

# Statements

## GUIDELINES

& other documents



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST<sup>®</sup>  
CHURCH

A 2010 Compilation by the  
Communication Department of the General Conference

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## Introduction

Questions frequently come—“What does the church say about?” These inquiries come from Seventh-day Adventist believers themselves, church pastors and also from the general public or media.

Reflecting on the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the since the 1980s, we recognize an active interest in many church circles to develop and publicize the church’s position statements on specific topics or issues. Often, these are a reaction to a prominent public agenda issue. It goes without saying that the church, as a moral force in society, is expected to clarify or express its stance, or even develop a particular concern. Adventists, as members of society at large, often mirror the challenges and needs of those around them.

Some of the issues are not new, but they are more pressing today, perhaps. The documents available here represent a whole spectrum of these issues and concerns. It is recognized that the church does not have to comment on every public issues and social agenda. Many of these documents simply clarify the church’s position on such issues, as well as provide guidance on how believers can witness to their convictions, principles and practices, as well as how one can react to developments in society.

The denomination’s history dates back to the 1860s when the church organization was formally established. From the early years, and through its history, Seventh-day Adventists have been recognized as a group of conscientious Christians who are vocal about and prominent in taking a stand for a number of causes and issues. The list of these is quite impressive—civil rights and the anti-slavery movement, religious liberty, health and temperance reform, leadership in prevention of alcoholism and drug dependency, anti-tobacco lobby, education, welfare, aid, development and so on.

Though their heritage sees Adventists as reform-minded, it also shows church leadership as sometimes reluctant to take public positions on issues. Exceptions include such issues as religious freedom and temperance. It was typical for Adventists to emphasize that changes in society are best effected through the changing of personal lives of individual church members. Public pronouncements or action were not the preferred approaches in influencing social agenda.

So, though Adventists successfully used the church pulpit and the classroom to express Christian values and speak against social ills, they have not, until recently, formalized their official position through public statements. It was a non-creedal approach at the outset, with the “fundamental beliefs” being formulated into a “doctrinal statement” only in the 1930s.

This publication was initially intended as a sourcebook for Seventh-day Adventist communication professionals to use as a tool for their media contacts.

It grew to become a useful tool for church leaders and clergy, and now is in its third printing.

This volume presents statements and guidelines discussed, approved, and voted by church leadership since 1980, and has been enlarged by more recent (since 2000) public church documents. In all, the documents were written with a particular church public in mind, some reflecting a specific internal interest of the church. Here you will find documents issued by the General Conference in Session, by the General Conference Executive Committee, by the Administrative Committee of the General Conference, or by the Office of the General Conference president. The documents presented in this volume fall into three categories:

1. **Position statements**, including the *Mission Statement* of the Seventh-day Adventist Church;
2. **Guidelines**; and
3. **Other documents**, such as a study paper on AIDS, or a document explaining the church's view on inter-church relations and the so-called ecumenical movement.

As the church continues to grow in both members and influence, its role in society will require that its views and what it holds true becomes known. Such will continue to be the demands of society, and such will be the need to define Adventism's relevance, or present truth, to those who are asking questions and seeking answers to their dilemmas. What is presented in this volume is, in a way, a collection of documents that showcase a part of a journey in the church's response to public issues. New documents, no doubt, will follow. Over the years, several statements build on the previously expressed views of the denomination.

The documents presented here are not an end in themselves, but a reflection of a movement sensitive to its calling and the people who "know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:6 NIV).

The importance of these documents can be thus summarized—actions speak louder than words.

**Rajmund Dabrowski**, Director  
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[Revised June 2010]

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# STATEMENTS

## **Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

### ***Our Mission***

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.

### ***Our Method***

We pursue this mission under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through:

1. *Preaching.* Accepting Christ's commission (Matthew 28:18-20), we proclaim to all the world the message of a loving God, most fully revealed in His Son's reconciling ministry and atoning death. Recognizing the Bible to be God's infallible revelation of His will, we present its full message, including the second advent of Christ and the continuing authority of His Ten Commandment law with its reminder of the seventh-day Sabbath.

