Church leaders issue ‘An Appeal for Oneness in Christ’

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Calling unilateralism "the great adversary of the unified Body of Christ," the statement included a direct response to the July 29 action of the Columbia Union Conference Constituency Meeting Action to ordain pastors "without regard to gender."

The Columbia Union Conference action, the statement said, "is not in harmony with General Conference Working Policy—the collective decisions of world leadership that define the operating procedures and relationships applicable to all organizations. Further, the action sets aside the 1990 and 1995 decisions of the General Conference in Session respecting the practice of ordination."

Moreover, General Conference leaders indicated the Columbia Union Conference action could bring consequences. "The action taken by the Columbia Union Conference represents a serious threat to the unity of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, and thus, at its next meeting in October 2012, the General Conference Executive Committee will carefully review the situation and determine how to respond," the statement said.

At its conclusion, church leaders appealed for restraint. "The officers of the General Conference and the division presidents again appeal to all entities, organizations, and individuals, including the Columbia Union Conference, to refrain from independent and unilateral decisions and implementing actions on issues affecting ministerial ordination, and to invest their energies and creativity in fostering a vigorous dialogue through the established process about how the Church should recognize and affirm the gifts of the Spirit in the lives of believers."

Along with the statement, church leaders promised, "an important companion document, organized as a series of questions and answers about key assumptions and assertions and historical backgrounds discussed at the recent Columbia Union Conference constituency meeting or in related communication" would be released on August 8.

Organized in 1863, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is the global governing body for the 17 million-member Seventh-day Adventist Church, active in more than 203 countries and territories. Headquarters are in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.