Annual Council Issues Statements on Union Ordinations and Homosexuality

During this week’s Annual Council meetings in Silver Spring, Md., world church leaders voted 264 to 25 to approve a “Statement on Church Polity, Procedures and Resolution of Disagreements in the Light of Recent Union Actions on Ministerial Ordination.” The statement is a response to the actions of three union conferences — the North German Union in the Inter-European Division, and the Columbia Union and Pacific Union in the North American Division — which separately voted this year to permit ordination without regard to gender. The North Pacific Union Conference will discuss this topic at its upcoming executive committee meeting in November. Read more about the action and full copy of the voted statement from the Adventist News Network. The group also voted to reaffirm the church’s stance against homosexual activity and same-sex marriage, but softened the denomination’s position statement to offer compassion toward gays and lesbians. Read more about these items and review the revised statements from the Adventist News Network.

Mt. Ellis Student Recovering from Cardiac Arrest

On Oct. 3, Gang Yoon, a student at Mt. Ellis Academy in Bozeman, Mont., was traveling with his brother Fez Yoon while on home leave in Eastern Washington when his heart stopped. Fez had pulled off the road when a woman stopped to help. She had just completed her CPR training the day before and was instrumental in saving his life. Gang was air-lifted to Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane, Wash., where he remained in a coma for three days. While there was fear about his recovery, in less than a week, Gang was up and walking. Friends and classmates have been praying for him, and the doctors say it is nothing but a miracle that he is alive. Gang was released from the hospital this week. Please pray for his continued recovery. You can see more pictures and follow the story on Mt. Ellis Academy’s Facebook page.

Enrollment Jumps at WWU
With fall quarter in full swing, Walla Walla University (WWU) announced that enrollment is up by 109 students from last year. This increase makes it one of the highest enrollments of all time for the university. Helping to raise the numbers is a strong 83 percent retention rate of the previous year's freshman class as well as a large incoming freshman class. Incoming freshman to the School of Engineering represent the largest increase of any department. Learn more about the enrollment increase at WallaWalla.edu.

GLOW in the Dark
Are you looking for ways to witness on the darkest night of the year? Each year, members in the Upper Columbia Conference (UCC) have been using Halloween as an opportunity to share God's word with their neighbors by handing out GLOW pamphlets to trick-or-treaters who come to their door. And this year is no different. Visit UCC's website for more information and to participate in this event.

Christ's Method Alone for Urban Mission
New York 2013, the launch event for large-city evangelism for the Adventist church, is hosting a training day for church members on Oct. 27, titled Christ's Method Alone. This event will be streamed live on the Hope Church Channel from Brooklyn, N.Y., with speakers from the General Conference, as well as local union and conference leaders. You can find more information on the NY13 website.
After three hours of respectful study and discussion, leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist world church voted to approve a “Statement on Church Polity, Procedures and Resolution of Disagreements in the Light of Recent Union Actions on Ministerial Ordination” on October 16, during the Annual Council of world church leaders held in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

The vote was 264 in favor and 25 opposed.

The move comes after three local unions – the North German Union in the Euro-Africa Division, and the Columbia Union and Pacific Union in the North American Division – separately voted this year to permit ordination “without respect to gender,” something the Adventist Church as a whole has twice rejected in votes at the movement’s General Conference Sessions, which are held every five years.

The voted statement expresses disapproval of the independent actions of the unions, appeals for all Church units “to consider thoughtfully the impact and implications of decisions” made independently of the world community, and affirms the role of women in the Church’s life and ministry. The document also points toward continuing studies on the theology of ordination, the results of which are expected to be ready in 2014, ahead of the following year’s 60th General Conference Session. No sanctions are applied, or suggested, in the document.

“This statement deals with Church structure and procedures. It does not address the question of ministerial ordination practices per se,” the statement said. “The central issue is one of Church polity – how the Church defines its organization, governance and operations.”

