

North American Division 2018 Year-end Meeting Response to the *Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions*

November 6, 2018

Affirmation

As the North American Division Executive Committee, we, along with our brothers and sisters around the world, wholeheartedly affirm a shared commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist faith. Based on the Bible and the 28 Fundamental Beliefs, this faith is expressed through the church's worldwide mission and prophetic role in fulfilling the commission to proclaim the gospel "to every nation and tribe and language and people" (Rev 14:6, ESV; see also Matt 28:18-20; Rev 14:6-12).

We also affirm a shared commitment to oneness in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13, 27). As a global church family comprised of all generations, we belong to each other, care for each other, and are called to treat each other with respect and trust (John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; 1 John 4:7-8, 11-12, 20-21; Eph 4:2, 32; Col 3:13). As Ellen G. White wrote, "There is no person, no nation, that is perfect in every habit and thought. One must learn of another. Therefore, God wants the different nationalities to mingle together, to be one in judgment, one in purpose. Then the union that there is in Christ will be exemplified" (*Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists*, 137.1).

We also affirm that structure and organization bring value to advancing the mission and message of the church (1 Cor 14:40).

Our Church

When the body of Christ functions as God intended, as exemplified by the early church, it derives its authority from Christ, the head of the church, who led through service (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; Eph 1:22; Col 1:18; 2:10). Servant leaders express and foster Christlike forbearance and humility (Matt 20:25-28; John 13:1-17; Phil 2:1-5). Such leadership creates healthy structure, which gives voice to all members of the body and respects the priesthood of all believers (Ex 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9).

The structure of the church is characterized by unity and diversity, as stated by Paul in 1 Cor 12:12: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (ESV). Such unity in the body of Christ reflects a reality for which He prays in John 17. Honoring diversity in implementing the Seventh-day Adventist mission allows for effective response to specific conditions while still maintaining global values and identity, as exemplified in Acts 15.

Our Position

We recognize Christ as the head of the church (Col 1:18). We are guided by the Bible as our only creed, the Holy Spirit who inspired and interprets it, the writings of Ellen G. White that shine light on it, and a resulting spirit of Christlike forbearance. As such, we are compelled to reject the spirit and direction of this document voted at the 2018 Annual Council (hereafter indicated as "the document"), as it is not consistent with the biblical model of the church. We simply cannot, in good

conscience, support or participate in the implementation of the process outlined in the document, as it is contrary to the culture of respect and collaboration taught in the Bible (Zech 4:6; Rom 14:13; 15:7; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:5; Eph 5:2).

Furthermore, we believe that the document moves us away from the biblical values proclaimed by the Protestant reformers and the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and, in so doing, moves us toward a centralized power and a hierarchical system of governance that overrides the policies and procedures already in place (1 Cor 12:12-27). We are alarmed that, in this document, church policies and voted actions are equated with Scripture. We are also deeply concerned by the use of shame as a punitive measure, because it is in violation of the spirit of the gospel (John 8:3-11).

Additionally, the document moves us away from the principles behind the 1901-03 reorganization, endorsed by Ellen G. White, which decentralized denominational authority.

The voicing of our objection is in alignment with the 1877 General Conference voted action, which allows for questioning any General Conference vote “shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of individual conscience” (*Review and Herald*, October 4, 1877, p. 106).

Ellen G. White, in response to an 1888 General Conference Session vote she had counseled against, later wrote, “It was not right for the conference to pass it. It was not in God’s order, and this resolution will fall powerless to the ground. I shall not sustain it, for I would not be found working against God. This is not God’s way of working, and I will not give it countenance for a moment” (*Letter 22*, 1889, pp. 10-11). We believe the church should take heed of this counsel at this moment in our history.

Requests for Action

1. We respectfully request, in light of Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17 and in harmony with the call for unity in the body of Christ in Fundamental Belief No. 14, that the General Conference Executive Committee at its 2019 Annual Council rescind the action approving the document.
2. We respectfully request that the 2019 Annual Council revise any policies that enable majority fields to dictate the management of non-doctrinal, non-biblical issues to minority fields (1 Cor 12:26) and create policies that protect the interests of minority fields.
3. We respectfully request that an item be placed on the 2020 General Conference Session agenda calling for a statement by the world church that: (1) affirms our shared respect for the richness and variety of the multiple cultures and practices in which we minister; and (2) empowers ministry that is sensitive to the local context (Acts 15; 1 Cor 9:19-23).

It is our sincere hope that the future will be characterized by continual prayer and open dialogue, empowered by “him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20, ESV).

This response was voted during the Year-end Meeting of the North American Division Executive Committee on November 6, 2018 in Columbia, Maryland.