



# 8 Questions to Ask at the Annual Council

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## 8 Must Ask Questions at the 2018 Annual Council

The GC Working Policy [B95-05-15] asks that every effort be made to reconcile the unions before their removal and dissolution. It leaves unspecified as to what the reconciliation would look like. To that end, the following questions need to be asked on the floor of the Annual Council.

**Q1:** When will we know if complete reconciliation between the unilateralist unions and the General Conference in Session has taken place?

Examples could be:

The Unions rescind all Bylaws amendments that are out of harmony with the General Conference Model Union and Conference Constitutions.

The Unions rescind the ordinations of women and reclassify them as commissioned.

**Q2:** What options for mitigation does the GC Working Policy provide for the General Conference Executive committee to offer regarding Unions who are out of compliance? Is there a differentiation between Unions who moved unilaterally before TOSC, before the 2015 vote, and those who did so after the 2015 vote? Are there mitigating conditions for Unions in the European Union who are facing national equality/diversity laws?

**Q3:** If a division does not find a union to be in rebellion or in apostasy, can the GCEC recommend the findings to be re-examined by the Session?

**Q4:** Can the Session dissolve the unilateralist unions and ask the divisions to take over the unions after they are classified as union-missions?

**Q5:** Can the integrity and authority of the Session's vote in 2015 be nullified by the GCEC if they don't find a pathway for the resolution of this matter before 2020? Is not the GCEC running the risk of being equally non-compliant as the unilateralist unions if they do not follow the GC Working Policy? Please see GC Working Policy B95-05-15. In other words, how long can resolution procedures exceed 2020?

**Q6:** What steps are being taken to protect Adventist churches that are loyal to the General Conference Session in these unilateralist unions? Is there a way that they can exit these unions and join the General Conference under a provisional basis until 2020?

**Q7:** That the superseding authority over the structure and organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the General Conference in Session is well established in ecclesiastical policy. In State organizing documents however, the Constituency of Unions have certain rights and powers. When these rights conflict with ecclesiastical authority, the United States Supreme Court has deferred to the highest ecclesiastical body in hierarchical churches. What will the General Conference do if Unions assert their rights under State Law against the church's ecclesiastical authority in the US Courts systems?

**Q8:** What is the General Conference Executive committee's financial, legal, and risk assessment and management procedures if the Session votes that multiple Unions must be dissolved beyond the disbursement of union-held funds?

For discussion see next pages:

Picture in your mind's eye this scene from the General Conference Session in 2020. A delegate steps up to the microphone, leans forward and speaks:

*“Brother Chair, The efforts of the General Conference Executive Committee and the Divisions have failed to reconcile the unions that have defied the authority of the General Conference in Session. Therefore, under the GC Working Policy provision [B15-05, B15-10, B15-15 and B95-05-15], I move that the General Conference in Session find these unilateralist Union-Conferences out of compliance and dissolve them effective immediately.”*

The Chair asks for a second, then vigorous discussion ensues, and then the vote is taken by secret ballot. The vote tally is announced, and all the union-conferences that took a unilateralist stance are dissolved.

### **Are there specific measures we can take to prevent this constitutional crisis from occurring?**

Before we examine the possibilities let's first address a flawed assumption:

The North American Division and the Trans-European Division will never find their unions to be in apostasy, rebellion, and therefore shortcut the process of the so called “Nuclear Option.”

### **This assumption cannot be sustained by a close reading of GC Working Policy's provisions for Dissolution of Unions.**

The Session can (and has in the past) reviewed and reversed decisions made by lower bodies. It can simply take up the matter and find the NAD to be in error (if they returned a “no rebellion” finding). Furthermore it could initiate and complete the “nuclear option” itself and dissolve the Unions for going against voted policies and the 2015 vote.

If it tries to seek a resolution by offering lesser painful options in hopes of a full reconciliation, the General Conference Executive Committee is running the risk of undermining the GC Session's authority. Worse, they could find a “solution,” only to have the 2020 Session invalidate it and then our church will experience a real constitutional crisis.

