Guatemala: Hundreds participate in historic communications congress

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April 20, 2012 - Guatemala City, Guatemala...Libna Stevens/IAD

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Guatemala gathered hundreds of communicators during its first Communication Congress held in Guatemala City, Guatemala, on Apr. 14, 2012. The historic event brought nearly 800 Adventist communicators from throughout its regions, churches and schools nationwide to learn, network and catch the vision of establishing more church visibility within the community, on the internet, and via mass media.

"You have the challenge of being on the forefront to counteract what's out there," said Pastor Guenther Garcia, as he addressed the assembly at the El Progreso Adventist School Auditorium. "We must exploit the technology we have at hand through mass communication, so that we may transmit the hope written in the Word of God, and lift the cross of Christ" he added.

It's a core message which resounded throughout the day as communicators were motivated to seriously commit to getting on board with the short-term and long-term goals top church leaders are aiming for during the next four years.

"The plan is to ensure that every church and school has its own website, it's own Facebook page and twitter account, populated with news and information about the church and its message," said Pastor Gustavo Menendez, communication director for the church in Guatemala and organizer of the event. Additional plans include ensuring that every church and school is identified properly, radio programming is heard throughout the entire country and some 350 cable companies carry the church's official television channel Esperanza TV's programming.

With more than 950 churches, it's an ambitious plan, but one church leaders have strategically planned to attain by 2015, according to Pastor Menendez.

Already, each of the eight conferences and mission offices have webpages established and the goal is to have some 250 churches with new websites, Facebook pages and twitter accounts active by September 2012, according to Menendez.

"This is only a 25 percent of our churches which we plan to reach this year as well as 25 percent more each successive year by 2015," he added.

Plans also include the establishment of an initial network of 100 Adventist news correspondents throughout Guatemala.

"We want our flow of communication to be on-going between our churches, our regional offices, our departments in union headquarters so that we may forward them to the Inter-American Division and the rest of the world church," explained Pastor Menendez.

Pastor Menendez is sure the mass communication plans in motion will only improve.

"We are on the verge of an explosive massive communication operation within our church in Guatemala," he said. "This congress is a vehicle to plunge ahead."
The historic congress brought Inter-American Division (IAD) communication leaders to speak to and train communicators on how to build bridges of hope among the church and the community.

Pastor Leon Wellington, vice president and communication director for the church in Inter-America, spoke to communicators on their duties as communicators, crisis management and the vision for communication for the territory-wide church. Wellington also commended church leaders for the "level of seriousness among the leadership in Guatemala in approaching the strategic use of modern communication tools and channels to spread the gospel."

"You are not only making big plans and serious financial investments, but you are seeing tangible evidences that your efforts are bearing fruit," said Pastor Wellington.

Pastor Wellington said that the communication congress was an exemplary model that should be replicated throughout Inter-America.

Abel Marquez, associate communication director for the church in Inter-America, held a number of seminars on corporate communication, establishing web pages as well as a creativity workshop.

Marquez congratulated the church on the magnitude of the congress.

"This congress represents a large impact not only in Guatemala but throughout Inter-America and a model to follow in other countries and regions," said Marquez.

For Johnson Ramirez, a 37-year old information systems graduate who is the webmaster for six of the eight church regional offices in Guatemala, the congress was an eye-opener and driving force to continue his contribution to fulfilling the mission of the church.

"This congress was clear in that we must do something great for God and use all means of communication available," said Ramirez, who also manages three Adventist church websites, a church school's website, and does radio and video spots for the church in his spare time.

"We are all part of sharing the gospel and using our gifts for God's service," added Ramirez.

Humberto Batz of Central Adventist Church in Guatemala City agrees with Ramirez. At 62, Batz has loved the Adventist Church and vowed to serve God for many years. He's glad to be built up one of a few church websites in Guatemala with a comprehensive daily updated website.

Batz, who owns an advertising agency and works as head of public relations for the province of Quiche, sharpened his news writing skills during the congress and is happy continue covering events that take place within the church every week.

He hopes the church in his Guatemala will move forward into taping into what he considers a key vehicle to exploit communication in the church throughout the Central American country.

"We need to use the strength of the youth who are already immersed in technology, to cover more ground," said Batz, a resource he said, is crucial to attaining the communication strategic plans set out by the church.

Batz has caught the vision church leaders in Guatemala want all communicators to get, said Menendez.

"We are aiming to have communication teams in all our churches where the experience and maturity of our communication directors can mix in with our technology savvy youth to proclaim the gospel through the web and social media networks," said Menendez.

"We want to reach the more than 2 million FB users, and more than 14 million cellphone users in Guatemala," he said. "It's almost one cellphone per person who can connect from anywhere in the country."

That's the ultimate goal, explains Menendez in utilizing teams. "Young people who will take part in fulfilling the mission participating in electronic evangelism from their homes or anywhere and unlimited opportunities to share the truth."
The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Guatemala has more than 239,000 members worshipping in 950 churches and congregations. The church also operates a radio station as well as 27 primary and secondary schools.

For more on Guatemala's Communication Congress and other initiatives, visit http://www.uniondeguatemala.org/

To view photos of the event, click here