

# The Unity I Would Like to See:

## An Open Letter to the General Conference

BY MARY CHRISTIAN | SEPTEMBER 11, 2018

*Dear GC Executive Committee:*

I have recently been reading a document you published this past July, “Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions.”<sup>1</sup> In this paper, steps are outlined for identifying and disciplining church entities deemed out of compliance with the church’s doctrines and policies. The first page opens with a quotation from Ephesians 4:3: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

This emphasis on church unity has been a recurring theme in the writings of the General Conference and its leaders during the past few years, first in conversations on gender and ordination, and, more recently, in other areas of discussion such as creation and sexuality. These calls for unity have frequently held up the early Christian church as an example, offering numerous quotations from the epistles and from Acts. Elder Ted Wilson, for example, in a presentation at the GC Global Leadership Summit in Lisbon this past February, quoted the Acts account of the believers who “continued daily with one accord in the temple,” and echoed Paul’s injunction to the Philippians to “fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Acts 2:46; Philippians 2:2).<sup>2</sup>

I agree that the early church described in the New Testament offers valuable lessons for the Adventist church today. But the lessons I see there are somewhat different from the picture of “unity” offered in recent GC statements, and if I may, I would like to share with you a little of what I’ve seen, a layperson’s perspective. It has been intriguing these past few months to study the book of Acts with my Sabbath School class in Warner Robins, GA, against the backdrop of the GC’s proposed actions for promoting unity and compliance.

(I notice, by the way, that “unity” is an oft-repeated refrain in the adult Sabbath School quarterly this quarter.<sup>3</sup>) The story of the early church does indeed contain many uplifting scenes of believers being “one in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32). Yet it seems to me that this is not the whole story.

My sense of the early church, based on my recent re-reading of Acts and the epistles, is that its history is rather a messy one, in which the first apostles wrangled with one another and with new believers in trying to create a cohesive group identity—an identity centered on Jesus, yet allowing space for wide differences of class, ethnicity, geography, and worldview. They were struggling to make sense of ideas which, to outsiders and often even to themselves, seemed contradictory—a Jewish Messiah and a Savior of all people, an exclusive Jewish nation and a fellowship of believers from all nations, Mosaic laws and salvation by faith. They had conflicts—cultural, personal, logistical, and theological—much as the Adventist church today has. There were clashes of opinions, personalities, and egos. And what interests me most in the story (I speak here as a college English professor as well as a former church board member familiar with local-level church disputes) is not the heroic picture of the apostles doing miracles and holding firm to their faith in the face of imprisonment and torture, or of the loving, harmonious believers living “in one accord” (important and inspiring as these stories may be), but the drama of negotiation, debate, and occasional head-butting through which the Christian church came into being. This focus on real, imperfect people struggling through real dilemmas and frustrations—this is where the epistles and the book of Acts seem to me most real, most relevant to our church today.

The conflicts of the church in the first century are not exactly the same as those faced by the twenty-first century Adventist church, yet I think we can gain important insights by looking at the ways in which believers dealt with these conflicts. Here are a few examples that stand out to me:

**1. The church leaders preached the good news of Jesus wherever they went; yet they understood that Jesus would mean different things for different listeners.** For their Jewish listeners, Peter, Stephen, and others repeated Jewish history over and over, stressing the fulfilled Old Testament prophecies, Jesus' recent death in Jerusalem, and their listeners' own guilty participation in his crucifixion. For the Athenians, Paul presented Jesus as the "Unknown God," the creator and father god memorialized in the Athenians' own shrine and poetry (Acts 17:22–28). For the uneducated people of Lystra, Paul made no reference to prophecy or to poetry, but described Jesus simply as the God who sends rain and crops, who "provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17). They seized every opportunity to "uplift Jesus," and did not distort or water down the truth. But they saw that the truth about Jesus was complex and many-sized, and they tried to present the parts of Jesus' story that would be most meaningful, relevant, and readily understandable to each group of listeners.<sup>4</sup>

**2. Apostles, in making administrative decisions, listened to the concerns of ordinary believers and took their well-being into account.** When the Grecian converts complained that their widows were getting less than their share of food, and that the Hebraic Jewish widows in the church were being unfairly favored (Acts 6:1), the twelve apostles did not order the Greeks to be silent and stop distracting from the Great Commission. Instead, they recognized that the need for food was a real need, and so was the need for fairness. In appointing deacons and delegating

responsibilities to them, they sought to address both these needs, while also maintaining their own primary focus on spiritual ministry and evangelism.

