



Elder Robert Stanley Folkenberg

January 1, 1941 - December 24, 2015

Robert S. Folkenberg, an innovative church administrator and mission advocate who led the Seventh-day Adventist Church for nine years, died Dec. 24 after a lengthy struggle with cancer. He was just days from his 75th birthday.

Folkenberg felt that Adventists had an exciting message to share and the Internet was a great way to expand the church's reach. The Adventist Church, he believed, could use the Internet to provide information, training, and experiences that better demonstrated the global aspect of its mission.

He pushed the church forward with new technology during his tenure as president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists from 1990 to 1999 and brought CompuServe, a precursor to the World Wide Web, into use within the church, making Seventh-day Adventists the first denomination to use such technology.

“Elder Folkenberg was filled with creative and innovative ideas regarding church work and evangelism,” General Conference president Ted N.C. Wilson said. “As president of the General Conference, he strongly nurtured the media aspect of outreach for church activities and evangelism as well as pioneered the use of Internet for communication within the church structure.”

Folkenberg also had a great passion for mission, the driving force of his ministry. During his time as world church president, he helped start the Global Mission initiative, which has been responsible for establishing thousands of new congregations around the world.

“We could have not asked for a greater support than Folkenberg for Global Mission,” said Michael L. Ryan, the first director of Global Mission and a former general vice president of the General Conference.

Ryan said he remembers Folkenberg often saying, “Participation in Global Mission is not optional.”

“Elder Robert Folkenberg was visible, involved, and passionate about proclaiming the hope of the gospel in places where Jesus name was not known,” he said. “It mattered to him personally that the church was organized and focused on mission and that every member made being Christ's ambassador their top priority.”

A Life of Mission

Robert Stanley Folkenberg was born on Jan. 1, 1941, to missionary parents in Santurcee, Puerto Rico. He went to school in Puerto Rico until the fourth grade before finishing elementary school in Cuba. He entered high school in California and graduated from Milo Adventist Academy in Oregon in 1958.

Folkenberg first attended Atlantic Union College in Massachusetts and then Newbold College in England before graduating from Andrews University in Michigan with a degree in ministry in 1962. In 1963 he completed a master's degree in New Testament theology at Andrews University. Folkenberg returning to the United States from his studies at Newbold College in 1960. Folkenberg returning to the United States from his studies at Newbold College in 1960.

Folkenberg was an avid pilot. He secured a single and multi-engine airline transport pilot rating, commercial helicopter and sea rating, and flew more than 2,000 hours, the majority of which were in Central America and the Caribbean.

Folkenberg dedicated much of his life to service in the Inter-American Division. Serving first as a pastor in Panama (1966-68), he later became stewardship director of the Panama Conference (1968), president of the Honduras Mission (1970), secretary (1974) and later president of the Central American Union (1975). In 1980 he became assistant to the president for the Inter-American Division. He served in North America as president of the Carolina Conference (1985-90) before being elected General Conference president in 1990.

Folkenberg developed lifelong friendships among the people with whom he lived and worked.

Libna Stevens, assistant communications director for the Inter-American Division, called Folkenberg “bigger than life” when she first met him at the age of 7 in her home in Costa Rica.

“He would fly his plane from Guatemala to oversee the Adventist college my dad was managing in Alajuela, Costa Rica,” Stevens said. “He would come to our home for breakfast many times before he left on his trip. He loved yuca (cassava root) and would just get right in the kitchen to sauté onions while my mom was cooking. He did that every time with a big grin on his face.”

She spoke fondly of his “funniest laugh” and kind affection. “He would always take time to talk to my sister and me,” she said. Hilda Matar-Montero, a staff

member at the Miami-based Inter-American Division since 1977, recalled how Folkenberg had found the time in his busy schedule to officiate her wedding several months after his election as General Conference president.

