



# Statements, Surprises, and Sunshine | BY BONNIE DWYER

**He initiated a process, totally independent of the procedures already spelled out in *Working Policy*, to take over the unions whose constituencies have voted to ordain women.**

In the flurry of statements about church unity that emanated from the General Conference this past fall, beginning with the fifty-page document entitled “A Study of Church Governance and Unity,” a blanket of words obscured the divisive intent of the General Conference President. He initiated a process, totally independent of the procedures already spelled out in *Working Policy*, to take over the unions whose constituencies have voted to ordain women. His action took most people by surprise, and is explored more fully in this issue with papers by historian George Knight, pastor/administrator Gary Patterson, and theologian Dave Thomas.

On our web site, we reported the actions leading up to Annual Council, and that surprised many people, too, particularly at the General Conference, where the plan appears to have been to have key committees quietly vote the action against the unions and then simply have that ratified at Annual Council without fuss or bother. The timeline of actions is included in the Note-worthy section of this issue, for reference, also.

By passing over *Working Policy* and creating his own documents, President Ted Wilson reinforced the growing sense of “kingly power” his administration is building in the way that it handles issues in the church. It seems the only votes that carry meaning for him are those that take place at the General Conference. But the votes of constituencies—church members—matter, too.

Frustration at the local level with being ignored at the General Conference has led some to consider withholding tithe dollars in protest, thinking that offerings are the votes that carry the most weight. However, doing so would sig-

nificantly hurt the local efforts of the church, perhaps more than it would impair the General Conference. Portions of the tithe dollar come back to the local church in the form of salaries for pastors, they also significantly fund activities at the conference and union level. Only sixteen cents on the dollar make it to the General Conference and some of that comes back, too. To send a message to the General Conference, perhaps the best thing to do is to sit down and write it out and send it on its way.

Staying engaged with the process, supporting the local church, conference, and union are significant, too. We pledge to follow the committees that will be tasked with carrying out the voted actions. Recently, I wrote to communication officials at the Division and General Conference, asking for the names of those who would be on the committee voted by the North American Division, and involved at the General Conference. In one reply that I received, I was told that the North American Division Administrative Committee had not yet (at that time in late November) voted the names of committee members, but they might not be sharing the names anyway. That response took me by surprise. As a journalist I expect the church to be open and transparent in committee work, as well as in the way that it handles money. The church members in whose name these actions are being taken deserve to know who and what is being done.

We need more sunshine—openness—and fewer surprises and statements to build the trust that is at the heart of unity. ■

---

Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.