Going back to 2012, when the Pacific Union Constituency first considered changing its Bylaws and voted in a change in policy, then GC General Vice President Dr. Cooper read this statement in which he described the scope of the General Conference in Session:

*“Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have been asked to address a couple of points that may, to many, seem as tangential to the issue that is uppermost in our minds today, yet because this matter has been in discussion for some time in the church, and several individuals have made important contributions to a clearer understanding of how the church works,*

*I think it is important that we consider carefully how to proceed. This is an important learning moment for all of us about our church.*

*It has been asserted that the General Conference session, by virtue of its actions in 1990 and 1995, acted outside of its authority in expressing a decision with respect to ministerial ordination practice. Such an assertion implies that a General Conference session, which Seventh-day Adventists recognize as the highest ecclesiastical authority in our organization, is only an authority in some things and is barred from expressing itself in other matters. A conclusion of this kind must be seriously questioned. In its decisions regarding the content of the church manual, a General Conference session establishes policies that govern and guide local church life.*

*A General Conference session can also, if it chooses, determine other policies or practices that define the church as a whole. The General Conference Executive Committee has been entrusted with the development of operating policies for the church; however, it would be incorrect to conclude therefrom that a General Conference session is denied the ability to speak, out of its wisdom, in matters that it deems necessary for the church.*

*A General Conference session does not function under delegated authority from some other denominational entity. It is its own authority with respect to decisions it wishes to make, and its decisions are to be respected by all organizations, including the Executive Committee, which has been questioned by a General Conference session.*

*An illustration of the General Conference session as the highest ecclesiastical authority in the church is seen in its being the body that can settle differences among its member organizations. A General Conference session can also render its decision in matters referred to it by other organizations. Such was the case in 1995, when the North American Division officers and Union presidents requested approval for an amendment in ordination practice within this division. The presentation of such a request provides ample evidence that the North American Division officers and Union presidents, at the time, recognized a decision on this matter was outside their own authority and properly belonged to a General Conference session. The session acted, in its own right, to address the request.*

*We have accepted the General Conference session is the highest ecclesiastical authority in our denomination and that actions of the General Conference in session represent the voice of the church. To assert or imply that the distribution of authority throughout our structure thus constrains the ability of the General Conference in session to determine the context and framework within which each organization functions, gives a misleading impression of how the church works.*

*In recent months, the idea that Unions are fully entitled to resolve the ordination question on their own has received widespread circulation. Some of those who advocate this view have done important homework on the nature of our denominational structure*

*and the processes and relationships that characterize our life together. Unfortunately, we must observe that there is still more homework to do. It is true that authority and responsibility have been carefully distributed throughout our church structure in such a way as to hold us together by bonds of interdependence. This is the key to the strength of the Seventh-day Adventist church as a worldwide organization. However, the idea that the authority and responsibility of one type of organization can be exercised autonomously and unilaterally is a concept alien to the ethos and practices of the church.*

*General Conference working policy speaks about the various types of organizations as being part of the worldwide organization. Whereas each has accepted the privilege and responsibility of representing the church in its part of the world, each is, therefore, required to operate and minister in harmony with the teachings and policies of the church, and the actions of the World Church in session.*

*The decision a few weeks ago by this Union Executive Committee to seek wider counsel in support for its intention to implement ministerial ordination without regard to gender is understood. In turning to a Union constituency for this counsel in support, the Executive Committee chooses to overlook the counsel that has already been expressed by the Worldwide church. It is out of concern for this that the General Conference officers, including all division presidents, chose to express an appeal to the Union Executive Committee. You have received a copy of that. The basic ideas underlying this appeal are the global church has expressed itself on the very question that is before this body today. And secondly, the global church is right now engaged in a study of the theology of ordination and its implication for our practices.*

*The General Conference officers and division presidents have placed before you their appeal. They have not engaged in a debate with you about current or proposed ministerial ordination practices. Another forum is provided for that. Instead, they have asked that you refrain from autonomous action in a matter that is in the hands of the World Church, and further, that you engage fully in the present opportunity to review and revise, if necessary, our global thinking and practices with respect to ordination. We believe that this is not an unreasonable request, and that to people of goodwill, it is not burdensome. We respectfully ask that you give the process a chance."*

The Pacific Union Constituents ignored the warning and voted in their new policy of ordaining without regard to gender.

