



Potomac Conference
CORPORATION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS®

STATEMENT FROM THE POTOMAC CONFERENCE ON ACCEPTANCE OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING FROM THE PAYCHECK PROTECTION PROGRAM

This statement is issued from the Office of the President, Bill Miller.

Recently, the Potomac Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists applied for and received \$5.4 million from the Federal Government as part of the Coronavirus, Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES ACT) through a program known as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

Through the CARES ACT, small businesses and faith-based organizations have the opportunity to apply for a portion of the \$349 billion set aside to assist them with payroll and other financial obligations. These government provisions were enacted to create a safety net for citizens, businesses and not-for-profit entities such as churches that were negatively impacted by the economic ramifications of government-mandated closures due to the current pandemic.

Potomac has given careful study and consideration of the Biblical example in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah when state assistance was gratefully accepted, allowing for the restoration of the temple and its services in Jerusalem. Reflecting on Ezra and Nehemiah's help from the reigning government to rebuild the temple, Ellen G. White writes:

"The Lord still moves upon the hearts of kings and rulers on behalf of His people. Those who are laboring for Him are to avail themselves of the help that He prompts men to give for the advancement of His cause. The agents through whom these gifts come may open ways by which the light of truth shall be given to many benighted lands. These men may have no sympathy with God's work, no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with His word; but their gifts are not on this account to be refused" (Ellen G. White, Lessons from the Life of Nehemiah pp 8 & 9).

Conference administration also considered the strong position of Ellen White, who, in 1894, favored the acceptance of a grant of land from the Zimbabwean government so the Adventist Church could build Solusi College. A. T. Jones and other influential religious liberty leaders of the day quashed the idea. Ellen White addressed them with the following message:

"Just as long as we are in this world, and the Spirit of God is striving with the world, we are to receive as well as to impart favors. We are to give to the world the light of truth as presented in the sacred Scriptures, and we are to receive from the world that which God moves upon them to do on behalf of His cause. God has not closed the door of mercy yet. The Lord still moves upon the hearts of kings and rulers in behalf of His people, and it becomes us who are so deeply interested in the religious liberty question not to cut off any favors, or withdraw ourselves from the help that God had moved men to give for the advancement of His cause.

"Let these men [Religious Liberty leaders] read the book of Nehemiah with humble hearts touched by the Holy Spirit, and their false ideas will be modified, and correct principles will be seen, and the present order of things will be changed" (Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pp 200 & 202).

The General Conference (GC), North American Division (NAD) and the Columbia Union (CU) issued reflective statements to church leaders about accepting government money.



The GC has stated that "...when laws of a nation permit government assistance to churches or their institutions our principles permit receipt of funding that is not accompanied by conditions that inhibit our ability to freely practice and promulgate our faith, to hire only Seventh-day Adventists, to retain governance by only Seventh-day Adventist and to observe without compromise principles expressed in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church-State Relations Articles, March 1, 2002).

The statement by the NAD, though cautionary, was not prohibitive. In fact, several media entities of the NAD including, Breath of Life, It Is Written, Pacific Press and Voice of Prophecy all applied for and received funding.

Following the advice of legal counsel, the Columbia Union determined that accepting the allocation from the government did not violate the Church's traditional position on the separation of Church and State.

It was, therefore, out of an abundance of caution and prayerful consideration and concern for its employees that the leaders of the Potomac Conference recommended to the Executive Committee that the conference officially accept the \$5.4 million for which it was approved in order to create an economic safety net for the pastors, teachers and support staff of all-conference institutions.

On April 28, 2020, the Executive Committee, after extensive discussion, voted to participate in the PPP to provide economic disaster relief in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The agreement and commitment of the conference to the local bank, which provides the funds secured by the Federal Government's Small Business Administration, is to return its level of staffing to the months before the closures were required. Potomac's administration is committed to fully meeting this stipulation by the expected date of June 30, 2020. In addition, seventy-five percent (75%) of the funds must be used for payroll costs, with the remainder being allocated to interest on debt, rental obligations and utility costs.

The \$5.4 million loan will convert to a grant once all the above conditions, set forth by the Federal Government, have been met. This loan-turned-grant will assist in Potomac being intentional in making sure our employees experience minimal interruption in their income and our students' academic advancement will not be disrupted.

In full awareness of the historical and anecdotal positions of the Church regarding the receipt of government funds, leaders of the Potomac Conference believe the availability, receipt and utilization of said funds is within the will and plan of God to preserve the financial health of the conference as we move forward in growing healthy, disciple-making churches.





