Adventist Church president leads thousands in massive Brazilian outreach

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Speaking to a congregation of 2,000 at the São Paulo Adventist University Center (UNASP) Church - with another 5,000 to 6,000 viewing a broadcast at other locations -- Wilson said he planned to join thousands of church members that day in distributing what turned out to be 4 million copies of The Great Hope, an outreach book based on The Great Controversy by Ellen G. White, a pioneering co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist movement. A total of 25 million books are to be distributed throughout the South American Division in one day, he noted.

Officials in the South American Division emphasized that the March 24 effort is not an isolated venture. The following Sabbath, March 31, will be a "friendship day" in which neighbors are invited to participate in an Adventist worship service and lunch with Adventist families. The goal of the "Impact Hope" campaign is to inspire Seventh-day Adventists in the South American Division to live a lifestyle of personal evangelism.

For his part, Wilson lauded the division's massive one-day literature outreach, and said other world church divisions could benefit from similar programs.

"The beauty of all of this is that it motivated the entire church on every socio-economic level to participate in distributing the book to loved ones, friends, neighbors, and others," Wilson wrote later in an e-mail message to Adventist Review. "It got the church out into the community to meet the people and the Holy Spirit blessed the efforts enormously. ... It has shown that a single event approach, along with every other personal outreach activity and local church outreach, can be a huge rallying point to galvanize God's people for witnessing and missionary work. Divisions and unions around the world need to use this approach to bring church members together in something that is far bigger and grander than anything we could do individually."

Along with a burgeoning Adventist medical missionary outreach in the region, Wilson said literature distribution is a key means by which mega-cities such as São Paulo, with a municipal population of 11.3 million (and an additional 8 million in the surrounding metropolitan area) are to be reached. The city will also be one of 12 host cities when Brazil welcomes the 2014 FIFA World Cup soccer championships.

"The world church has committed itself to distribute 175 million copies of The Great Hope and the larger version [The Great Controversy] this year and next year," Wilson told the congregation. 
"Can you imagine how many new Seventh-day Adventist believers we will have because of this? And we give God all the glory."

Wilson added, "God uses His Word to change people's lives. He uses books like this [The Great Hope] to change peoples' lives."
That change was evident in the life and testimony of Sheyla Guimarães, a homemaker from the city of Mineiros do Tietê, about 140 miles (225 km) from the city. Her heartfelt video testimony was played during the worship service, and described the story of a spiritual seeker who was dissatisfied. In October 2011, Sheyla's daughter found a copy of The Great Hope in the family's mailbox. She "devoured" the book, and said she found answers that were not provided in other churches. Today, she's a Seventh-day Adventist.

Guimarães and her daughter came to the platform and were greeted by Wilson and other church leaders. She told Wilson and the congregation how happy she was to be a part of the family of God.

During his sermon, Wilson emphasized the role of the Seventh-day Adventist movement as "a unique people with a unique message." He explained that because of the gift of the Spirit of Prophecy, which Adventists believe was manifested by Ellen G. White during her 70-year ministry, the church has a special responsibility.

"We are told the greatest wealth of truth ever entrusted to mortals has been given to [the remnant] to give to the world," Wilson said. "When we understand that by grace we are saved, when we understand the completeness of salvation as explained by the sanctuary service, then we begin to understand that Jesus is our creator, is our redeemer, is our example, is our high priest and is our coming King. In Jesus we have everything we need to be saved. What a message it is to share with people today!"

Before joining the thousands at the UNASP church in going out to share The Great Hope, Wilson said he'd been told that São Paulo had the greatest population density of Seventh-day Adventists in Brazil.

"By God's grace, São Paulo will become even more populated with Seventh-day Adventists" as a result of the March 24 outreach, Wilson said. "Let us go into every corner of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Belém, Fortaleza, Manaus - and throughout every country of South America. Bring the wonderful news: Jesus is coming again!"

Following the worship, Wilson and other church leaders visited Jd. Colombo, one of the slum neighborhoods in São Paulo's Paraisópolis, or "Paradise" district to share that "great hope" with residents.

The day concluded in São Paulo with a rally of more than 60,000 Adventists celebrating the outreach effort. Combined youth choirs and a full orchestra, Wilson reported, led "a program organized of thanksgiving to God and, of course, thanks to the great efforts of so many people who dedicated themselves to this great missionary task."

--With reporting by Márcio Basso and Felipe Lemos, South American Division