2. *Teaching.* Acknowledging that development of mind and character is essential to God's redemptive plan, we promote the growth of a mature understanding of and relationship to God, His Word, and the created universe.

3. *Healing.* Affirming the biblical emphasis on the well-being of the whole person, we make the preservation of health and the healing of the sick a priority, and through our ministry to the poor and oppressed, cooperate with the Creator in His compassionate work of restoration.

### ***Our Vision***

In harmony with the great prophecies of the Scriptures, we see as the climax of God's plan the restoration of all His creation to full harmony with His perfect will and righteousness.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Spring Meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland, April 1993.*

## **A Statement on Abuse and Family Violence**

Seventh-day Adventists affirm the dignity and worth of each human being and decry all forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and family violence.

We recognize the global extent of this problem and the serious, long-term effects upon the lives of all involved. We believe that Christians must respond to abuse and family violence both within the church and in the community. We take seriously reports of abuse and violence and have highlighted these issues for discussion at this international assembly. We believe that to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and potentially extend such behavior.

We accept our responsibility to cooperate with other professional services, to listen and care for those suffering from abuse and family violence, to highlight the injustices, and to speak out in defense of victims. We will help persons in need to identify and access the range of available professional services.

When changed attitudes and behavior open possibilities for forgiveness and new beginnings, we will provide a ministry of reconciliation. We will assist families in grief over relationships that cannot be restored. We will address the spiritual questions confronting abused persons, seeking to understand the origins of abuse and family violence and developing better ways of preventing the recurring cycle.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.*

## Statement on AIDS

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and associated conditions are spreading rapidly around the world. On the basis of statistical studies it is estimated that in the near future, in many countries of the world, every church congregation numbering 100 or more will include at least one member who has a friend or relative with AIDS.

AIDS is transmitted through two major sources: sexual intimacy with an infected person, and introduction of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) contaminated blood into the body either through injections with unsterile needles and syringes or through contaminated blood products. AIDS can be prevented by avoiding sexual contact before marriage and maintaining a faithful monogamous relationship with an uninfected person in marriage, and by avoiding the use of unsterile needles for injections and assuring the safety of blood products.

Adventists are committed to education for the prevention of AIDS. For many years Adventists have fought against the circulation, sale, and use of drugs, and continue to do so. Adventist support sex education that includes the concept that human sexuality is God's gift to humanity. Biblical sexuality clearly limits sexual relationships to one's spouse and excludes promiscuous and all other sexual relationships and the consequent increased exposure to HIV.

The Christlike response to AIDS must be personal—compassionate, helpful, and redemptive. Just as Jesus cared about those with leprosy, the feared communicable disease of His day, His followers today will care for those with AIDS. James advised, "What good is there in your saying to them, 'God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!'—if you don't give them the necessities of life?" (James 2:16, TEV).

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*This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana.*

## **Ban on Sales of Assault Weapons to Civilians**

Automatic or semi-automatic military-style weapons are becoming increasingly available to civilians. In some areas of the world it is relatively easy to acquire such guns. They show up not only in the street, but in the hands of youngsters at school. Many crimes are committed through the use of these kinds of weapons. They are made to kill people. They have no legitimate recreational use.

The teachings and example of Christ constitute the guide for the Christian today. Christ came into the world to save lives, not to destroy them (Luke 9:56). When Peter drew his weapon Jesus said to him: “Put your sword back in its place. ...All who take the sword will die by the sword” (Matthew 26:52 TEV). Jesus did not engage in violence.

The argument is made by some that banning assault weapons limits the rights of people and that guns do not commit crimes, but people do. While it is true that violence and criminal inclinations lead to guns, it is also true that availability of guns leads to violence. The opportunity for civilians to acquire by purchase or otherwise, automatic or semi-automatic assault weapons only increases the number of deaths resulting from human crimes. Possession of guns by civilians in the United States has increased by an estimated 300 percent in the past four years. During the same period there has been a staggering increase in armed attacks and resulting deaths.

