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Together in mission: Lake Union discusses hospital system changes, nurturing church growth, record tithe gains

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▲ AdventHealth facilities include Adventist Medical Center Hinsdale, Adventist Medical Center Bolingbrook, Adventist Medical Center La Grange, and Adventist Medical Center GlenOaks.

Ascension, AdventHealth to unwind AMITA Health partnership

October 21, 2021 (CHICAGO)—After working closely together for nearly seven years, AdventHealth and Ascension have decided

to unwind their AMITA Health partnership, the joint operating company serving the healthcare needs of residents of the greater Chicago area.

Leaders of both sponsoring organizations have determined that going forward separately is in their collective best interest in order to more nimbly meet the changing needs and expectations of

consumers in the rapidly evolving health-care environment.

Both organizations are committed to a smooth and expeditious transition. Following the transition, AdventHealth and Ascension will operate their individual hospitals and care sites in the Chicagoland area. There will be no disruption to patient care.

Ascension and AdventHealth will begin the process of unwinding the partnership in a way that best serves the needs of the community. AdventHealth and Ascension maintain a strong relationship and are united in ensuring the residents of Chicago have access to the best possible healthcare. ■

AdventHealth



Ken Denslow



Elden Ramirez

▲ Lake Union president Ken Denslow and executive secretary Elden Ramirez at the November 10 Lake Union executive committee meeting. The committee is a representative body made up of pastoral and lay representatives from the five Lake Union conferences -- Indiana, Illinois, Lake Region, Michigan and Wisconsin, and generally meets three times a year.

Together in mission

LAKE UNION DISCUSSES HOSPITAL SYSTEM CHANGES, NURTURING CHURCH GROWTH, RECORD TITHE GAINS

On Wed., Nov. 10, the 38-member Lake Union executive committee met and heard reports of how mission is moving forward. This was the second year the meetings were

held virtually because of the pandemic. Highlights included:

AMITA HEALTH

Thor Thodardson, chief operating officer of AMITA Health, provided updates on major changes coming to the health system. An amicable decision was made last month to dissolve the interfaith health network between Alexian Brothers Health System,

Presence Health and Adventist Midwest Health.

Thodardson explained that the Adventist hospitals (Adventist Medical Center Hinsdale, Adventist Medical Center Bolingbrook, Adventist Medical Center La Grange and Adventist Medical Center GlenOaks) weren't doing as well six years ago when the partnership was entered into but are "now doing much better" and they

are “carrying the larger financial burden of the other systems.”

This change means control of the Adventist hospitals revert to the parent company, AdventHealth. “We’re coming home, so to speak,” he said.

Thodarson accepted an invitation to serve as CEO of the Chicagoland hospitals and said the reverse merger playbook is now underway. It is expected that as of March 31, 2022, the transfer of all employees to AdventHealth will be complete. By April 1, the AdventHealth branding will go live.

“The feedback we are receiving from medical staff and the community has been very positive. It’s tremendous and we’re excited for what it means.”

ANDREWS UNIVERSITY

Andrew University president Andrea Luxton reported that after a tough year, they are doing better.

“This year, you can sense the energy,” she said. “You should listen to the stories from departments, how they’re continuing to connect with students and how they’re doing service in the community.”

Luxton said their vaccination rates are helping to mitigate campus disruptions, as they report a 75 to 78 percent vaccination rate on campus, and close to 90 percent among faculty.

She cautioned about continued pressures on higher education. “We see reports coming out of Adventist colleges: the impact of enrollment because of COVID-19; the question of whether higher education is important. We still have two to three challenging years ahead of us as we slowly move out of this environment.”

Despite the head winds, she is hopeful. “We still see so many parents who still value Adventist higher education.”

She reminded the committee Andrews is a Lake Union school and that “the church is stronger and better when our education system is strong.”

LAKE UNION

Lake Union president Ken Denslow said we should renew our mission to the cities. Citing statistics of the 35 million people in the Lake Union, he noted 17 million are concentrated in our metro cities — Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis and Milwaukee. “It’s an amazing fact, in my mind, that we have so much people concentrated in a small number of locations.”

He continued, “Our job is not to just help fill in the gaps in churches, but until the message is sent to every man, woman, child in our area, our job is not complete. Our job is to cover the territory.”

He asked the question: “How do we go about it?” and quickly provided some thoughts. “I don’t have all the answers but we need to talk about it. It may take us joining forces with conferences and reaching these cities. Indianapolis is a good example where the GC, NAD, Union, Indiana and Lake Region conferences are working together. We should make it clear the specific plans belong to people on the ground in those areas.”

Denslow also pointed out that we have one remaining ABC left in our territory. “We want to join hands with Indiana and support what they’re doing. They’re resourcing camp meetings around the Union. We encourage you to buy books so we can physically have ABC in our field for as long as possible.”

SECRETARIAT

In his first Lake Union executive committee meeting, Elden Ramirez outlined church growth figures which he hopes spurs further discussions. He emphasized that his report was based on information churches plugged into the eAdventist platform.

The figures, he cautioned, are “conversation starters” since they are gleaned from a very small statistical sampling and, as such, may be skewed. For example, in 2020, only 7.5 percent of churches reported figures.

In North America, Ramirez explained, they have categorized churches into four groups: multiplying, growing, plateauing, declining.

Multiplying churches were described as having 7 percent baptism, 7 percent increase over attendance and planted one church in seven years. Growing churches had a 2 percent baptism rate, 2 percent increase in attendance and had planted a church. A church which plateaued may have baptisms but, after transfers and deaths, the number is still the same. Meanwhile, a declining church had no baptisms and no membership increase.

“As a Union, it was only in 2019 we saw 1 percent of churches are multiplying.”

TREASURY

Lake Union treasurer Glynn Scott provided financial updates which included the September year-to-date tithe performance of 11.38 percent increase over 2020 tithe.

“This tithe increase truly highlights God’s blessing upon His church and the faithful stewardship of our members,” he said.

Across the nine Unions of the North American Division (NAD), year-to-date September 2021 tithe increases range from 9.83 to 13.47 percent with the NAD aggregate increase in 2021 tithe of 12.06 percent. The LUC tithe increases during 2021 have been the largest increase in the history of our union.

Scott said, “For this financial blessing and all other blessings, we give praise to our God.”

Debbie Michel, Lake Union Herald editor and Katie Fellows, assistant Communication specialist

**NAD TITHE % GAIN/LOSS
YEAR-TO-DATE BY UNION**

