

Spring Meeting Postlude: “Uplifting Jesus” Document

BY BONNIE DWYER | APRIL 11, 2018

The General Conference Executive Committee completed its work early and was adjourned at noon on Wednesday, April 11. As the members were making their way to the airport a document that curiously never made it onto the agenda was posted on the Adventist News Network. Under the headline “An Invitation to Uplift Jesus: A Statement from the General Conference Executive Leadership and Division Presidents,” the document resembled in many ways the loyalty oath portion of the document sent back to committee from Annual Council 2017. This time the request for loyalty was being made to independent organizations, with the One Project being singled out as an example.

We appeal to all organizations and initiatives that are united with us in mission to reaffirm or to respond positively in their official communication channels to the following crucial questions.

Seven questions follow, touching on substitutionary atonement, the role of doctrine, understanding of the heavenly sanctuary, uniqueness of Adventism, literal six day creation, biblical authority and prophetic interpretation, support for church teaching on marriage and the family and LGBTQ relationships, and church membership in the light on Scripture. The full document follows below:

To honor and exalt Jesus is the foundational commitment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and undergirds its prophetic message expressed in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. Salvation by Faith alone leading to a life of discipleship to Jesus is the goal of our mission. As we proclaim the three angels’ messages let us make sure that Christ stands at the center of all our activities and initiatives.

A number of entities both inside and outside the church organization have been founded for the purpose of exalting the name of Jesus. Such an honorable task also brings the challenge of proclaiming a Christ in harmony with His Word. It is our conviction that the Jesus whom Seventh-day Adventists are to follow and emulate is the One revealed in the Bible—the One who presented Himself as the Truth and upheld the authority of the Scriptures. It is of utmost importance that we never forget that Jesus identified Himself with “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). He is actually the Word (John 1:1).

Church leaders are often asked for advice on how to relate with some initiatives and organizations, some of which are well established and widely accepted, such as ASI-recognized entities, which have long cooperated with the church and its leadership. A more recent development is the One Project (now apparently transitioning to become the Global Resource Collective), about which some questions have been raised. Therefore, the General Conference executive leadership with Division presidents has decided to offer some guidance regarding the evaluation of any initiative seeking church endorsement.

We commend those who, prior to joining any initiative or movement, study for themselves to assess whether such movements are in accordance with the revealed will of God (Acts 17:11). As Jesus Himself advised us: “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt 7:16). He also gave the warning, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt 7:21).

In harmony with the conviction expressed above that the name of Jesus must be uplifted in ways consistent with His propositional revelation in Scripture, we invite our church leaders and any concerned individuals to assess the biblical foundations of any ministry or evangelistic initiative in the light of Isaiah 8:20: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

The Church will be eager to work with all who share its prophetic message expressed in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. In light of issues that have been raised regarding some recent initiatives, the following questions although not exhaustive provide some guidance for an assessment of such groups. We appeal to all organizations and initiatives that are united with us in mission to reaffirm or to respond positively in their official communication channels to the following crucial questions:

1. What does it mean to accept Jesus Christ? When we say we accept Christ is this a mystical Christ of experience only, or, does it mean an acceptance of the doctrinal truths He taught, or, both? Does such ministry or initiative uphold the substitutionary atonement of Jesus?

2. How do they understand the role of doctrine in Christian faith? Is there an organic connection between the person of Christ and the teachings or doctrines of Christ? Is there the understanding that knowing Christ necessarily includes knowing and living His teachings and the Biblical truths He taught?

3. What is their understanding and support of the message and mission the Adventist church in the light of its prophetic mission? How do they express their understanding of 1844 and Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary?

4. Do they have a clear understanding of the uniqueness of the Seventh-day Adventist movement? Are they clear in how Adventist faith differs from other evangelical denominations that exalt Jesus?

5. What is their understanding of creation? Do those involved in new ministries and initiatives believe that God created this world in six literal days and rested on the seventh day in the recent past as understood and voted in our 28 Fundamental Beliefs?

6. What is their understanding of biblical authority and prophetic interpretation? Do they accept the historicist explanation of Bible prophecy and do they share the Adventist understanding of the little horn of Daniel 7, the beast powers of Revelation 13 and the antichrist of Scripture, and that faithfulness to Christ will ultimately climax in a conflict over the law of God with the Sabbath at the center of that final controversy?

7. Due to current perceptions of gender and sexuality, which contradict the biblical teaching on marriage and the family as accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these pertinent questions must also be asked: How do they understand gender identity and the question of LGBTQ+ relationships to church membership in the light of Scripture? Do they have a clear, unambiguous and biblical understanding of this subject?

