



# **1. CRISIS OF AUTHORITY IN THE SDA CHURCH: HOW THE CRISIS DEVELOPED**

**... P. GERARD DAMSTEEGT, DR. THEOL. (RET.), SDA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,  
ANDREWS UNIVERSITY**

# THE LATE 1960S

Attention began to be focused on the role of women in leadership positions.

In the 1970s several General Conference- commissions studied this question from the standpoint of theology, ecclesiology (doctrine of the Church) and mission.

# Remember Mohaven!

A special issue commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Council on the Role of Women in the Church, Sept. 16-19, 1973



**MOST OF THE MEMBERS.** Fourteen women and 13 men converged at the Ohio Conference's youth camp for the Council on the Role of Women in the Church, September 16-20, 1973. Twenty-two of the council members were on hand when N. R. Dower snapped this photo. (Back row, left to right): C. E. Bradford, Raoul Dederen, Josephine Benton, Kit Watts, C. Mervyn Maxwell, Marcella Anderson, Dorothy Beltz, Hedwig Jemison, Madelynn Haldeman, W. J. Hackett, Gerhard Hasel. (Front row, left to right): Ed Zinke, Gordon Hyde, Ron Watson, Betty Ahnberg, Hazel Damazo, Betty Stirling, Norwida Marshall, Leona G. Running, Doris Schmidt, Maybelle Vandermark Goransson, Kay Dower.

13 men and 14 women

# 1973 AUTUMN COUNCIL OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

**Continued study be given to the “theological soundness of the election of women to local church offices which require ordination . . . and that in areas receptive to such action, there be continued recognition of the appropriateness of appointing women to pastoral-evangelistic work.”**

# **1974 ANNUAL COUNCIL OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE**

**It reaffirmed sections of the 1973 action and added its opinion that “in the interest of world unity of the church, no move be made in the direction of ordaining women to the gospel ministry.”**

# Women Pastors Baptize Candidates in Columbia Union Conference

Recently, baptismal candidates at several churches within the Columbia Union not only completed their course of instruction and examination under the supervision of women pastors but were baptized by them.

Because the Church Manual states that local elders may be given the authority to baptize in the absence of an ordained minister and because the church now ordains women as local elders, the possibility exists for women to perform baptisms. However, this is not reported to have occurred until recently.

The Potomac Conference voted that 4 men and 3 women could baptize in the conference if the following provisions were met:

1. They were functioning as pastors in the church.
2. They were on the Potomac Conference payroll to do a pastor's work.
3. They were not holding ministerial licenses.
4. They were ordained as local elders.

Because of questions being asked by members of the General Conference, those wishing to write in support of this action should write to the following individuals; Elder Wallace Coe, president, Columbia Union, 5427 Twin Knolls Road, Columbia, MD 21045 and Elder Ronald Wisbey, President, Potomac Conference, P.O. Box 1208 Staunton, VA.

1984  
Pushing  
the  
Brethren

GC asked  
conferences  
not to extend  
permission

# 1985

## GENERAL CONFERENCE

**It urged that “‘affirmative action’ for the involvement of women in the work of the church be a priority . . . and to request leaders to use their executive influence to open to women all aspects of ministry in the church that do not require ordination.”**

# 1988 Women's Commission,

March 24-27, 1988





# 1990 GC



# 1990

## GENERAL CONFERENCE

**It accepted the recommendation of the 1989 Annual Council that “in view of the wide-spread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world church, and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the church, we do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry.”**

# 1995

## GENERAL CONFERENCE

**The session denied a request from the North American Division that each division “the right to authorize the ordination of individuals within its territory in harmony with established policies. In addition, where circumstances do not render it inadvisable, a division may authorize the ordination of qualified individuals without regard to gender.”**

**1995**

# **GENERAL CONFERENCE**

**Presentation by 2 Andrews  
University professors (Dr. Raoul  
Dederen and Dr. P. Gerard  
Damsteegt) of the pro and against  
views on women's ordination**