**3. While recognizing the Old-Testament laws and prophetic writings as God-given sources of guidance and inspiration, they interpreted these writings with a sense of their rhetorical and historical context, and with a recognition that changed circumstances can call for changes in practice.**

This idea comes to the surface, I think, in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40). The eunuch

had gone to Jerusalem to worship (v. 27). This was contrary to the laws of Moses: "No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 23:1). Though Luke does not say it in so many words, it is possible to

read into the text that the eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship and been turned away—if so, the temple officials who sent him away might well have pointed to Deuteronomy and claimed that sola scriptura was on their side. Might this be why the eunuch was fascinated by the passage of Isaiah that speaks of a man suffering "humiliation," "deprived of justice," a man with no descendants (Acts 8:33)? In any case, Philip did not insist on applying the Mosaic criteria, but welcomed the eunuch into the fellowship of Jesus. For Philip, it was more important to include and affirm this sincere truth-seeker than to insist on the letter of the law.<sup>5</sup>

**4. The early church leaders recognized that some decisions must be left to individual conscience—and respect for the consciences of others.**

After the Jerusalem Council, the apostles instructed the gentiles to "abstain from food sacrificed to idols" (Acts 15:29). But in Romans and in 1 Corinthians, Paul spoke in less absolute terms: He, not believing in the gods represented by the idols, did not see the eating of sacrificed food as an act of

*The early church leaders recognized that some decisions must be left to individual conscience—and respect for the consciences of others.*

idol worship, and could eat with a clear conscience. But he recognized that others could not do so, and avoided actions that might undermine their faith, and urged other similarly “strong” believers to do likewise.

**5. On some questions, the church leaders seem not to have reached one final, settled answer, especially in balancing personal freedom and cultural sensitivity.** In the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), Peter and James insisted that circumcision should not be required for non-Jewish Christians, though the books of Moses had repeatedly insisted on this requirement. It was seen as an undue hardship for new believers (this might be taken as another illustration of the previous point that circumstances and historical contexts matter when one applies scriptural teachings). This decision was stated in the letter the leaders sent to the Gentile believers (vv. 23–29). Paul reinforced this rejection of compulsory circumcision still more vehemently in some of his letters, especially the one to the Galatians. Yet both Paul and Peter seem to have upheld this dismissal of Jewish ritual more rigidly in theory than in practice. Paul, shortly after the Jerusalem Council, circumcised Timothy before taking him as a helper in order to avoid offending Jewish observers (Acts 16:3). Peter also changed his behavior to show deference to Jewish customs when prominent Jews were present, though Paul publicly reprimanded Peter’s decision as hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11–21). Both these apostles agreed that the laws of Moses were important and given by God, and also agreed that the ceremonial laws were not the thing that brought salvation, and also agreed that it was important to be sensitive to the beliefs of the people they were trying to reach, whether Jews or Gentiles. Both experienced situations in which these three values—obedience to the law, salvation by grace, and cultural sensitivity—seemed in tension, and on occasion they disagreed on how these tensions should be resolved. Both were leaders of a church celebrated for being “in one accord”; both were committed followers of Christ who had repeatedly received the Holy Spirit, and who had sacrificed and suffered much for their faith—yet they disagreed, and, it seems, even argued and exchanged harsh words. These facts have more than once given me pause for thought when I’ve been tempted to doubt the sincerity or

godliness of a fellow Christian simply because of a difference in judgment or in cultural perspective, or because I’ve taken offense at something he or she has said.