“Decisions to pursue a course of action not in harmony with the 1990 and 1995 General Conference Session decisions (with respect to ministerial ordination) represent not only an expression of dissent but also a demonstration of self-determination in a matter previously decided by the collective Church,” the statement said. “The General Conference Executive Committee regards these actions as serious mistakes.”
The statement text continues, “The world Church cannot legitimize practices that clearly contradict the intent of General Conference Session actions. … Accordingly, the world Church does not recognize actions authorizing or implementing ministerial ordination without regard to gender.”

But the statement is also clear in stating the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s position on women: “The General Conference Executive Committee specifically affirms the important roles that women fill in the life of the Church. Their giftedness and commitment is a blessing to the whole Church and a necessary part of its work in mission.”

The measure passed on a secret, paper ballot after the day’s discussion, which began with comments from Pastor Ted N. C. Wilson, Seventh-day Adventist world church president. Wilson expressed the hope that the world church’s units would continue “focusing on the mission of the Church, uniting in Christ, even though we will face some differences and disagreements.”

Wilson was followed by noted evangelist and retired General Conference vice president Pastor Mark Finley, who spoke about the question of how the early church made decisions and worked in unity. He referenced three incidents in the book of Acts.

"The essence of unity is not uniform action; it is respecting one another enough to listen carefully, respond thoughtfully and decide together," Finley said. "Insurmountable difficulties were resolved as early church leaders met together, prayed and surrendered their personal opinions to the decision of the larger corporate body."

During an extended comment period, Pastor Daniel Jackson, North American Division president, sought to reassure world church leaders that the division supported the Church’s mission, despite the polity question discussed in the statement.

"We want to make it abundantly clear that the NAD without any hesitation expresses our unity with the world church," Jackson said. "We are not just an adjunct to the world church; we are brothers and sisters with every person in this room."

A pastor in the NAD’s Atlantic Union Conference, Dedrick Blue, told his fellow delegates that “the process deals with the mechanism, but the effect is just as important as the process. What we are grappling with here is the effect of our decision as a world body,” adding, “Don’t get involved with process to neglect justice and mercy.”

While he voted in favor of the statement, North Pacific Union Conference president Pastor Max Torkelson II said he hoped younger Adventists wouldn’t get the wrong message from the action. He spoke with a reporter following the meeting.

“I’m concerned that, particularly our younger church members have less patience” to wait for the world church to act, he said. “And we’re asking them, we have been asking them, for years, to be patient, and now again we’re asking them to be patient. I admire them to the degree that they are, but I’m wondering how long we can presume that they will be patient. I’m afraid that we may
disappoint them."

Following the vote and before prayers by Adventist university leaders from three continents, Wilson said he appreciated delegates’ careful approach to the matter.

“Thank you for your confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring unity to God's Church,” Wilson said. “We're not at the end of the road, we still have a journey to complete, but by God's grace, let's do it together.”

—Click HERE to read the full statement (PDF download)
Church's view on gays, lesbians adjusted to emphasize 'compassion'

Oct. 17, 2012 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

Edwin Manuel Garcia/ANN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church on Wednesday reaffirmed its stance against homosexual activity and same-sex marriage, but also softened the denomination's position statement to offer compassion toward gays and lesbians.

The half-page policy statement on homosexuality was approved overwhelmingly by a hand vote of more than 200 pastors, lay people and other denominational workers attending the final Executive Committee business session of the 2012 Annual Council at the denomination's world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

Church leaders said the original position statement drafted in 1999 was clear and based on biblical teachings. They chose to update the document to relay the message that the church doesn't accept homosexual practice but must recognize the need to minister with compassion to gays, said Vice President Pardon Mwansa, who chaired the policy committee that recommended the change.

"We felt we needed to close this statement with a phrase that shows that the church is willing to show a Christ-like compassionate spirit to those who practice homosexuality," Mwansa told attendees who represented church leaders in six continents.

The statement – which does not define compassion nor explain how the church should treat homosexuals – also was re-edited to show in a stronger stance than before that the church intends to remain faithful to scripture.

The final sentence of the three-paragraph document now reads: “As His disciples, Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the Lord's instruction and example, living a life of Christ-like compassion and faithfulness.”
None of the delegates in the auditorium spoke on the issue before voting.