# 1995 GC



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBG0vBWxsP8>

or google “Damsteegt” & ordination

# 1995 Soon After

- **Women were ordained anyway. Ordinations in Potomac and in South Eastern California.**
- **September 23, 1995, Sligo, ordination of three women**



# 2010 GENERAL CONFERENCE



# 2010 GENERAL CONFERENCE





# 2010

# GENERAL CONFERENCE

**At this session there was a request for an official Church study of ordination. The General Conference administration informed the Session of its commitment “to establishing a process to review the subject of ordination and will report back to Annual Council during this quinquennium (2010-2015).”**

# 2013 TOSC



# **GENERAL CONFERENCE THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION STUDY COMMITTEE (TOSC)**

**Its membership included more than 100 persons of both genders serving the Church as theologians, pastors, administrators and laypersons, mostly from the NAD. It met four times over a period of 2 years.**

# RESULTS OF TOSC

## Disagreements

The Study Committee did not arrive at a consensus regarding a biblical position or Ellen G White's counsel on whether or not ministerial ordination should include male and female.

# RESULTS OF TOSC

## Agreements

**It did reach a high degree of accord concerning a biblical theology of ordination. It agreed about ordination as practiced in the early Church in the New Testament 1) that “Seventh-day Adventists understand ordination, in a biblical sense, as the action of the Church in publicly recognizing those whom the Lord has called and equipped for local and global Church ministry”, and 2) that “While ordination contributes to Church order, it neither conveys special qualities to the person nor introduces a kingly hierarchy within the faith community.”**

# **THE TOSC REPORT PRESENTED AT THE 2014 ANNUAL COUNCIL**

**This report included theological and hermeneutical reasons for conclusions on both sides of the question. The Committee suggested three ways forward but did not make a consensus recommendation concerning the practice of ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.**

# **THE RESULT OF TOSC**

**The question becomes one of how Church members will live in harmony and unity while acknowledging the presence of differing views on the issue of the ordination of Women.**

# 215 GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION



*Arise! Shine! Jesus is coming!*



# **2015 GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION**

**Recognizing the importance of this question with respect to understanding the Bible, the multinational and multicultural nature of the Church and its mission, and the biblical example of addressing differences that do not directly involve fundamental beliefs, the General Conference Executive Committee chose to again call for guidance from the global Church.**

# DECISIONS IN GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION HAVE AUTHORITY

**SDAs recognize these decisions as the will of the Church. Ellen G White affirmed this view as follows: “I have been shown that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.”**

# **THE MOTION ON ORDINATION WAS IN THE CONTEXT OF CHURCH UNITY**

**WHEREAS, The unity for which  
Jesus prayed is vitally important to  
the witness of the Seventh-day  
Adventist Church, and;**

# **MOTION IN THE CONTEXT OF CHURCH UNITY**

**WHEREAS, The Seventh-day  
Adventist Church seeks to engage  
every member in its worldwide  
mission to make disciples of Jesus  
Christ among people from every  
nation, culture and ethnicity, and;**

# **MOTION IN THE CONTEXT OF CHURCH UNITY**

**WHEREAS, Various groups appointed by the General Conference and its divisions have carefully studied the Bible and Ellen G White writings with respect to the ordination of women and have not arrived at consensus as to whether ministerial ordination for women is unilaterally affirmed or denied, and;**

# **MOTION IN THE CONTEXT OF CHURCH UNITY**

**WHEREAS, The Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms that “God has ordained that the representatives of His Church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference Session, shall have authority”**

# **THE MOTION TO BE VOTED ON**

**THEREFORE, “After your prayerful study on ordination from the Bible, the writings of Ellen G. White, and the reports of the study commissions, and after your careful consideration of what is best for the church and the fulfillment of its mission, is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No?”**

# THE MOTION TO BE VOTED ON





# RESULTS



 SAN ANTONIO 2015  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH  
*Arise! Shine! Jesus is coming!*



## Vote Count:

Yes -	977
No -	1,381
Abstain -	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,363</b>

