fit a culture of tolerance, Diop says.

But today's notion of tolerance is a misnomer, he says.

"There's a naive assumption that tolerance means endorsement. No. People have the right to life, the right to freedom, the right to expression, the right to their own choices, but that does not make those choices compelling to everyone," Diop says.

"Respecting their rights? We must, unquestionably. We owe every human being respect, dignity, courtesy and decency, but that does not mean accepting, endorsing or embracing their values," he says.

Diop says while mission begins with "common ground," it must go beyond that. Muslims and Christians can find commonalities between the Quran and the Bible, but ultimately the words they use are caught in what Diop calls "webs of meaning" or context. "The Jesus of the Quran is..."