But a more controversial agenda item, the revised position statement dealing with same-sex marriage, prompted a more passionate response, sometimes focused on the issue itself, and at other times on the grammatical nuances involved in the group-editing of a controversial paper.

The committee leaders said they elected to revise the same-sex union statement to reflect societal trends, such as acknowledging that some governments have given legal standing to same-sex unions.

“The institutions of marriage and family are under attack,” declared Willie Oliver, policy committee member and co-director of Family Ministries for the global church, quoting from a line that is now part of the new statement.

The statement also deleted the word “disorder” – calling it outdated – and replaced it with “disturbance” to describe homosexuality. That line in the five-paragraph document now reads: “Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disturbance and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by the entrance of sin into the world.”

And like the statement on homosexuality, the statement on same-sex marriage attempts to extend compassion.

The previous version stated: “We hold that all people, no matter what their sexual orientation, are children of God.” The new version says, “We hold that all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, are loved by God.”

One delegate from Europe attempted to amend the statement to delete the line about homosexuality being a “disturbance,” suggesting the church be more sensitive.

His proposal was rejected by North American Division lay member Gina Brown, and eventually the entire body. “Though many of us have family members who are homosexual, we understand the thought process, we still embrace them, we still love them, we still care for them,” Brown said. “However, as a church, we must take a stand for what is right.”

Ekkehardt Mueller, deputy director of the Biblical Research Institute, praised the committee for including a phrase in the line that was proposed for amendment that links homosexuality to the “entrance of sin” into the world.

“We feel that this is necessary in this context,
especially since homosexuals today would deny any notion of sin and would say ‘this is how we are created, God has created us this way, and therefore we have the right and duty to this lifestyle,’ so I would be opposed to the amendment,” Mueller said.

The theme of homosexuality, and transgender issues, prompted one delegate, the president of the British Union Conference, to ask church leaders for guidance with a situation his region recently experienced.

“We have had a brother who two weeks ago came back to church as a sister. Legally, in British Law, he is now sister, he has had the operations. I have never encountered anything like this in my ministry,” Ian Sweeney said in an address to the policy committee members. “We would need some help on that one.”

Sweeney didn’t get the answer he was probably hoping for, but it became obvious the church will grapple with the issue again in the future.

“We have received requests from other parts of the world field about situations in their church. The church manual does not have a lot to say – in fact, very little to say – on this subject, so these are subjects that we're having to address now in the church body,” replied Adventist Church Vice President Ben Schoun, vice chairman of the policy committee.

“Perhaps the committee will bring forth suggestions or guidance," Schoun said.
The best day or night to knock on doors is Halloween, October 31st. Our yearly GLOW In the Dark event is coming soon fast upon us, and you don’t want to miss this.

GLOW in the Dark 2012 is a night to get the Word of God through the printed page to as many as possible. Imagine, a day when people expect you to knock on their door!

Here’s what you can do: You are a gifted and passionate individual who can make this event happen in your area; be it your school, university, church, outreach team, Adventurer club, Pathfinder club, etc! We can cover much ground of Eastern Washington and Upper Columbia conference if we work together. Envision blanketing entire cities with GLOW! There is no better time!

Here are some things to make GLOW in the Dark a successful event this Halloween:

1) Attached is a flyer that you can print out and pin around your school/church, etc.

2) Grab announcement time, at church or school, and tell them about this conference-wide event

3) It’s easy! Make it sound easy! (E.g., It’s as easy as extending an elbow and saying, “Trick or Truth!”)

4) Grab some Halloween GLOW in the Dark (Twilight: is it just a story (http://www.glowonline.org/literature-2/twilight-is-it-just-a-story-2/) exclusively from me (Email Jordanaa@uccsda.org [mailto:jordanaa@uccsda.org] or call me at 509-242-0625).

5) Visit our GLOW website (http://www.uccsda.org/GLOW/inthedark) to see if there is a GLOW in the Dark event happening in your area.

Happy GLOWing!