



Adventist News Network

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June 29, 2005

World Session Agenda Looks at New Directions; Nurturing Growing Church

Silver Spring, Maryland – [Taashi Rowe/ANN] Continued growth in Seventh-day Adventist church membership worldwide will top the agenda of the church's world session in St. Louis, Missouri this summer. Delegates will address the challenge of church life and growth management in the worldwide church. The 2,000 voting delegates to the business meeting will affect the direction of the church for the next five years and beyond as they consider new resolutions and vote on new international leadership of the church.

The Adventists have chosen "Transformed in Christ" as the theme for their 58th quinquennial business meeting. "The title is fitting, as change, growth and transformation is at the heart of Adventism," comments Ray Dabrowski, director of communication for the world church.

With more than 5 million members joining the church in the five-year period since the last meeting in the year 2000, such growth presents concerns, says Matthew Bediako, secretary of the world church. "How do we nurture and retain thousands that join the church?"

Despite the dynamic growth of the church in Africa in the past few years, which was so great the church recently added a new administrative region in East Central Africa, the church continues to lose members each year. In the past five years the church has lost roughly a million members which represent less than 10 percent of the entire global membership.

The meeting will also allow leaders to make decisions about fundamental church beliefs that can only be addressed in a setting such as this. A new fundamental belief—Growing in Christ—was adopted at the church's 2004 Annual Council meeting, but will officially be added to the existing 27 at the 2005 meeting. It emphasizes daily communion with Christ. "We've never had one that emphasizes prayer, meditation and worship before," says Larry Evans, undersecretary for the world church.

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This addition to the fundamental beliefs will encourage members to realize that the church is fluid and ever-changing. “It is also important to demonstrate to members that the church is not locked into a creed,” Evans says. “Truth emerges as time changes.”

At an executive committee meeting that meets two days before the business meeting, church leaders will also vote on a resolution concerning the role of the Bible in the Adventist Church.

“We are reaffirming the Bible and its central role in the life of the church, and we urge members to seek ways to share its message with others and in their own lives,” Evans explains.

The committee will also reaffirm the authenticity of the writings of Ellen G. White, a key founder of the movement. The affirmation follows strong support at the executive committee’s 2005 Spring Meeting for a plan to distribute key books written by Mrs. White to every Adventist family, in order to provide spiritual help and direction towards the Bible’s counsel.

Another major issue is the number of delegates to attend such future meetings. Currently the number is limited 2,000, but, Evans explains, the delegation committee wants to keep that number more flexible to make room for new church organizations.

Delegates will also address world regions and local church regions that plan to reduce staff or reorganize.

Although this meeting will not carry some of the more hotly-debated issues from recent years, such as women’s ordination, divorce and remarriage, Bediako confirms significant decisions will be made at the 10-day meeting.

Though a major part of the assembly is the business aspect, Bediako also sees the gathering as a huge family reunion with up to 70,000 people expected to attend on the weekends.

“We are now in 206 countries and some will, for the first time, see their brothers and sisters from other parts of the world,” he says.

In addressing delegates and participants Jan Paulsen, president of the world church, says: “At the heart of all that we will do, and all our decision-making, there is really only one objective: to better prepare and equip our church for the mission God has given us. For we are essentially a witnessing community, living in anticipation of the return of our Lord.”

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