"He was a true friend," Matar-Montero said. "When I asked him to marry my husband and me, he told me, 'Hilda, tell me when you need me to be there, and I will arrange my trips around your wedding.' Sure enough, he took the time to marry us." Matar-Montero kept in touch with Folkenberg over the years and most recently spoke with him by phone on Dec. 9. "I told him how much we were all praying for him," she said. "He told me, 'Time is so short Hilda, but I am ready. I love the Inter-American Division, and I love all the people I know.' I look forward to meeting him in heaven."

Folkenberg died at 1:35 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 24, surrounded by his family at his home in Winter Haven, Florida. Folkenberg's final days were filled with peace, said his daughter, Kathi Folkenberg Jensen, a registered nurse. Today when we were caring for him he smiled," she wrote on Facebook on Dec. 21. "When my mom asked why he was smiling, he whispered he's happy because he is at peace. Praising the Lord for my Dad, his strong faith in His Savior, and the blessed assurance of salvation we can have because of Jesus and His sacrifice for us!"

Folkenberg is survived by his wife, Anita Emmerson, along with their two children, Robert Jr. and Kathi, and six grandchildren. Robert Folkenberg Jr. serves as president of the Adventist Church's Chinese Union Mission.

A memorial service will be held at 4 p.m. on Jan. 10 at the Avon Park Seventh-day Adventist Church in Avon Park, Florida, his son said by e-mail. Wilson will present the homily. See map and driving directions below.

In lieu of flowers, the family welcomes donations to ShareHim, a mission and

evangelistic initiative created by Folkenberg to train people and local churches to hold evangelistic series in their communities. ShareHim accepts online contributions at http://sharehim.org/php/donate_how.php

Folkenberg did not believe being an Adventist was a spectator sport and spoke often about what the Bible said regarding salvation. A favorite verse that he cited often was Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (NKJV). Throughout his lifelong work in the Adventist Church, Folkenberg put an emphasis on “confessing” Christ — through technology, through mission and through the local churches with which he worked.

After resigning as General Conference president in 1999, Folkenberg developed ShareHim, which has been active throughout the United States and around the world, including in an evangelistic series that resulted in 30,000 baptisms in Zimbabwe last May.

“Elder Folkenberg spent part of his early ministry in frontline evangelistic activity and the last part of his ministry in direct evangelistic outreach through ShareHim,” Wilson said. “Evangelism and the proclamation of the three angels’ messages were the passion of his life. Whether he was in frontline or administrative work, his heart was in helping people know Christ and then become an active participant in the mission of the church. His early ministry as part of an evangelistic team gave him the foundation for the rest of his life.”

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JAN 10. 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

Avon Park Seventh-day Adventist Church
1410 W Avon Blvd
Avon Park, FL 33825-951

Tribute Wall



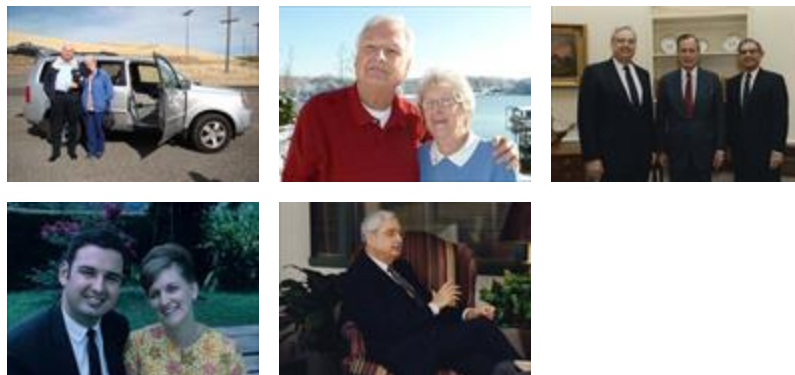
“ *Reflecting on Memories created a Tribute Video in memory of Elder Robert Stanley Folkenberg*



Reflecting on Memories - December 30, 2015 at 09:36 AM



“ *11 files added to the album Memories Album*



Reflecting on Memories - December 25, 2015 at 10:21 AM