Theology of Ordination Committee ends first session
Chair says there is 'real hope' on resolving differing views on ordination

First religious liberty symposium in Guadeloupe spurs civic engagement
Leaders urge more local dialogue with government, religious groups
Members of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) ended their first session – held January 15-17 at a meeting site near the church’s world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States – on an optimistic note.

“We have real hope that the church will be able to find a way to resolve the differences we have on the issue of ordination,” committee chair Artur Stele, director of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute, reported to church leaders worldwide via a phone conference following the session. “We left the meeting feeling very optimistic and confident that God is leading us. We have many reasons to thank the Lord.”

The General Conference Administrative Committee organized the TOSC in October 2012 to study the concept of ordination from a biblical perspective and whether it is intended for only one gender. The study committee comprises 106 members, including theologians, laypersons, pastors, and Bible students from each of the church’s 13 world divisions. The General Conference appointed Stele as chair, Geoffrey Mbwana as vice chair, and Karen Porter as secretary. About 25 percent of the members are women.

La Sierra associate professor of religion Kendra Haloviak-Valentine, assistant to the General Conference president Mark Finley, and newly appointed Solusi University president Joel Musvosvi presented the daily devotionals. Seasons of prayer invoking the Holy Spirit’s presence and guidance were then followed by the presentation of papers by individuals assigned to study various aspects of ordination. These papers included topics on how to deal with doctrinal issues in the church, the history of ordination, and hermeneutics.

After each presentation, time was given to discuss the material presented with the entire committee. On the second day smaller groups met for reflection and to develop suggestions and recommendations on the papers. Based on the suggestions and recommendations from the working groups, the presenters will refine their papers, and second drafts will be sent to the divisions’ Biblical Research Committees and to the TOSC members for input before the next meeting.

Differences of opinion were animatedly expressed on the second afternoon of the session, one member said in an interview, “but then Pastor Stele stopped and said, ‘Let’s pray,’ and the whole atmosphere changed. There was a warm Christian spirit, and we felt free to openly share our views.”

A letter to the General Conference Executive Committee from the TOSC chair, vice chair, and secretary summing up the session read, in part: “Members of the committee could not help but express their gratitude to God for the sweet spirit that prevailed in these meetings. Please continue to pray for the Committee as it works under the leadership of the Holy Spirit in this study.”

The second of the four scheduled sessions will be held in July 2013 in Maryland.
First religious liberty symposium in Guadeloupe spurs civic engagement

Jan. 22, 2013
Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe
ANN staff

Seventh-day Adventist public affairs leaders heralded the church’s first religious liberty symposium here in Guadeloupe as a model for more civic engagement at local regions worldwide.

Earlier this month, some 800 people attended a three-day symposium in this Caribbean island, with Adventist leaders continuing to urge local pastors and administrators to deliberately pursue dialogue with government officials and other religious groups.

In attendance were pastors, local church officials and government leaders, including the island’s top government official Victorin Lurel, president of the Regional Council of Guadaloupe. Guadaloupe is a department of France.

“We think a symposium like this is a model for more Adventist Church conferences and unions to organize locally,” said Ganoune Diop, associate director of the department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) at the denomination’s world headquarters.

“We want people to better know who Seventh-day Adventists are and be aware of their contributions to the community,” said Diop, who also serves as the church’s liaison to the United Nations.

Roberto Herrera, PARL director for the denomination’s Inter-American Division, said he hopes the event spurs more commitment on behalf of all congregations in understanding the importance of promoting religious freedom. It’s also a chance to promote the church’s commitment to health, education and humanitarian assistance, as well as empowering women and children.

Guadeloupe has long had strong religious liberty, said Max Laurent, president of the Adventist Church’s French Antilles Guiana Union, which oversees Guadeloupe. One challenge, however, is Adventist secondary students periodically running into problems with classes and exams held on Saturdays, the day Adventists observe the biblical Sabbath.

Laurent said church leaders in Guadeloupe would continue to dialogue with government leaders and school officials on behalf of their students.

The Adventist Church will hold a union-wide religious liberty celebration later this year in Martinique.
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