**6. When the apostles disagreed, they kept on working—and allowed one another to keep on working.** Barnabas and Paul had a “sharp disagreement” about whether to give John Mark a second chance in the mission field after he had once disappointed them (Acts 15:39). This dispute led them to separate. Luke, in recording the story, does not make a statement on which one was right—perhaps it was one of those cases in which “each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong.” In any case, what strikes me in this story is this: Paul and Barnabas disagreed and separated, but both kept working to serve God and build up the church. Also, neither one attempted to turn church members against the other, to use apostolic authority to shame or punish or ostracize the other, or to question the other’s sincerity or devotion to Christ, or to impede the other’s work in any way. (At least, there is no record of either of them behaving in this way. The record in Acts gives little detail. But I would at least like to think that they handled their disagreement in a mature and constructive way.) Discord and disputes may not be God’s plan for the church, but for as long as the church is staffed by fallen humans, they will happen. But such disputes need not destroy God’s work—if both parties love and serve God, God can use both, even if they seem to be going in opposite directions.

The picture of the early church that emerges from the New Testament, in my reading, at least, seems patchy, scappy, dissonant, even chaotic. To readers looking for a clear map or guidebook on how to “do church” correctly, the story is downright frustrating. Believers struggled to articulate their beliefs, to reconcile ancient laws with new revelations, to distinguish divine commands from personal bias, to be true to their own consciences while accommodating other people’s. Even the apostles made mistakes, changed their minds, and were not always consistent in applying teachings or defining policies. In short, early Christians had a lot in common with the Christians of today.

But I see one other thing in the early church: its people and institutions were flawed, messy, and contentious,

yet God blessed them and used them. God increased their numbers by the thousands, and endowed them with supernatural abilities of healing, language, and prophecy. He transformed Peter the traitor, Saul the persecutor, and John Mark the deserter into workers who would face any hardship, threat, or suffering rather than forsake their Master. He poured out power in a degree seldom seen, before or since, in the world's history.

This, I think, is what we mean when we speak of wanting our church to be more like the early church. I believe this is what Jesus meant when He prayed for all believers: "May they be brought into complete unity to let the world know that you sent me" (John 17:23). If He was praying that the disciples would "accomplish their work together without any difference of opinion," as Elder Wilson put it in his Lisbon presentation, we may conclude that the Father answered that prayer with a "No," regarding the early believers as well as those of the present day.<sup>6</sup> But if He prayed that they would be united in their willingness to be used and their readiness to receive His help and power—well, then, it has happened once and can happen again if God allows it.

This is the unity I earnestly want to see, that I pray for. And I do not believe it will be brought about by revising the twenty-eight fundamentals, or by forming new committees, or by dismissing or shaming church members who honestly question the church's official teachings on sexuality or six-day creation, or by silencing union leaders who follow their consciences in supporting women in ministry. No one's belief in Jesus or in the Adventist Church's mission will be reinforced by such actions—from what I have seen, these measures are far more likely to lead to resentment, distrust, and discouragement. The General Conference cannot make true unity happen; nor can any union or division president, or pastor or evangelist or church member. Only God can bring that unity.

What can we do in the meantime? We can wait, study, pray, listen, learn, share, care for the needs we see around us. We can allow space for one another to work, as Paul and Barnabas did. We can make mistakes, recognize them, learn from them, and move on. We can do our balanced best to follow our consciences and respect other people's. But the unity can come—and will—only by God's act, in His time.

As the time approaches for the Annual Council business meeting, I join with my Adventist brothers and sisters in praying for guidance, both for you, our church's leaders, and for ourselves, the members of the church and of Christ's body. I pray for the unity sent by God. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,  
Mary Christian

### Notes & References:

1. [news.adventist.org/fileadmin/news.adventist.org/files/news/documents/113G-Regard-for-and-Practice-of-General-Conference-Session-and-General-Conference-Executive-Committee-Actions.pdf](https://news.adventist.org/fileadmin/news.adventist.org/files/news/documents/113G-Regard-for-and-Practice-of-General-Conference-Session-and-General-Conference-Executive-Committee-Actions.pdf).

2. I'm relying on the version of the speech published in *Adventist World*: Ted N. C. Wilson, "Church Unity and Biblical Authority," *Adventist World* April 2018, p. 17. ([www.adventistworld.org/april-2018/](http://www.adventistworld.org/april-2018/)).

3. For example, "It's so easy to sow dissension in the ranks, isn't it? How can we do all in our God-given power to keep peace among us and to focus, instead, on mission?" (Lesson 4, Sunday, July 22). Or "Church unity is always so important. How can we learn to work together, unified, even when we have different views of things?" (Lesson 11, Friday, September 14). ([absq.adventist.org/current-quarter](http://absq.adventist.org/current-quarter)).

