Adventist Church president supports community, spiritual development during Africa tour

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Inter-American Division  >  Communication Department

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Seventh-day Adventists are committed to supporting community development in southern and central Africa, world church President Ted N. C. Wilson said during a recent tour spanning several of the region's countries and numerous church building projects.

In Zimbabwe, tens of thousands of people came out to hear Wilson at a stadium in Harare. Sharing the Adventist hope of this world, he said. "The Reformation did not end with Luther. It must continue with us."

Later, in Africa, Wilson met with local church officials and members in Burundi, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Zambia. He urged local membership to unite with their world church family in embracing the church's Revival and Reformation initiative.

Afterward, the world church leader flew to France, where he spoke for worship service at the Adventist Church on the campus of Adventiste du Saleve.

Rebuilding infrastructure

In Burundi, Wilson visited the future site of an Adventist hospital planned for the country's capital city, Bujumbura. Later, in a meeting with President Pierre Nkurunziza, the national leader urged the Adventist Church to hasten construction, explaining that the country has a great need for hospitals and clinics.

President Nkurunziza also paid tribute to the church's contributions to education, poverty alleviation and other development projects in the country, which continues to recover and rebuild infrastructure following decades of political unrest.

Wilson told President Nkurunziza that the church is keen to support the country's physical, mental and spiritual development. He also thanked the government of Burundi for protecting religious liberty and allowing Adventists to complete their national community service on Sunday instead of Saturday.

Wilson called the leader of the largely Christian nation a "man of God" and offered a brief devotional and prayer for Nkurunziza, commending his efforts toward achieving peace and reconciliation in Burundi.

A call for unity

Later, in Ethiopia, Wilson laid the foundation stone for a 14-story multipurpose building expected to house new headquarters for the Adventist Church in the church. The church in the region is adhering to new building codes, said Alemu Haile, president of he church in Ethiopia.

Flanked by government officials from the country's capital city, Addis Ababa, Wilson and East Central Africa Division President Blasious Ruguri donned safety helmets to lay a name plaque for the forthcoming building.

At a later meeting with local church leaders and members, Wilson encouraged unity among membership, urging Adventists not to let race or ethnicity wedge between them or hamper the work of the church.

Sharing the Adventist hope

In Zimbabwe, Wilson underscored the importance of Scripture. "Seventh-day Adventists must hold fast to the Bible as our foundation for belief and practice in this world," he said. "The Reformation did not end with Luther. It must continue with us."

In comments to Adventist leaders and church members in Zambia, Wilson underscored the expansion of church infrastructure in the region reflects membership growth and a commitment to house new headquarters for the Adventist Church in the church. The church in the region is adhering to new building codes, said Alemu Haile, president of the church in Ethiopia.

In a meeting with President Nkurunziza, the national leader urged the church in the region to unite with their world church family in embracing the church's Revival and Reformation initiative.

While in Africa, Wilson praised the church's education system at a plaque unveiling ceremony to mark the opening of a new administrative building for Rusangu University. He added that education is the only means to overcome poverty and ignorance.

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Growth and development

In neighboring Zambia, Wilson visited the site of the proposed new Zambia Union Conference office facilities near Ndola. The new headquarters will accommodate burgeoning church growth in the country, church officials said.

In 2007, the North Zambia Field was divided into two new church territories with a combined membership of nearly 120,000. Zambia is the fastest growing church in the world church's project to distribute church co-founder Ellen G. White's touchstone book The Great Controversy. Local members can help by donating toward the purchase of books and sharing copies with their friends, family and neighbors, he said.

Later, Wilson addressed a graduating class of hundreds of students at the church's Solusi University, also in Bulawayo.

Changing opinions

The final leg of Wilson's official tour took him to France, where Euro-Africa Division President Bruno Vertallier and Franco-Belgian Union President Jean-Claude Nocandy welcome the world church leader and offered insights into the life, activities and strategies of the church in the region.
During a question-and-answer period, local church leaders asked Wilson about his focus on Revival and Reformation, the church's relationship with other faith groups and how to handle lay initiatives. Observers say the exchange was open, fair, relaxed and, at times, even humorous.

Wilson, who previously served in the French-speaking Western African country of Cote d'Ivoire, is fluent in the language. Local church leaders say the shared language helped create a deep connection with French and Swiss Adventists.

"It was very helpful for me to meet President Wilson personally," one local church leader said. "I have heard many rumors about him since [General Conference Session in] Atlanta, but ... I find he is a very approachable person, humble, with plenty of administrative experience, wise and a real leader. And I have realized he is authentic."

During March 17 Sabbath worship services, many French and Swiss Adventists were able to meet Wilson and listen as he preached on the campus of Adventiste du Saleve in Collonges-sous-Salève, France. He urged members there to humble themselves before God so that He can make them witnesses across Europe.