In most of the world such weapons cannot be acquired by any legal means. The church views with alarm the relative ease with which they may be acquired in some areas. Their availability can only open the possibility of further tragedies.

The pursuit of peace and the preservation of life are to be the goals of Christians. Evil cannot be effectively met with evil, but must be overcome with good. Seventh-day Adventists, with other people of good will, wish to cooperate in using every legitimate means of reducing, and eliminating where possible, the root causes of crime. In addition, with public safety and the value of human life in mind, the sale of automatic or semi-automatic assault weapons should be strictly controlled. This would reduce the use of weapons by mentally disturbed people and criminals, especially those involved in drug and gang activities.

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## **Birth Control: A Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Consensus**

Scientific technologies today permit greater control of human fertility and reproduction than was formerly possible. These technologies make possible sexual intercourse with the expectation of pregnancy and childbirth greatly reduced. Christian married couples have a potential for fertility control that has created many questions with wide-ranging religious, medical, social, and political implications. Opportunities and benefits exist as a result of the new capabilities, as do challenges and drawbacks. A number of moral issues must be considered. Christians who ultimately must make their own personal choices on these issues must be informed in order to make sound decisions based on biblical principles.

Among the issues to be considered is the question of the appropriateness of human intervention in the natural biological processes of human reproduction. If any intervention is appropriate, then additional questions regarding what, when, and how must be addressed. Other related concerns include:

- likelihood of increased sexual immorality which the availability and use of birth control methods may promote;
- gender dominance issues related to the sexual privileges and prerogatives of both women and men;
- social issues, including the right of a society to encroach upon personal freedom in the interest of the society at large and the burden of economic and educational support for the disadvantaged; and
- stewardship issues related to population growth and the use of natural resources.

A statement of moral considerations regarding birth control must be set in the broader context of biblical teachings about sexuality, marriage, parenthood, and the value of children—and an understanding of the interconnectedness between these issues. With an awareness of the diversity of opinion within the church, the following biblically based principles are set forth to educate and to guide in decision making.

1. *Responsible stewardship.* God created human beings in His own image, male and female, with capacities to think and to make decisions (Isaiah 1:18; Joshua 24:15; Deuteronomy 30:15-20). God gave human

beings dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:26, 28). This dominion requires overseeing and caring for nature. Christian stewardship also requires taking responsibility for human procreation. Sexuality, as one of the aspects of human nature over which the individual has stewardship, is to be expressed in harmony with God's will (Exodus 20:14; Genesis 39:9; Leviticus 20:10-21; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20).

2. *Procreative purpose.* The perpetuation of the human family is one of God's purposes for human sexuality (Genesis 1:28). Though it may be inferred that marriages are generally intended to yield offspring, Scripture never presents procreation as an obligation of every couple in order to please God. However, divine revelation places a high value on children and expresses the joy to be found in parenting (Matthew 19:14; Psalms 127:3). Bearing and rearing children help parents to understand God and to develop compassion, caring, humility, and unselfishness (Psalms 103:13; Luke 11:13).

3. *Unifying purpose.* Sexuality serves a unifying purpose in marriage that is God-ordained and distinguishable from the procreative purpose (Genesis 2:24). Sexuality in marriage is intended to include joy, pleasure, and delight (Ecclesiastes 9:9; Proverbs 5:18, 19; Song of Solomon 4:16-5:1). God intends that couples may have ongoing sexual communion apart from procreation (1 Corinthians 7:3-5), a communion that forges strong bonds and protects a marriage partner from an inappropriate relationship with someone other than his or her spouse (Proverbs 5:15-20; Song of Solomon 8:6, 7). In God's design, sexual intimacy is not only for the purpose of conception. Scripture does not prohibit married couples from enjoying the delights of conjugal relations while taking measures to prevent pregnancy.