Organizations, groups, or individuals that cannot affirm the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and provide clear and unambiguous answers to the questions above should not expect endorsement from the organizations of the Church. The General Conference executive leadership with Division presidents invites every member and entity of the church to uphold the name of Jesus by presenting him to the world and living according to His will. In doing so, Jesus must be proclaimed in connection with the truth as revealed in Scripture and understood by Seventh-day Adventists. Consequently, we reaffirm our utmost commitment, which is to preach "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

—General Conference Executive Leadership and Division Presidents

May
2018

COMPLIANCE PROCESS DESIGNED

The General Conference announced that after “several months of dialogue and gathering data, the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Unity Oversight Committee (UOC) has begun outlining elements of a compliance process that will be considered by world church leaders later this year.” It was also announced that by the end of May, the UOC had met with twelve of the fourteen world church entities (there are thirteen divisions and one attached union). UOC Secretary Hensley Mooroooven called these meetings “very cordial and candid dialogues.”

July
2018

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE COMPLETES DOCUMENT

The General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) announced that it had voted and approved a document recommended by the UOC on July 17. The document, “Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions,” along with the companion document, “Terms of Reference for Compliance Committees,” will now move on to the General Conference and Division Officers Committee (GCDO) for discussion, and finally, on to the GCC at October’s Annual Council. The “Regard for...” document calls for an hierarchical system to garner compliance where, if a matter remains unresolved, it will continue to move up the chain of command to the next-highest level of Church administration until it becomes resolved. If, “in the event the due process referenced above does not bring about compliance,” a graduated system will be applied to the non-compliant leader: 1) warning, 2) public reprimand, 3) being placed on removal for cause and subject to policy application.

Compliance Document Moves Forward after Administrative Committee Approval

BY UNITY OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
ADVENTIST NEWS NETWORK | JULY 18, 2018

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's General Conference Administrative Committee voted on Tuesday, July 17, a document recommended by the Unity Oversight Committee (UOC). The recommendations came after nine months of listening and consultation with church entities around the world and outlines a process of addressing entities not in compliance with the actions of a General Conference (GC) Session, the GC Executive Committee, or working policy. The outlined process includes setting up a number of compliance review committees that will address specific issues of non-compliance and will make recommendations to the General Conference Administrative Committee.

The Unity Oversight Committee was informed by quantitative and qualitative data gathered from church leaders worldwide as well as dialogues with the thirteen world divisions, General Conference Leadership Council, and GC institutions. Comments from Executive Committee members during previous Annual Councils were also considered.

The Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research was tasked with developing a questionnaire and administering a survey of all union and division presidents worldwide. All those surveyed submitted a response, even though in some cases they chose not to answer all questions. The results of the survey were published in a previous article, and showed that a majority of the world Church's union presidents favored some kind of process for dealing with non-compliance.

Following standard process and protocol, the document voted today by GC ADCOM will also be discussed by the General Conference and Division Officers Committee. It will then be sent to the GC Executive Committee at its Annual Council this October for consideration.

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1 ADCOM/ADCOM to MLR-GCDO18AC+18AC(DIV)

2
3 113-18G REGARD FOR AND PRACTICE OF GENERAL CONFERENCE
4 SESSION AND GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE
5 COMMITTEE ACTIONS
6

7 A sacred trust exists between church members and their elected Church leaders. Unity and trust
8 are strengthened as church members and organizational leaders commit to being led by the Spirit to
9 regard and honor the constituted decisions made by fellow church members and leaders.
10

11 “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”—Eph 4:3. “We are
12 coming to a time when, more than ever before, we shall need to press together, to labor unitedly. . . In
13 unity there is strength.”—2SM 374.
14

15 Where regard for and practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive
16 Committee actions have not been followed, these principles shall apply:
17

18 1. All perceived non-compliance shall officially be identified and reported by the
19 Administrative Committee of a conference and/or union and/or division successively to the next higher
20 organization, beginning with the administrative level of the Church closest to the matter. If any level of
21 organization does not report an issue of non-compliance, it becomes the responsibility of the next higher
22 organization.
23

24 2. Planning for and implementing compliance shall initially be the responsibility entrusted
25 to the administrative level of the Church closest to the matter.
26

27 3. Administrators dealing with any matter of perceived non-compliance shall exercise
28 Christian due process which will (a) include much prayer and dialogue, (b) provide a clearly written
29 statement defining the perceived non-compliance, (c) provide an opportunity for the executive officers
30 of the perceived non-compliant entity to provide both a verbal and written explanation, (d) create an
31 atmosphere by which compliance and unity may be achieved, and (e) provide a reasonable timeframe to
32 realize change and consistent progress.
33

34 If, in the opinion of the executive officers of the conference and/or union and/or division and/or
35 General Conference, change has been requested but has not been realized or there is no evidence of
36 consistent progress, the General Conference Administrative Committee may request the appropriate
37 General Conference Compliance Review Committee* to implement its terms of reference. If, in the
38 opinion of a General Conference Compliance Review Committee, reasonable time has been given for
39 discussion and review, the General Conference Compliance Review Committee may directly make
40 recommendations to the appropriate Administrative Committee.
41

42 An entity seeking appeal may do so directly to the assigned General Conference Compliance
43 Review Committee.* The appeal process made by the non-compliant entity shall be considered part of
44 the work of the General Conference Compliance Review Committee* as defined by its terms of
45 reference.
46

