

GC LATEST RESPONSE:



Conference and Division Officers Committee (GCDO) will again consider the topic of unions that have voted to ordain women. While last week the [recommended action](#) from the office of the General Conference president was to dissolve the unions and attach them to the General Conference as missions, this week a rewritten “pastoral action” will propose giving the unions a year of grace and will appeal to them to repent of their actions.

If approved by GCDO, the action will then go to the Annual Council meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee. The [Unity Documents](#) (both the 50-page original and the 17-page summary) prepared by the Secretariat as opinion statements for reference in discussion of the action will also be presented to Annual Council delegates. Minor editorial changes have been made to the documents, according to *Adventist Review*.

With a year of grace, there is more time to allow for the consultations that are outlined in the General Conference Working Policy. For instance, according to section B 75 30, when consideration is being given to adjust the status of a union, the first action to be taken is by the Division Executive Committee and the North American Executive Committee holds their year-end meeting later this month.

According to reliable sources, should the unions choose not to repent or ask forgiveness for their actions, the item will be brought back to Annual Council in 2017.

INITIAL RESPONSE OF GC TO UNIONS ORDAINING WOMEN:

A rewrite of [the proposal to discipline the unions](#) that have voted to ordain women was requested in the committee known as GCDO—General Conference and Division Officers—after about an hour of discussion on Thursday. According to reliable sources, the rewritten material will come back to the committee early next week for reconsideration.

Both the Pacific Union and the North American Division have declined to comment on the ongoing discussions.

The proposal is that the General Conference take over such unions and operate them as missions attached to the General Conference. That would mean that the GC would then be able to remove present union leadership and replace them with their own appointees. Then a new constituency meeting could be called to attempt to reverse the ordination vote. Given that the constituency votes for women’s ordination in both the Columbia and Pacific Unions were approximately 80 percent to 20 percent in favor of ordination means that this is a move that is not without risk.

The legal process for such a move will undoubtedly be debated and lengthy. While “A review of organizational status may be initiated by a decision of the executive committee in any higher level of organization that was involved in granting the type of status in question,” according to the *GC Working Policy* (Section B 75 30), “When the entity under consideration is a union conference/mission or union of churches, the decision to adjust status shall be made, AFTER appropriate consultation with the entity concerned and the division executive committee, by the General Conference Executive Committee at a Spring Meeting or Annual Council.”

Section B 95 15 of the *Working Policy* deals with Dissolution and Expulsion of Unions. It spells out a lengthy process for such a move that begins with the division. The General Conference Executive Committee is consulted at step three to consider whether or not another union constituency meeting should

be called. At step four, the recommendation from the General Conference Executive Committee is referred to the next regular or specially called General Conference Session for consideration.

Whichever section of the Working Policy the proposal under consideration is functioning under, the process, it would seem, cannot be limited solely to a vote of the General Conference Executive Committee. Other committees, specifically the Division Executive Committee, would be required to concur.

To support the proposed actions, earlier this week, the General Conference Secretariat released a lengthy study document on church governance and unity stressing the authority of the General Conference. Zeroing in on “invalid ordinations”, it stated, “It is incorrect to assert that there is nothing in denominational policy to stop unions from ordaining females to gospel ministry. Such ordinations have been explicitly disallowed by a GC Session action, a decision reinforced by two other GC Session votes.”

The document goes on to say, “If everyone were to defy decisions they disagreed with, there would be no point in having a decision-making process. To take part in a process, and then to disregard it if it does not go our way, is contrary to the biblical principles of unity and mutual submission. Equality and unity in Christ oblige church members and church leaders to make decisions together and then to respect fellow brothers and sisters in Jesus by following those decisions. Communities can only function if all members agree they will accept communal decisions; otherwise there is not community, but disunity.”

LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY FACULTY:

In response to the General Conference document, “A Study of Church Governance and Unity,” the Loma Linda University School of Religion faculty today voted their unanimous support to the statement released by the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary on September 30, 2016.

That statement reads as follows:

We, the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, affirm the biblical truth of church unity grounded in our worship of God, our common faith, our shared community, and our sense of mission. We have serious concerns about the recent document ‘A Study of Church Governance and Unity’ released by the General Conference and its portrayal of the nature and authority of the church. Further discussion by the church at large on this important ecclesiological issue is needed before such a document is adopted.”
Voted October 4, 2016, Loma Linda, California

Both Andrews University and Loma Linda University operate under the auspices of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

ANDREWS UNIVERSITY STATEMENT:

Members of the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University have called on the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to engage the Adventist Church in wider dialogue concerning the recently released “unity” document. On September 25, the Office of the Secretary of the General Conference circulated the document, “[A Study of Church Governance and Unity](#),” to members of the General Conference Executive Committee and published the document on the website of the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research which helped prepare the document for publication.

The document contends that on the matter of women's ordination church territories in all parts of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, particularly the church's unions, should “defer,” “submit,” “yield”—the document uses several synonyms—to what it characterizes as the higher authority of the

General Conference because of that body's wider representation. Many have objected to the document's seeming move to consolidate the General Conference's governing power, which in turn [could be used to take over](#) some union conferences being characterized as "rebellious." Others have objected to [the document's demonizing language](#) that implies that the many territories in the Seventh-day Adventist Church that have moved toward ordaining women may be exhibiting a spirit indicative of satanic influence.

Andrews University Seminary faculty members object on different a basis—that the document must be discussed more widely with broader input before being put before the General Conference Executive Committee for approval. In a joint statement released on Friday, September 30, the Seminary Faculty members called on the General Conference to engage the wider body:

We the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, affirm the biblical truth of church unity grounded in our worship of God, our common faith, our shared community, and our sense of mission. We have serious concerns about the recent document “A Study of Church Governance and Unity” released by the General Conference and its portrayal of the nature and authority of the church. Further discussion by the church at large on this important ecclesiological issue is needed before such a document is adopted.” Voted September 30, 2016.

It is not the first time that the General Conference and the Seminary faculty have staked out different ground over the question of ordaining women. In October, 2015, only months after the General Conference rejected a measure that would have given jurisdiction of ordination to the church's thirteen divisions, nine seminary faculty members petitioned the General Conference to return their ordained minister credentials in favor of commissioned minister credentials. The General Conference rejected the request, using an argument that is now contained in the "unity" document:

Because ordination is the Church's recognition of a divine calling, it cannot be given up on individual impulse. Thus, what would have to be repudiated would be a pastor's entire vocation and his calling to ministry. Even if one were to accept such a process as theoretically permissible, however, presently no pastor with ministerial credentials has denied his call to ministry; and it seems highly unlikely that any pastor would do that. Repudiation is not actively prohibited, but certainly GC Working Policy does not countenance such a course of action" (page 38).

The Seminary faculty released a joint statement called "[On The Unique Headship of Christ in the Church](#)," repudiating male headship in advance of the 2015 General Conference Session as well.

<https://www.adventistarchives.org/summary-of-a-statement-on-church-governance-and-unity.pdf>

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