4. *Freedom to choose.* In creation—and again through the redemption of Christ—God has given human beings freedom of choice, and He asks them to use their freedom responsibly (Galatians 5:1, 13). In the divine plan, husband and wife constitute a distinct family unit, having both the freedom and the responsibility to share in making determinations about their family (Genesis 2:24). Married partners should be considerate of each other in making decisions about birth control, being willing to consider the needs of the other as well as one's own (Philippians 2:4). For those who choose to bear children, the procreative choice is not without limits. Several factors must inform their choice, including the ability to provide for the needs of children

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the needs of others (Phil 2:4).

5. *Appropriate methods of birth control.* Moral decision making about the choice and use of the various birth control agents must stem from an understanding of their probable effects on physical and emotional health, the manner in which the various agents operate, and the financial expenditure involved. A variety of methods of birth control--including barrier methods, spermicides, and sterilization--prevent conception and are morally acceptable. Some other birth-control methods<sup>1</sup> may prevent the release of the egg (ovulation), may prevent the union of egg and sperm (fertilization), or may prevent attachment of the already fertilized egg (implantation). Because of uncertainty about how they will function in any given instance, they may be morally suspect for people who believe that protectable human life begins at fertilization. However, since the majority of fertilized ova naturally fail to implant or are lost after implantation, even when birth control methods are not being used, hormonal methods of birth control and IUDs, which represent a similar process, may be viewed as morally acceptable. Abortion, the intentional termination of an established pregnancy, is not morally acceptable for purposes of birth control.

6. *Misuse of birth control.* Though the increased ability to manage fertility and protect against sexually transmitted disease may be useful to many married couples, birth control can be misused. For example, those who would engage in premarital and extramarital sexual relations may more readily indulge in such behaviors because of the availability of birth control methods. The use of such methods to protect sex outside of marriage may reduce the risks of sexually transmitted diseases and/or pregnancy. Sex outside of marriage, however, is both harmful and immoral, whether or not these risks have been diminished.

7. *A redemptive approach.* The availability of birth-control methods makes education about sexuality and morality even more imperative. Less effort should be put forth in condemnation and more in education and redemptive approaches that seek to allow each individual to be persuaded by the deep movings of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Some current examples of these methods include intrauterine devices (IUDs), hormone pills (including the “morning-after pill”), injections, or implants. Questions about these methods should be referred to a medical professional.

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*This statement was voted during the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee on Wednesday, September 29, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

**Recommendations: Use of Mifepristone (RU486)**

1. In the treatment of medical conditions, such as cancer, for which RU486 may provide effective therapy, the drug should be used in keeping with relevant laws and established medical science.
2. RU486 is also used for contraception. When the effect of the drug is to prevent fertilization, its use is ethically permissible. Like other oral contraceptives, however, RU486 may sometimes prevent implantation of a fertilized ovum. This is ethically problematic to those who consider this effect to be abortion.
3. When RU486 is used in legally permissible and medically appropriate ways for the purpose of causing abortion, the previously adopted Seventh-day Adventist Guidelines on Abortion should guide the practice.

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*This recommendation was voted by the Christian View of Human Life Committee at Pine Springs Ranch, California, April 10-12, 1994, and was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), Silver Spring, Maryland, July 26, 1994.*

## **Caring for Creation—A Statement on the Environment**

The world in which we live is a gift of love from the Creator God, from “Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water” (Revelation 14:7; 11:17, 18). Within this creation He placed humans, set intentionally in relationship with Himself, other persons, and the surrounding world. Therefore, as Seventh-day Adventists, we hold its preservation and nurture to be intimately related to our service to Him.

God set aside the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial and perpetual reminder of His creative act and establishment of the world. In resting on that day, Seventh-day Adventists reinforce the special sense of relationship with the Creator and His creation. Sabbath observance underscores the importance of our integration with the total environment.