4. I can't help wondering: Does the Adventist church follow their example when it insists that the only ministries that genuinely "uplift Jesus," are those that share and emphasize the General Conference's official interpretations of the six-day creation, Daniel's little horn, sexuality and gender, and all other issues? See "An Invitation To Uplift Jesus," *Adventist News Network*, 11 April 2018. ([news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2018-04-11/an-invitation-to-uplift-jesus/](https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2018-04-11/an-invitation-to-uplift-jesus/))

5. Some scholars have argued that this story offers insights for Christian responses toward gay and trans believers. See, for example, Fritz Guy, "Same-Sex Love: Theological Considerations," in *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-Day Adventist Perspectives* (Adventist Forum: 2008), part 4, 43–62.

6. Wilson, "Church Unity and Biblical Authority," 16.

---

MARY CHRISTIAN teaches composition, drama, and world literature at Middle Georgia State University. She also serves as an Adult Sabbath School teacher at her local church in Warner Robins, GA.

*October*  
**2018**

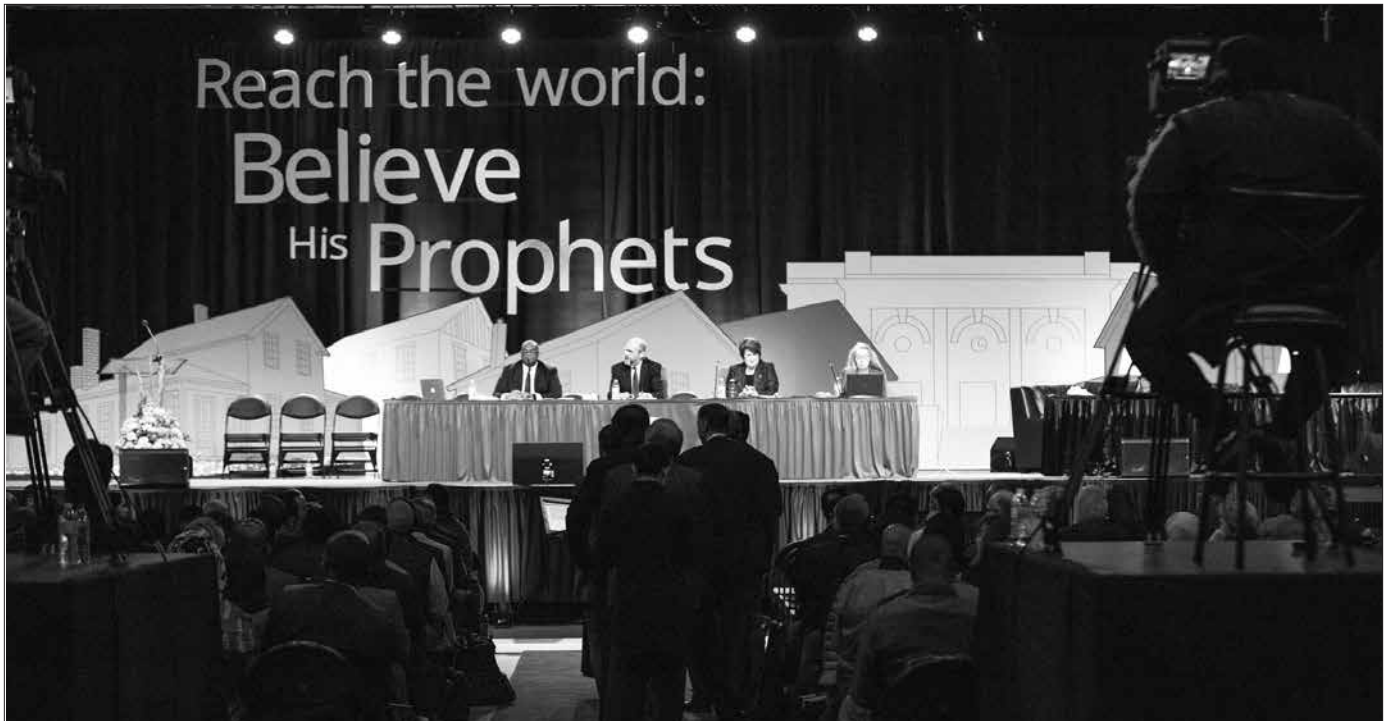
## **ANNUAL COUNCIL APPROVES COMPLIANCE COMMITTEES**

More than sixty members of the General Conference and Division Officers (GCDO) Committee met on Thursday, Oct. 4, and split down the middle on a vote concerning the latest compliance document that was drafted by the General Conference Administration. The vote to approve the document and place it on the Annual Council Agenda was thirty-two yes, thirty no, with two abstaining. President Ted Wilson had implored committee members to support the proposal, but after more than an hour of discussion, the vote to proceed with this latest version still did not get any more traction than last year's version. In informal discussion as people were breaking for lunch some suggested that the close vote meant that the whole matter should just be dropped.

On October 8, the General Conference released on the Adventist News Network an article entitled, "Questions regarding the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its leadership," responding to the ongoing conversation about the overreach of the proposed action for Annual Council. The list of seven questions and corresponding answers included "has the General Conference leadership become a persecuting power as identified in Revelation 13?" and "Is the General Conference leadership exercising 'kingly power' akin to papal authority?"

In the Southeastern California Conference, Sandra Roberts was re-elected president on October 7, despite the displeasure of the General Conference about her serving in a position reserved for ordained ministers. (She has been ordained in her conference.)