# AFTER THE VOTE PRESIDENT WILSON MADE THIS APPEAL



# PRESIDENT'S APPEAL

**“I appeal to all of us in this church to put away differences of opinion. You may guard an opinion, but let’s be careful how we express it, and move ahead. We need to humble ourselves before God as we recognize God’s instructions regarding a General Conference in session. . . .**

# PRESIDENT'S APPEAL

**“My friends, my colleagues, my fellow church members in this great Advent movement, now is the time to unify under the bloodstained banner of Jesus Christ and His power, not our own power. Now is the time—and I’m very serious about this—to unify in the mission of God’s church. As we move forward in unity, I appeal to your heart for calmness and peace.**

# PRESIDENT'S APPEAL

**“How important it is for us to avoid controversy since the mission of the church is at stake.”**

# PRESIDENT'S APPEAL

Next Wilson shared a “quotation from *Testimonies*, volume 9, page 216: “Let every believer do his best to prepare the way for the gospel missionary work that is to be done. But let no one enter into controversy. It is Satan’s object to keep Christians occupied in controversies among themselves. . . . God’s workers are to be of one mind and one heart, praying for the impartation of the Spirit and believing that God will fulfill His word.”

# **2016 ANNUAL COUNCIL**

**2016 “A Study of Church Governance and Unity”**

**This study of SDA Church policy and its relationship to unity is for the purpose of guiding the Church in relation to policies concerning the ordaining and credentialing of pastors.**

# **UNITY AND THE GC WORKING POLICY**

**It shows the connection between unity and the GC Working Policy. The present Policy is the fruit of 150 years of discussions among church leaders from around the world chosen by church members to represent them. Measures became policy only when a majority agreed on them. Its chief purpose was to foster unity and mission.**



# **CRITERIA FOR ORDINATION SET BY THE WORLD CHURCH**

**Ever since the Seventh-day Adventist Church first established criteria for the ordination of ministers in 1879, the world Church has set such criteria. Since 1930, the GC Executive Committee has delegated to unions responsibility for selecting candidates for ordination, based on the criteria set by the world Church.**

# DEPARTURES FROM THE WORLD CHURCH

**Starting in 2012, however, a few unions have claimed the right to set criteria for ordination, disregarding the 1990 GC Session action not to allow women to be ordained to gospel ministry, and the decisions of the 1995 and 2015 General Conference Sessions not to allow variances from this policy.**

# DEPARTURES FROM THE WORLD CHURCH

**Since the 2015 GC Session, some unions and conferences have diverged from GC Working Policy by discontinuing ordinations, and commissioning or licensing all new pastors; issuing ministerial licenses and/or commissioned-minister credentials or licenses to all pastors in their territories, including those previously ordained; and allowing commissioned or licensed ministers to function as ordained ministers.**

# **THIS STUDY EMPHASIZES THE WORLD CHURCH'S POSITION ON ORDINATION**

**It should be based on the Bible, as Ellen White indicated shortly after the landmark 1901 reorganization of the Church**

**It makes the case that unions and conferences should not unilaterally depart from what has been agreed by the world Church.**

# 2016 UNITY IN MISSION: PROCEDURES IN CHURCH RECONCILIATION

1 EOM/PRE/GCDO16AC/PREXAD/GCDO16AC/16AC to MLR-17AC

2

3 114-16G UNITY IN MISSION: PROCEDURES IN CHURCH

4 RECONCILIATION

5

6 UNITY IN MISSION: PROCEDURES IN CHURCH RECONCILIATION

7

8 The Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to grow with members coming from “every

9 nation, tribe, tongue, and people.” These believers have the privilege of working and praying for

10 the unity in faith and mission for which Jesus so earnestly prayed (John 17:11, 20-23). At times,

11 such unity can be a challenge for a local church—how much more for a worldwide family of

12 nearly 20 million people consisting of many different languages, cultures, and backgrounds. And

13 yet this is the high ideal to which we have been called!

