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Image by Aventist News Network

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Aug. 19, 2012 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States...ANN staff

Top leadership of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists this evening issued a response to the Pacific Union Conference's vote to ordain ministers without regard to gender, saying the move is a "serious threat" to unity of the world church and preempts an ongoing study on the issue of ordination.

In a special session this afternoon, constituents of the California-based Pacific Union voted 79 percent to 21 percent to "approve ordinations to the gospel ministry without regard to gender." The Adventist Church currently does not ordain women as ministers.

Pacific Union's move comes three weeks after a union in the mid-Atlantic United States voted a similar action. The Maryland-based Columbia Union Conference on July 29 voted to recommend to its Executive Committee to approve ordination without regard to gender.

General Conference officers said both actions are contrary to policy. Leaders appealed to all administrative units to "refrain from independent and unilateral decisions" and said the world church Executive Committee will determine how to respond at its next meeting in October.

The response from General Conference officers follows in its entirety:

A RESPONSE TO THE ACTION OF THE PACIFIC UNION CONFERENCE CONSTITUENCY MEETING ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 19, 2012

The 17 million members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are united through the Holy Spirit in a common commitment to Christ and the truths of His Word, an urgent end-time mission, and a divinely inspired church organization. A threat to any one of these places at risk the unity of the church. It is for this reason that the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms the Pacific Union's action not to change their Constitution and remain in harmony with the world church. This represents a step in a positive direction. The General Conference leadership is seriously concerned, though, with the Pacific Union's subsequent action to preempt the collective decisions of the world church regarding ordination. Unilateral actions contrary to the voted decisions of the global church seriously threaten the unity of the church.

The world church recognizes the vital role that women play in the life, ministry and leadership of the church and encourages their active involvement. Because the General Conference Administrative Committee has already voted and commenced the most comprehensive study in our history on the subject of ordination, which will include the study of the ordination of women, the action of the Pacific Union to grant Ministerial Ordination "without respect to gender" preempts the process voted for the current study of ordination theology and practices by committing the Pacific Union Conference to a particular outcome before the study-and-discussion process is completed. It also expresses a lack of trust in the integrity of the general process accepted and voted by General Conference administrators and personnel, division officers, and...
pastors and lay members from all the world divisions who serve on the General Conference Executive Committee, which includes the presidents of the 125 unions representing the world church, regarding how we approach common challenges.

Further, the action is contrary to General Conference Working Policy and sets aside the 1990 and 1995 decisions of the General Conference in Session respecting the practice of ordination. The action taken by the Pacific 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, as indicated in another recent public statement by General Conference officers and division presidents, the General Conference Executive Committee will carefully review the situation and determine how to respond. In the spirit of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the officers of the General Conference appeal to all entities, organizations, and individuals, including the Pacific Union Conference, to refrain from independent and unilateral decisions and from implementing any such actions.

It is our prayer that the "oneness" Jesus prayed for in His great intercessory prayer in John 17, and that which the disciples experienced in Acts 2, will be manifest in His church today. We pray that the result of this "oneness" will be lives transformed by His grace, united in His love, and empowered by His Spirit to proclaim His last-day message in all of its fullness to a perishing planet, hastening the glorious return of our Lord.

Ted N. C. Wilson, President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

G. T. Ng, Secretary
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Robert E. Lemon, Treasurer
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists