Millennials in Conversation:
"Here to Vote, Not Kill Each Other!"
Two young people, Katie Morrison and Maxwell Aka, sat down and had a conversation regarding the 2015 General Conference in session. Morrison, age 21 and a senior at Union College, works as a communication intern at the Rocky Mountain Conference. Aka, age 24, works in the Youth Department at the Ontario Conference. This is the first General Conference either of them have ever attended.

*Millennials talk about the walking:*
Maxwell Aka: I took a video of how long it takes to walk from the Grand Hyatt to the dome. The video was 12 minutes long.

Katie Morrison: We need to get one of those segways.
MA: Like the ones without handles! Everyone walks too slow for my liking.

KM: I hate slow movers and I’m constantly passing and dodging.

MA: It’s hard to pass! Like when the whole extended family is lined all across the walkway! I’m like, I’m going to jump over you guys! I’m wondering if other people are getting cabin fever. It’s not like we’re for real trapped but it is a lot of people crammed into one very small space.

KM: I’m definitely feeling the same as you with that but I wonder if that’s just because of our age. Older generations – do they feel this same thing as us? Or younger kids having a fun week, do they want to be done?

MA: I feel like we’re too similar to get a well-rounded view on this. I’m sure extroverts are over the moon running around yelling, “Everyone’s here!”

*Millennials talk about being introverted at GC:*
KM: It’s very overwhelming for me, not naturally being a people person. I’m an introvert to the core.

MA: Yeah me too.

KM: I love how friendly everyone is! But I’m dying to get to my room and be alone. I can’t wait to go back to the hotel room and watch The Bachelorette.

MA: It’s definitely hard to get away from people. I’m staying with my parents and it’s chill. For the most part, they’re busy but it seems like there’s always someone around and always really close. I mean, we’re sitting under the overpass of the highway right now and hundreds of people are walking past us even in the middle of this conversation!

*Millennials talk about favorite parts of the week:*
KM: I like all the different people around. I think it’s crazy that you can walk by someone from Asia, someone from Europe, someone from Canada. All these people are speaking so many languages and they’re all here for the same thing! They’re so friendly! I’ve been stopped on the sidewalk so many times and they just strike up a conversation. I’m not nervous about being approached by people from the convention because everyone is so nice.

MA: I’ve done quite a bit of missionary work all over the world so I like the fact that I’m seeing people from all different places [pauses to say hi to a friend walking past]. I never thought I’d see them in the United States of all places. But here they are! Yeah that’s cool. Everyone looks so different, looking diverse.

KM: GC just seems like a big camp meeting on steroids except with more decisions being made. Instead of just speakers and messages, it’s a board meeting on steroids mixed with a camp meeting on steroids.

MA: Basically the common denominator is steroids. Whatever church thing you’ve been to before, it’s that taken up 10 notches.

*Millennials talk about attending the business sessions:*
KM: I’ve never been to a church or school board meeting so this huge version is my first experience. It’s very annoying. There are so many people and getting just a few people to agree is hard, let alone like 2,500 people. And with something as important as this, a worldwide decision, I knew it was going to be hard but it’s REALLY hard. And all the points of order? And motions? It has to be frustrating to those on the floor if I’m getting this frustrated.

MA: Yeah, it’s the bureaucracy of it. I’ve been in school board meetings before but I wasn’t sure what to expect here. It definitely is just a huge staff meeting. I’m amazed that they’re able to do anything at all because there are so many people! It’s impressive and staggering at the same time. It’s like, “Wow, look at what you’re able to do!” but also, “Wow, look at the difficulty of it.”

KM: I know I’m complaining right now but honestly I don’t have any better suggestions. Do you?

MA: Nope. Although I do think there are people that just want to say their piece, whether or not it actually helps. I think there could be less of that; but that’s not a structural process problem as much as it is people’s attitudes.

KM: And that’s something you can’t control.

MA: No matter how hard you try.

*Millennials talk about the atmosphere:*

KM: It’s a lot more negative than I thought it would be. I’m not saying it’s entirely negative but on the balance, I thought there would be more positivity than there is.

MA: Maybe a bit more lighthearted?

KM: A little bit, yeah.

MA: We’re just here to vote, not to kill each other!

KM: It’s a lot more nitpicky than I thought it’d be. Which again, that might just be me being naïve. They are doing these important changes on our rules, our church manual, so there does have to be some consideration.

MA: The best word to describe myself and what I know of the process and the details and the issues? Naïve. I thought to myself, they’ll say a few things, make some points, and say, “It’s settled.” But the extent to which people interpret and drag things out and nitpick things just makes me think, “Wow.” It’s important that all voices are heard but at the same time, it’s staggering to me how vehemently people will stand by a point.