Annual Council reports began on October 12. On October 14, 2018, the discussion and vote on the compliance document occurred, and the proposed document passed with 185 yes votes, 124 no votes, and two abstentions. After Annual Council, there were many responses to the action taken.



Members line up to speak in the Kellogg Arena in Battle Creek, Michigan, USA (Brent Hardinge/Adventist News Network).

## Approval of the “Regard for” Document: Observations on the Compliance Discussion

BY EDWIN TORKELSEN | OCTOBER 16, 2018

### I. Introduction by Ted Wilson and others (1 hour 45 minutes, Wilson himself used 45 minutes).

This very long introduction was exclusively dedicated to explaining and defending the General Conference proposal:

a) Wilson reassured the audience that the compliance committees in reality have no authority or power. They merely have an advisory function reporting to GC AD-COM. They have no “teeth” of their own.

b) None of this is a “power grab” by the GC administration, it is all within the “system.”

c) The compliance committees are actually put in place to defend the system, not circumvent it. They are not the KGB or CIA.

d) The proposed discipline is not severe, it is of the “mildest order.”

### II. Four more people (Mike Ryan, David Trim, Karnik Doukmetzian, and Hensley Moorrooven) explained the methods used by the Unity Oversight Committee:

### they listened to input, adjusted the document, made it public, all with full transparency.

Trim explained in detail why the Questionnaire was a valid method of gathering reliable information about the opinions of the majority of the membership. There was a close consensus that some consequences were needed. Doukmetzian, GC legal counsel, explained the legal validity of the punishments outlined in the document. Moorrooven presented this argument: The Holy Spirit is the source of unity, the policies are a consequence of that unity. Non-compliance with policies is therefore going against unity (and by implication the Holy Spirit). Ryan summed it all up, and presented his own personal opinion of the document.

### III. TW addressed the fact that the vote in the GC Division Officers (GCDO) meeting became known and was leaked to an “independent publication.”

This leak must have been committed by a member of the GCDO, and was characterized as unethical.

#### **IV. Mooroven read the document out loud and it took 15 minutes.**

Every single person included in this introductory defense procedure presented only legal or technical information, to justify the reasonableness and legal and technical correctness of the document. Not one of them even touched upon the principles that are the foundation and are embedded in this document. The argument was simply, as long as it was all technically correct, everything was perfectly OK. And it was all “within” the present “system,” nothing was outside the “system,” probably meaning that none of this changed anything regarding the “system” itself.