14

# **“UNITY IN MISSION: PROCEDURES IN CHURCH RECONCILIATION”**

**After much prayer, consultation, and discussion, it is VOTED, 1. To adopt the following steps of reconciliation with entities that appear to have overlooked or ignored the biblical principles as expressed in the Fundamental Beliefs, voted actions, or working policies of the Church:**

# **“UNITY IN MISSION: PROCEDURES IN CHURCH RECONCILIATION”**

- a. Listen and pray.**
- b. Consultation with a wider group.**
- c. Write pastoral letters.**

# **“UNITY IN MISSION: PROCEDURES IN CHURCH RECONCILIATION”**

**i) If after six months of discussion the matter has not been resolved, the executive officers of the next higher organization should write pastoral letters encouraging the executive officers and the governing body of the entity to lead their organization to be faithful.**



# **“UNITY IN MISSION: PROCEDURES IN CHURCH RECONCILIATION”**

**d. Listen and pray again.**

**e. Start phase two of  
reconciliation.**

# **“UNITY IN MISSION: PROCEDURES IN CHURCH RECONCILIATION”**

**VOTED, 2. To request the General Conference Administrative Committee to recommend to the 2017 Annual Council, procedural steps to be followed in the event that a resolution of the conflict is not achieved under procedures identified in recommendation 1. above.**

**“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).**

# **“UNITY IN MISSION: PROCEDURES IN CHURCH RECONCILIATION”**

**Summary: This document sought to provide a “pastoral” approach involving dialogue and a greater understanding among those involved.**

**This document was voted with 169 endorsing it and 122 voted against it.**

# 2016 NAD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE VOTES MOTION BY WISBEY



# **NAD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE VOTES MOTIONS IN RESPONSE**

**The first motion was made by Randal Wisbey, president of La Sierra University. Wisbey’s statement reads: “The attendees of the North American Division Year-End Meeting respectfully request that the General Conference provide Elder Sandra Roberts, president of Southeastern California Conference, the same rights, respect, and privileges of office as any other conference president within the North America Division who has been duly elected by an official and legal constituency meeting of that conference. . . .”**

# **NAD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE VOTES MOTIONS IN RESPONSE**

**The second motion was brought forth by Randy Roberts, senior pastor of the Loma Linda University Seventh-day Adventist Church. It reads: “The Seventh-day Adventist Church exists to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed in the Three Angels’ Messages. Nothing should impede this prophetic mission.**

**. “A Study of Church Governance and Unity,” Sept 2016, Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.**

**Image: Daniel R. Jackson, president of the North American Division, welcomes the members of the NAD Executive Committee to the 2018 NAD Year End Meeting. ©2018 NAD/Dan Weber**

# **NAD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE VOTES MOTIONS IN RESPONSE**

**After a discussion period, delegates voted  
by electronic device:**

**163, yes;**

**35 no;**

**one abstention.**

# 2017 GC ANNUAL COUNCIL





# **2017 GC ANNUAL COUNCIL**

**“Procedures for Reconciliation and Adherence in Church Governance: Phase II”**

**Summary: The document outlines the second phase of a process of reconciliation voted during last year’s Annual Council [2016] that sought to initiate standard procedures for maintaining church unity in matters involving non-compliance.**

# **2017 GC ANNUAL COUNCIL**

**It describes noncompliance and results of noncompliance.**

**The document differentiates non-compliant practices into three categories.**

# 2017 GC ANNUAL COUNCIL

**Category 1. The 28 Fundamental Beliefs.**

**Category 2. Voted actions of the General Conference in session or by the GCEC which, if not implemented, would adversely impact Church unity.**

**Category 3. Policies, initiate actions and practices that are local in nature, and not in violation of actions voted in General Conference Session and would not impact Church unity.**

# RESOLUTION OF NON-COMPLIANCE

**Officers/Administrators must be in harmony with GC Working Policy**

**Those who show inability or unwillingness to administer their work in harmony with policy should not be continued in executive leadership by their respective constituencies or governing boards/committees.”**