Support for Acceptance of Funds from the Paycheck Protection Program

Biblical References

Ezra 6:3-10

"In the first year of King Cyrus, Cyrus the king said that this was to be done about the house of God at Jerusalem: 'Let the house of God, the place where burnt gifts are given in worship, be built again with a good base. It should be sixteen times taller than a man, and as wide as thirty long steps. There should be three very large stones laid on the top of each other, and then one large piece of wood laid. Let it be paid for from the king's money. Let the gold and silver objects which Nebuchadnezzar took from the house of God in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon be returned to their places in the house of God in Jerusalem. You must put them in the house of God.' "So now, Tattenai, leader over the land on the other side of the River, Shethar-bozenai, and your friends who are leaders in the lands on the other side of the River, stay away from there. Leave this work on the house of God alone. Let the leaders of the Jews build this house of God again where it stood before. Also, I am making it known what you are to do for these leaders of Judah for the building of this house of God. All of it is to be paid for from the king's money out of the taxes from the lands on the other side of the River. And waste no time to get it to them. Be sure to give them each day whatever is needed, young bulls, rams and lambs for a burnt gift to the God of heaven, and grain, salt, wine, and oil for pouring. This is so they may give pleasing gifts in worship to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons."

Nehemiah 2: 1-9

"In the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, wine was in front of him. And I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in front of him before. So the king said to me, "Why is your face so sad when you are not sick? It must be that you are sad in your heart." Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies waste and its gates destroyed by fire?" Then the king said to me, "What are you asking for?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your eyes, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves. Let me build it again." The king said to me, with the queen sitting beside him, "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a time. And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given to me for the leaders of the lands on the other side of the River that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah. Send a letter with me for Asaph, the keeper of the king's trees, that he may give me cut trees. These will be for making heavy wood pieces for the gates of the strong place by the house of God, and for the city wall, and for the house where I will stay." And the king gave me what I asked for, because the good hand of my God was upon me. Then I came to the leaders of the lands on the other side of the River and gave them the letters. Now the king had sent army captains and horsemen with me."



Government grants to the Adventist Church

In 1894, the Zimbabwean government offered the Adventist Church land to build a school, known today as Solusi University. At the time, influential religious liberty leaders balked at the idea, but Ellen White remonstrated with them offering this insight:

"Just as long as we are in this world, and the Spirit of God is striving with the world, we are to receive as well as to impart favors. We are to give to the world the light of truth as presented in the sacred Scriptures, and we are to receive from the world that which God moves upon them to do on behalf of His cause. God has not closed the door of mercy yet. The Lord still moves upon the hearts of kings and rulers in behalf of His people, and it becomes us who are so deeply interested in the religious liberty question not to cut off any favors or withdraw ourselves from the help that God had moved men to give for the advancement of His cause.

"Let these men [Religious Liberty leaders] read the book of Nehemiah with humble hearts touched by the Holy Spirit, and their false ideas will be modified, and correct principles will be seen, and the present order of things will be changed."

~ Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pp 200 & 202

From the General Conference and Ellen G. White

In an April 3, 2020 statement, the General Conference Office of General Counsel Statement regarding the CARES ACT, indicated that there were no "strings attached" that would make participation in the PPP program objectionable to Seventh-day Adventist organizations. However, caution was encouraged for those intending to apply for the funds.

Additionally, the General Conference said this about Church-State Relations and acceptance of government aid. It covers all conditions in which that aid is given, including times of crisis.

"[W]hen laws of a nation permit government assistance to churches or their institutions our principles permit receipt of funding that is not accompanied by conditions that inhibit our ability to freely practice and promulgate our faith, to hire only Seventh-day Adventists, to retain governance by only Seventh-day Adventist and to observe without compromise principles expressed in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White."

Potomac Conference Executive Committee Action:

On April 28, 2020, it was voted by the Executive Committee to participate in the PPP to provide economic disaster relief resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The voted action:

"To accept the temporary, one-time, SBA-backed forgivable loan from First Bank – Staunton, under the CARES federal legislation, for \$5,400,000. Intention is for Administration to systematically allocate loan proceeds on behalf of the conference, its institutions, and local entities, over the following eight (8) weeks consistent with the employment and usage provisions as outlined by pertinent legislation, so that the loan will be 100% forgiven prior to the beginning of payments (2 years, 1%) scheduled to commence in October 2020. If circumstances change, and there appears to be the danger of entanglement of our religious freedom and practice, the conference will immediately pay off any outstanding loan balance."



Federal Government Action:

Many are concerned that if Christian organizations take federal funding, they will be required to adhere to nondiscrimination policies, which would force them to hire outside of the denomination and its longstanding practices. However, the US Treasury relieved these concerns and clarified their stance on the issue by stating the following regarding the Paycheck Protection Program:

"Nothing in [SBA nondiscrimination regulations] shall apply to a religious corporation, association, educational institution or society with respect to the membership or the employment of individuals of a particular religion to perform work connected with the carrying on by such corporation, association, educational institution or society of its religious activities."