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SESSION AND GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE
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1 4. With sound judgment and prayerful discernment, administrators may use existing
2 General Conference working policies and guidelines as tools for resolving matters of non-compliance.
3

4 5. If the matter continues to be unresolved, the next higher level of Church organization is
5 tasked with the responsibility to resolve the matter or facilitate the initiation of a process leading to
6 consequences.
7

8 In the event the due process referenced above does not bring about compliance and does not
9 result in the reversal of the action taken by the non-compliant entity and/or the constituency-elected
10 leader of that body (the union president, who represents both the voice of the union constituency and the
11 voice of the world Church and who is an *ex officio* member of the General Conference Executive
12 Committee), the entity and its duly elected leader may be subject to the following:
13

14 1. Warned—By vote of simple majority of the General Conference Executive Committee,
15 unions/unions of churches that have complied with a General Conference Executive Committee and/or
16 General Conference Session actions but have taken actions that are not in compliance with the practices
17 of the Church as defined by the General Conference Constitution and Bylaws and the General
18 Conference *Working Policy* may be “warned.” Being “warned” applies generally to a non-compliant
19 entity and does not intend to identify individuals for further action or mention.
20

21 2. Public Reprimand—By vote of simple majority of the General Conference Executive
22 Committee, the president of such unions/unions of churches that have not complied with General
23 Conference Executive Committee actions and/or General Conference Session actions, including
24 *Working Policy* that has been voted by the General Conference Executive Committee and/or General
25 Conference Session, may be given a public reprimand. Each time the union president exercises his right
26 of voice to address the General Conference Executive Committee, the members will be informed that the
27 speaker has been given a public reprimand.
28

29 3. Placed on Removal for Cause and Subject to Policy Application—When non-compliance
30 continues after public reprimand, the relevant General Conference Compliance Review Committee,* by
31 virtue of prior General Conference Executive Committee actions and General Conference Session
32 actions, shall have authority to consider and recommend to the General Conference Administrative
33 Committee, division officers, and General Conference Executive Committee, applying the existing
34 General Conference working policies and guidelines, such as removal of the individual member “for
35 cause.”—Bylaws Article XIII Sec. 1. c. and GC B 95.
36

37 In the event that entities that have been “warned” or “reprimanded” take actions that bring their
38 entities into compliance with the practices of the Church as defined by the General Conference
39 Constitution and Bylaws, the General Conference *Working Policy*, and voted actions of the General
40 Conference Executive Committee and/or General Conference Session, the relevant General Conference
41 Compliance Review Committee* shall recommend to the General Conference Administrative Committee

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COMMITTEE ACTIONS - 3

1 that they be reinstated to regular standing by the General Conference Executive Committee. In the event
2 that entities that have been “warned” or “reprimanded” continue in non-compliance with voted actions
3 of the General Conference Executive Committee and/or General Conference Session, the relevant
4 General Conference Compliance Review Committee* may recommend to the General Conference
5 Administrative Committee to pursue other actions that may be available in the General Conference
6 working policies and guidelines or the Constitution and Bylaws of the General Conference. If, after the
7 organization closest to the matter has been unable to resolve a compliance issue and the General
8 Conference Compliance Review Committee* has recommended consequences, only the General
9 Conference Executive Committee and/or the General Conference in session has authority to implement
10 the recommendation.

11
12 Presidents of conferences/missions whose unions have been “reprimanded” shall continue to
13 exercise voice, as provided by the General Conference Bylaws, and the body will be notified that the
14 invitee requesting voice is a constituent representative of a conference/mission of a “reprimanded”
15 union.

16
17 In instances where a president has been removed from the membership of the committee “for
18 cause,” other members of the General Conference Executive Committee from that union shall continue
19 to exercise full privileges without mention of reprimand.

20
21 Entities who desire reconsideration of a General Conference Executive Committee and/or
22 General Conference Session action, may seek recourse through processes already provided for in the
23 General Conference *Working Policy*. The process of seeking recourse and the “Regard for and Practice
24 of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions” shall run
25 concurrently.

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27 As circumstances warrant, this process may be used as a model by other levels of Church
28 organization.

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31 * As per General Conference Administrative Committee action of July 17, 2018.

August
2018

ROBUST RESPONSES TO COMPLIANCE COMMITTEES IDEA

In August, *Spectrum* Editor Bonnie Dwyer broke the story that a network of five compliance review committees had been established by the General Conference, each with a different topic to oversee: 1) General Conference Core Policies; 2) Doctrines, Policies, Statements, and Guidelines for Church Organizations and Institutions Teaching Creation/Origins; 3) Doctrines, Policies, Statements, and Guidelines Regarding Homosexuality; 4) Distinctive Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; and 5) Doctrines, Policies, Statements and Guidelines Regarding Issues of Ordination. The committees are populated by over forty GC employees. Although a couple of lay people are included on the committees, no pastors or officials from other levels of church governance (such as unions or conferences) are included.