#### **V. The Debate (2 hours and 55 minutes)**

Everyone assured each other that their main concern was to protect the unity of the church. They differed on how to secure that unity.

a) People approving the document: Every single one argued from a “law and order” point of view. The GC in session has voted, then everyone must comply, and those who don’t must suffer the consequences. Not one questioned the document on the basis of principle. Their only focus was rules and submission to votes and church authority. Their vision was that unity can only be real and secured through enforced uniformity; enforced compliance with voted policies was the road to that unity. Not one person questioned the validity of using coercion as a means of obtaining uniformity.

b) People disapproving the document: Almost all of them based their arguments on principles of governance, justice, and conscience. They defended the bottom-up system put in place by the 1901 GC Session. They pointed out that if this document passed, it would change the Seventh-day Adventist church to a top-down organization, which would result in a totally new cultural environment, characterized by surveillance, suspicion, lack of trust, and fear of possible personal consequences.

#### **Voting Results:**

For: 185 (60 percent)

Against: 124 (40 percent)

Abstained: 2

These results are almost identical to the voting results of the 2015 GC session. Most of those speaking for the document were from Africa and Latin America. This illustrates that social culture seems to be among the most decisive factors of the voters.

It was a bit puzzling to observe that through the debate hardly anyone from Africa spoke. Only at the very end was there a line of people, practically all of them from SID, that finally spoke, all of them for the document. Was this a coincidence? Or was it planned in order to be the ones that concluded the debate, all of them being for? The last speakers may be the ones that finally sway those who are uncertain.

Is this the end of the matter? Will this vote contribute to unity? Hardly. Conscience and principles of equality and justice cannot be voted away. Nor will the issue of women’s ordination.

This vote will probably not accomplish anything positive. It has simply, again, revealed that the split in our church is real, deep, and persistent. Today’s vote has cemented the stalemate created by the 2015 GC Session vote. It illustrates the futility of taking a deeply divisive issue to a simple majority vote. Such a vote will only be counter-productive to the declared aims of these actions and documents. The whole process, and the now-voted document, reveals again the lack of spiritual and political wisdom in our top leadership. Their course of action may secure a majority vote. It will never create unity, only more divisiveness.

In 2015, the appeal was made to accept the results of the vote, focus on mission, and move on. That did not happen then; it will not happen now. The results of the 2015 vote ought to have awakened the top leaders to at least re-examine their course of action. The feedback received in 2017 was not a call for cosmetic refinement of the loyalty document; it was a call to reconsider its foundational principles. They kept the principles, and did a few cosmetic changes. That only brought us back to square one of 2015. The stalemate is not only still there, it is more firmly in place.

---

EDWIN TORKELSEN is a retired historian who worked for the National Archives in Norway. He also taught Medieval History in the University of Oslo and was an Associate Professor of History in the University of Trondheim with a special interest in the development of the ecclesiastical, jurisdictional, theological, doctrinal, and political ideologies of the Medieval church. He is a member of the Tyrifjord Adventist Church in Norway.



Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division of Seventh-day Adventists. (Courtesy of Adventist.org.)

## AdventNetwork of Southern Africa Issues Statement after Annual Council Compliance Vote

*Editor's Note: The AdventNetwork, a forum of both lay church members and pastors in the Southern Africa Union Conference, has issued a statement on October 19, 2018, regarding the Annual Council compliance vote. The statement follows in its entirety:*

On the General Conference Annual Council decision on October 14, 2018, to establish Compliance Committees

On Sunday (October 14, 2018) the General Conference Executive Committee deliberated on the proposal “113-18G: Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions.” It is a process designed to enforce compliance with organizational policies as well as actions voted at General Conference Sessions and Executive Committee Meetings.

Those that fail to comply face disciplinary measures as outlined in the document. The Executive Committee voted to accept this proposal and the AdventNetwork of Southern Africa would like to express our disagreement with this decision. Considering the exhaustive and prayerful study and discussion of this specific development considering the biblical understanding of Unity, it is difficult to see God’s hand in this decision, yet.

In our letter on October 4, 2018, we raised seven areas of concern with this proposal, the setting up of the GC ADCOM Compliance Committees, and the terms of reference. We would like to reaffirm our concerns and belief that this decision will not achieve the intended goal, namely the Unity of Faith. Also, it will have an unintended adverse effect on the mission God has given to His church.