KM: I’ve been listening to some sermons at home and one point that hit me is this: maybe religion isn’t for you. It isn’t about you; it’s about God. Being at the Alamodome, I hear so many delegates saying, “Did you go over my point? I brought it up yesterday and I haven’t heard you mention it. I’m going to keep coming up here to the microphone because I don’t think I’m being heard.” Or I hear young people saying, “There aren’t delegates for us. We’ll never be heard. They aren’t listening to me.” I understand that equality is important
but honestly it is not about you, or me for that matter. We are not the center of the church; God is. That’s where my head is at.

MA: Right. And one thing that I found interesting is that it almost feels like there are worship times that are about God and then there are decision times that are about us. It seems so focused on the here and now that it feels shocking when God gets mentioned.

KM: It’s a very stark contrast.

MA: It feels like a mental switch between God stuff and decision making stuff. Obviously God is there in decision making but it’s just the atmosphere. It’s very clinical, very mechanical.

KM: That happened today! Some delegate made a comment and the chairwoman said, “Let’s let the Holy Spirit take care of that matter.” It was so weird to me! I was thinking, “Oh right! I forgot about the Holy Spirit!”

MA: There’s all this language that’s not typically church or religious language. To those people that work in the church, they might be used to it. But to me, it’s such robotic lifeless banter. It’s weird.

KA: Super weird.

_Millenials talk about women's ordination and some typical negativity:

MA: I don’t know why but negativity in young people seems to be the norm. I’ve seen some of the more progressive publications getting worked up but I haven’t seen a lot of people on the conservative side saying much of anything. I know I have many friends representing the conservative demographic but they’re dead silent.

KM: Are you more conservative?

MA: I don’t know how much I value terms like liberal and conservative. In the sense of a typical NAD Christian, I have conservative values. In the sense of a typical Adventist, I’d probably be more liberal. I’ve had my ear pierced, my hair is basically a Mohawk, I listen to rock music, I eat meat, but I don’t think that makes you a liberal Christian. You’re just more forward in Adventism. I’m for women’s ordination. I feel like there’s a lot of polarization because of this issue but it’s so nuanced and bureaucratic and detail oriented. It’s not what people are making it out to be! By splitting off into two camps, the tension has been so thick. The tension doesn’t need to be there. The issue we’re dealing with is not the issue people are making it into. What about you? If you could label yourself, would you?

KM: I’m not as anti-labels as people my age might be. The motion on women’s ordination, to me, doesn’t seem unreasonable just because it gives the decision to the divisions. Culturally some countries think of ordaining women as heresy while other countries are almost completely dependent on women pastors. I’m on board with it being voted in but I’m not cool with the people threatening to leave the church based on this decision. Church, to me, is for God. Church is for people to come together, yes, but to show God’s glory.
MA: It’s so exaggerated, and this is coming from someone who supports women in ministry. If the vote gets voted down, I believe NAD women will be fine. There will be disappointment and sadness, but there will likely be support too. They’ll keep their jobs and although it might not be ideal, they’ll survive. If we voted on something saying, “Only men go to heaven, we don’t value women, women must be silent outside the home and in the home,” I’d have to leave. I can’t support outright hate. That’d be the time to decide whether I’m participating in hatred. That feels like a reason to leave. This? We don’t need to fragment off and create a new denomination either way this vote goes. There is room to stay and help the growing process. The angry words and tones are disconcerting to say the least.

KM: I think it’s insensitive. The people who are threatening to leave have a very individualistic mindset.

MA: If the church did something that you thought was wrong but they aren’t forcing you as an individual to sin, grabbing you by the throat and forcing you, why not stick around and help work the church in the right direction? People making wrong decisions, that’s just part of being in church.

KM: That’s just part of being on earth. People will always be doing the wrong thing.

MA: Exactly. Part of the community of faith is that we can restore each other, correct each other, walk alongside each other and help one another grow. But to say to others, “Be where I am right now or else I’m done,” is selfish. Did you have fellowship with one another in the first place? In 1 John 1:6, it says, “If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.” If you can’t love the brother you have seen, your church family, then how can you love God, someone you haven’t seen? That’s a challenge for us here. Do we value the fact that we have each other enough to work through it? That’s where it gets the deepest for me. Let’s keep Jesus as the focus. Sometimes it feels like He’s not in focus.

*Millennials’ parting thoughts:*
MA: It is cool being here and super fun seeing people. There is lots of good food and the air conditioning is drastic.

KM: I would hope that the Holy Spirit’s presence would be as powerful as the A/C in the Alamodome. It’s both wanted and needed to cool things down. You need to make sure things go smoothly. Without the A/C and the HS, things would not go smoothly.

— by Katie Morrison, summer communication intern at Rocky Mountain Conference, and Maxwell Aka, of the Ontario Conference Youth Department