Delegates vote statement on civil discourse

By Julio C. Muñoz

The North American Division (NAD) Executive Committee unanimously adopted a statement that encourages “respectful, Christ-like dialogue” between Christians, particularly in regards to the upcoming 2015 General Conference Session vote on women’s ordination.

The motion stemmed from a concern expressed earlier in the division’s Year-end Meetings. NAD President Daniel R. Jackson and many of the attendees expressed concern about the tone of the debate that has been raging at various levels of the Seventh-day Adventist world church. But as Christians, Jackson reminded delegates, we are called to discuss issues with the understanding and compassion modeled by Christ.

“I don’t think it’s part of our mission to start attacking each other just because we don’t agree,” Jackson said during Sunday’s discussion on the ordination of women. “I’m not saying for a moment that we don’t have the right to disagree, but God has given us the responsibility to share His love.”

In response to Jackson’s call for civility of discourse, the delegates approved a statement that includes the following guidelines:

1) We resolve to encourage expressions of disagreement that are honest and open based upon a sincere desire to arrive at truth as expressed in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy;

2) We resolve to first communicate with those with whom we disagree and listen non-judgmentally to their positions so that we can represent those positions accurately before critiquing them;

3) We resolve to avoid the use of sarcasm, cartoons, anecdotes, parody or any other form of insinuation to diminish the reputation or personhood of others;

4) We resolve to refrain from sponsoring or countenancing online or offline dialogue that vilifies or depreciates the good name of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in general or the reputations of its individual members in particular.

We, therefore, resolve to avoid participating in, or being party to, all forms of unhealthy and demeaning discourse. Our aim is to govern our communication according to the high standards of Christian conduct found in the guidelines this statement so that God may be glorified in all we say and do.”
Jackson asked that the North American church members seek “higher ground” during these challenging times while the discussion about ordination builds up as the General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas approaches.