Though there have been concerns raised for many years about the non-compliance with policies in various parts of the world (even in our own Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division), the GC ADCOM never saw a need to create Compliance Committees. These were matters that threatened the very heart of the Gospel Mission. We don’t want to share



specific examples, as it is not the spirit through which we intend to convey our concerns—public naming and shaming. (Yet it seems to be the preferred method of the GC Compliance Review Committee.) It is only after GC Session 2015 that the process of Compliance Committees was initiated and came to this drastic measure, this past Sunday.

We would like to reiterate that it is the mission that drives policy development and not the other way around—“form follows function.” Union Conferences were set up during the major church organizational restructuring of 1901 to facilitate the mission in their geographical territories while having cognizance of the locally prevailing conditions. These conditions vary from one part of the world to the other. For example, the General Conference Working Policy C70 (Polygamy) was designed to deal with a matter some parts of the world church (mainly Africa) were grappling with. This policy is meant to support the mission of the church and is more helpful in Africa than in North America or Europe.

The unity we all desire is not and cannot be achieved through “naming and shaming” and other punitive measures foreseen in this voted document. As a matter of fact, this document will in effect create an “us and them” approach. It will divide the church even more. It is in light of these concerns and the decision taken that we would like to make the following statements:

1. Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division is not monolithic in its views. Although the representative system of governance that the SDA Church follows implies that delegates to business meetings do not necessarily have to consult their constituencies prior to taking a vote, we would like to indicate that our Division and Unions (like all others) are not monolithic and there is a wide range of diverse positions on this matter. Which in our understanding of what transpired at the council of Jerusalem is perfectly in order and does not constitute disobedience to God’s Church yet invites a spirit of Unity and not conformity as it allows for individual conscience. Does this mean we reject the leadership of our delegates? No, certainly not, it merely means we will not always agree with our elected leaders. Does this mean we will reject the policies of the Church? No, policies change, even our fundamental beliefs can be adapted and clarified, which means we keep ourselves open to the work of the Holy Spirit. When policies do not follow function, the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the Business Session of the General Conference and the Annual Council of the General Conference change, propose, and adapt policies to fall in line with function. As much as we don’t agree with the GC Compliance Review Committees, we will continue to evaluate it and engage it considering the Gospel Mission (Function), as we are currently doing.

2. Compliance with all policies and not a targeted few. We hope that the required policy compliance shall be applied fairly across all (policies and regions of the world

church). It would be unfortunate if only specific policies and regions become primary targets of the Compliance Committees. In forming the AdventNetwork of Southern Africa we wanted to create a safe platform, an informed platform, a visionary platform for the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern Africa. Something that has its origin in our painful past as we suffered under injustices—even though they were voted policies and legal.

3. Formation of Compliance Committees. The matter of the Compliance Committees, as well as their member composition, was not debated nor voted on at the GC Annual Council. This process needs to be opened to ensure it is transparent so as not to be misconstrued as a “private police.” The majority of lay members, at least in our part of the world, have been caught unawares by this major development within their Church, and therefore transparency moving forward will be of paramount importance.

4. Church entities/institutions/members spying on each other. There is a real danger that Adventist entities (including individual members) will initiate their own investigations, against both existing policy and stated provisions of the voted compliance document, to identify policy violations in their local or Union Conferences as well as Divisions/GC and report these. There will be mistrust between brethren and church entities. As indicated, there are numerous cases of policy violations which take place all across the world church and it should be very easy to create, report, and publicize a catalogue of these. This is exactly what we have always raised as a real and present consequent of this process of compliance committees. What was intended to be a whip, will now become a guillotine. Discussions of mission have now become archaeological expeditions for skeletons in closets. This is not prediction, this is happening as we speak.

It is our firm view that the establishment of compliance committees was not necessary as the church has adequate processes to deal with disagreements and differing points of view.

We pray and hope that our leaders will not be scared of asking for help. You have 20 million people as a collective pool of shared wisdom. We are sure in our day and age we can tap into this wisdom and come up with a policy that fosters unity. We will continue to prayerfully engage the issue at hand. We are not ashamed of the Gospel, and will continue to speak boldly, but in the full knowledge of our duty to “Do Justice, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly. . . .”

Yours in the Master’s service,  
Members of the AdventNetwork of Southern Africa

\*The AdventNetwork is a forum of both lay church members and pastors from across the Southern Africa Union Conference (in Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division). The forum engages on church related topical as well as general matters which pertain to the role of the church in society.