# **RESOLUTION OF NON-COMPLIANCE**

**Members of the GC Executive Committee not in compliance with  
Category 2**

**In addition to the standard financial Conflict of Interest, each  
General Conference Executive Committee member will be asked  
to a Statement of Commitment regarding General Conference  
Session actions, General Conference Executive Committee  
actions, and General Conference Working Policy, and the sacred  
spiritual trust of leadership. . . . Those who do not sign the  
document for whatever reason, will forfeit their privileges of  
voice, vote, and subcommittee participation.**

# **RESOLUTION OF NON-COMPLIANCE**

**The same rules apply to invitees to the Annual Council and delegates to the GC Session. They will forfeit their invitation.**

**With a vote of 184 yes, 114 no, the document went back to the Unity in Mission Oversight committee for revision. A vote on the revised document will take place at the Annual Council in 2018.**

# 2018 GENERAL CONFERENCE ANNUAL COUNCIL



# **2018 GENERAL CONFERENCE ANNUAL COUNCIL**

**Document “Regard for and Practice  
of General Conference Session and  
General Conference Executive  
Committee Actions”**



# MAIN POINTS

**Appeal: Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” — Eph 4:3. “We are coming to a time when, more than ever before, we shall need to press together, to labor unitedly. . . . in unity there is strength.” — 2SM 373, 374.**

# MAIN POINTS

- 1. Process for Reporting Perceived Non-Compliance**
- 2. Organization Closest to the Matter**
- 3. Process for Addressing Perceived Non-Compliance—**

# **ADMINISTRATORS DEALING WITH ANY MATTER SHOULD INCLUDE**

- (a) much prayer and dialogue,**
- (b) provide a clearly written statement defining the perceived non-compliance,**
- (c) upon receipt of the written statement, provide 60 days for the executive officers of the perceived non-compliant entity to provide evidence of compliance or a plan to achieve sustained compliance,**

# **ADMINISTRATORS DEALING WITH ANY MATTER SHOULD INCLUDE**

**(d) create a supportive atmosphere by which to achieve compliance and unity, and**

**(e) provide a reasonable timeframe (30 days) to provide evidence of compliance or a plan to achieve sustained compliance.**

# **4. PROCESS FOR APPEAL**

# **5. PROCESS FOR UNRESOLVED MATTERS**

# **6. DISCIPLINARY MEASURES—**

**In the event the due process referenced above does not bring about compliance its duly elected leader may be subject to the following disciplinary measures:**

# **6. DISCIPLINARY MEASURES—**

**a. Warned.**

**b. Public Reprimand**

**c. Placed on Removal for Cause by a two-thirds majority vote and Subject to Policy Application—General Conference Bylaws Article XIII Sec.1. c. and f., and GC B 95.**



# **6. DISCIPLINARY MEASURES—**

**VOTED, To approve the document,  
“Regard for and Practice of General  
Conference Session and General  
Conference Executive Committee Actions.”**

**The count of the secret ballots was as  
follows:**

**Yes 185; No 124; Abstained 2**



spectrumbot



**“Sister, won’t you play us another stanza of ‘All to Wilson I Surrender’ and we’ll give these three one last chance.”**

# NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION RESPONSE TO GC ANNUAL COUNCIL VOTE



**NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION  
2018 YEAR-END MEETING  
RESPONSE**

**NOVEMBER 6, 2018**

**Our Position in response to the  
document voted at the 2018 G C  
Autumn Council**

# NAD RESPONSE

**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.**

# NAD RESPONSE

**We are compelled to reject the spirit and direction of this document voted 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.**

# NAD RESPONSE

**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**

# NAD RESPONSE

**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.**



# NAD RESPONSE

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).

# NAD RESPONSE

**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).**

# NAD RESPONSE

**We believe the church should take heed of this counsel at this moment in our history.**

# NAD RESPONSE

## 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.**

# NAD RESPONSE

**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.**

**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).**

# NAD RESPONSE



# DOCUMENTATION

**“A Study of Church Governance and Unity,” Sept 2016, Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.**