### **Actions that the General Conference Executive Committee undertake in the meantime:**

1. Encourage all divisions to accept GCAS recommendations for financial policies and bring all divisions into financial compliance by the end of 2019.
2. Create a 6 month plan to bring all the world Divisions to compliance regarding the church membership rolls. Set aside funds for the computerization and data entry of all church member rolls in all divisions so that they are compliant by the end of 2019 or risk their delegations to be removed from GC 2020.
3. A new denominational magazine that can deal with dissenting topics in a fair and even-handed manner. Scholars from both sides of each issue (if needed) can be called upon to write papers to the issue.
4. Parliamentary procedure training and testing and competence certification for all delegates attending the 2020 Session.
5. GC initiates a Scholar-Exchange program between the World Divisions to foster a greater understanding on the issue of women's ordination.
6. GC initiates a study into Theological Methods and educates the world church members on the different approaches at the macro-hermeneutical level that exist in the church. GC further recommends a reversion back to Sola Scriptura and the Sanctuary hermeneutic that the pioneers employed to derive our system of beliefs.
7. Church administration at all levels should have at minimum a systematic theology masters and a Global Leadership MBA from 2030 onward. This is to help leadership understand the broad trends of the theological factions that exist within Adventism: Historical Adventism, Evangelical Adventism, Progressive Adventism and Biblical/Canonical Adventism and competently deal with global economic trends.
8. Creation of an independent Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) with relevant boards to oversee its work (compliance committees/boards). This office will have the authority to examine areas of non-compliance for financial fraud, sexual crimes, and abuse of power and other areas specified by the General Conference Executive Committee.
9. GC initiates a long-term solution by implementing plans to reduce the membership's reliance on pastors as per Ellen White's Counsel in 1901-1915.
10. Annual Council censures individuals who have taken extreme stances against the World Church Session in independent Adventist media.

### **Actions that Unilateralist Unions can undertake to show good faith towards a full reconciliation with the General Conference in Session.**

1. Confession/Admission of fault: Leadership and Executive committee vote on a statement.
2. Immediate Cessation of unilateralist activities: Constituency rescinds out of compliance ordinations and reinstates commissioned licenses.

3. Fruits of Repentance:
  - a. Bylaws amendments: With consultation of the General Conference Executive Committee, the Constituencies amend their Bylaws to the model constitutions for the Unions and Conferences as provided for the GC Working Policy.
  - b. Planned departures of leadership that encouraged the constituency to make such moves against the General Conference in Session.
  - c. Make such policy and leadership training changes at all levels in the Union so that such actions have little or no chance of occurring again.
4. For Unions who voted after the Session vote:
  - a. Accept Union-Mission status for a period of 2 years or as otherwise determined by the General Conference Executive Committee and reapply for admission as full unions in 2020 at the Session.
5. For Unions who voted before the Session vote:
  - a. Accept Union-Mission status and work on a pathway for resolution with the General Conference in Session. We recommend that the GC Session allow these unions to apply for Union Status after a longer period during which other compliance issues are dealt with which include but are not limited to:
    - i. Removal of Union University faculty who are non-compliant with Fundamental Adventist Beliefs.
    - ii. A church-by-church vote of acceptance of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs and vote back into the church structure.
    - iii. Any other measures as determined by the General Conference in Session to ensure the integrity of the structure, process, and authority of the Session.

While the entire world church hopes that these Unions will be reconciled to the Church, the burden to get back into compliance rests with the Unions not with the General Conference Executive Committee.

To hasten the reconciliation before the 2020 World Session, **We recommend the following motions:**

**MOTION:** THAT THE DIVISIONS IN WHICH THESE UNILATERALIST UNIONS EXIST FIND WHETHER OR NOT THEIR UNION'S UNILATERAL SEQUENCE OF CONDUCT ARE A PATTERN OF DEFIANCE AGAINST THE GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION VOTE OF 2015, 1995, AND 1990. THE RECOMMENDED TIME FOR A VOTE FROM THE DIVISIONS BE SET 1 MONTH BEFORE THE GC SPRING COUNCIL SESSION IN 2019.

**MOTION:** THAT THE GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REFER THE NON-COMPLIANCE TO THE GENERAL CONFERENCE IN SESSION OR A SPECIAL SESSION IN 2019 FOR DISSOLUTION OF THE UNIONS, AS PER POLICY.