## North American Division Issues Statement on Annual Council Vote and Message to Women Clergy

*Editor's Note: On October 15, 2018, the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists issued a statement regarding the Annual Council 2018 vote on the compliance document that passed 185 in favor to 124 against, with two abstentions. The NAD has also issued a message to women clergy in the wake of the vote. Both statements follow in their entirety:*

### NAD Statement on 2018 General Conference Annual Council Vote

This is a very challenging time for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. Actions taken at the 2018 General Conference Annual Council meeting in Battle Creek, Michigan, did not have the outcome for the church that we had strived toward. Many of us are dealing with fear, disappointment, and even anger.

We believe that this voted document, which outlines a system of governance to address church entities perceived not in compliance with church policy, does not follow the biblical values proclaimed by the Protestant reformers and the founders of the Adventist Church. This document, as voted, has made centralized power possible, and seeks to create a hierarchical system of governance.

In a collaborative effort, leaders in the NAD are discussing how the church in North America will move forward. Although this is difficult, amid the rancor we must keep our faith in Jesus. He is our Leader, and it is our trust in Him that will light our way. The mission, the work of the church, must and will go forward.

Policies don't hold us together. The Spirit of God holds us together. We urge you to pray for the Church; pray that we allow the Holy Spirit to do His work, to let the Holy Spirit keep us united.

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Gal. 6:9, NIV).

— North American Division Officers; October 15, 2018

### A Message to the North American Division Women Clergy

My Dear Sisters in Christ,

I am sending you this brief note to let you know that our NAD leadership team believes in your ministry. You have our confidence and the assurance that we will do all in our power to strengthen and empower you.

The action of the General Conference Executive Committee on Sunday afternoon does not alter your status. You are appreciated and needed in the overall ministry/evangelistic plan of the North American Division. Your ministry is invaluable.

Please understand that we will continue to work toward the fulfillment of our dream to have one thousand female pastors in our division. There will be some temporary setbacks along the path, but we are not deterred.

May God continue to bless and direct you in every way.

— North American Division Officers

*These statements originally appeared on the NAD website and in a special edition of NAD NewsPoints, the official news and information newsletter of the NAD.*



PACIFIC UNION CONFERENCE  
The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Pacific Southwest

## Pacific Union Conference Reaffirms Commitment to Ordain Women and Men Equally

BY PACIFIC UNION CONFERENCE

*Editor's Note: On October 17, 2018, the Pacific Union Conference issued a succinct statement reaffirming its commitment to ordaining both men and women. The statement follows the Annual Council vote on October 14 that approved compliance measures against leaders involved in perceived non-compliance, including ordaining women to pastoral ministry. The statement from the Pacific Union Conference follows below in its entirety:*

The mission of the church is universal, while the ministry of the church is local. We are resolved in our continued commitment to ordain women and men equally. We remain stalwart in support of our churches, schools, conferences, and all of our workers. The Pacific Union Conference affirms and renews our devotion to the unique ministry that Christ has given us.

—Pacific Union Conference Officers  
October 17, 2018

## Florida Hospital Church Board Issues Statement on Annual Council



FLORIDA HOSPITAL CHURCH

*Editor's Note: The Florida Hospital Church released a statement on October 27, 2018, announcing its solidarity with the Columbia Union and Pacific Union. These two unions both ordain women, and have therefore been deemed "non-compliant" by the General Conference. In the wake of the vote on the compliance document at the 2018 Annual Council, both unions issued statements reaffirming their commitment to women in ministry. The statement from Florida Hospital Church follows in its entirety:*

We, the Florida Hospital Church Board, stand in solidarity with Pacific and Columbia Unions Conference (sic) and their honoring the decisions of their constituents. We affirm that no region of the world church can be allowed to hamper the mission of another region. When this is the effect of policy, then such policy is non-compliant with the great commission of Jesus Christ and must be opposed. We believe our unity is in Jesus Christ and not in matters of policy, or methods of operation, or systems of governance.

---

*This statement originally appeared on the Florida Hospital Church Facebook page.  
Logo courtesy of Florida Hospital Church.*