The human decision to disobey God broke the original order of creation, resulting in a disharmony alien to His purposes. Thus our air and waters are polluted, forests and wildlife plundered, and natural resources exploited. Because we recognize humans as part of God’s creation, our concern for the environment extends to personal health and lifestyle. We advocate a wholesome manner of living and reject the use of substances such as tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs that harm the body and consume earth’s resources; and we promote a simple vegetarian diet.

Seventh-day Adventists are committed to respectful, cooperative relationships among all persons, recognizing our common origin and realizing our human dignity as a gift from the Creator. Since human poverty and environmental degradation are interrelated, we pledge ourselves to improve the quality of life for all people. Our goal is a sustainable development of resources while meeting human needs.

Genuine progress toward caring for our natural environment rests upon both personal and cooperative effort. We accept the challenge to work toward restoring God's overall design. Moved by faith in God, we commit ourselves to promote the healing that rises at both personal and environmental levels from integrated lives dedicated to serve God and humanity. In this commitment we confirm our stewardship of God's creation and believe that total restoration will be complete only when God makes all things new.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 12, 1992.*

## **An Affirmation of Creation**

### ***Introduction***

The very first words of the Bible provide the foundation for all that follows. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...” Genesis 1:1. Throughout Scripture Creation is celebrated as coming from the hand of God who is praised and adored as Maker and Sustainer of all that is. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalms 19:1 NIV).

From this view of the world flows a series of interlocking doctrines that lie at the core of the Seventh-day Adventist message to the world: a perfect world without sin and death created not long ago; the Sabbath; the fall of our first parents; the spread of sin, decay and death to the whole creation; the coming of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to live among us and rescue us from sin by His death and resurrection; the Second Coming of Jesus, our Creator and Redeemer; and the ultimate restoration of all that was lost by the Fall.

As Christians who take the Bible seriously and seek to live by its precepts. Seventh-day Adventists have a high view of nature. We believe that even in its present fallen state nature reveals the eternal power of God (Romans 1:20), that “‘God is love’ is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass” (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p 10).

For us, all Scripture is inspired and tests all the other ways, including nature, through which God reveals Himself. We have great respect for science, and applaud the prominence of science departments in our institutions of higher learning and healthcare. We also value the work of Seventh-day Adventist scientists and researchers not employed by the church. We train students at our colleges and universities on how to employ the scientific method rigorously. At the same time, we refuse to restrict our quest for truth to the constraints imposed by the scientific method alone.

### ***The Question of Origins***

For centuries, at least in the Christian world, the Bible story of creation was the standard explanation for questions about origins. During the 18th and 19th centuries the methodologies of science resulted in a growing understanding of how things worked. Today no one can deny that science has made a remarkable impact on our lives through advances in the areas of agriculture, communication, ecology, engineering, genetics, health, and space exploration.

In many areas of life, knowledge derived from nature and knowledge from divine revelation in Scripture appear to be in harmony. Advances in scientific knowledge often confirm and validate the views of faith. However, in regard to the origin of the universe, of the earth, and of life and its history, we encounter contradictory worldviews. Assertions based on a study of Scripture often stand in stark contrast to those arising from the scientific assumptions and methodologies used in the study of nature. This tension has a direct impact on the life of the church, its message, and witness.

We celebrate the life of faith. We advocate a life of learning. Both in the study of Scripture and in the orderly processes of nature we see indicators of the Creator's marvelous mind. Since its earliest days the Seventh-day Adventist Church has encouraged the development of mind and understanding through the disciplines of worship, education, and observation.

In earlier decades the discussion of theories on origins primarily occurred in academic settings. However, philosophical naturalism (wholly natural, random, and undirected processes over the course of time) has gained wide acceptance in education and forms the basic assumption for much that is taught in the natural and social sciences. Seventh-day Adventist members and students encounter this view and its implications in many areas of daily life.

In its statement of fundamental beliefs the Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms a divine creation as described in the biblical narrative of Genesis 1. "God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made 'the heaven and the earth' and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility

to care for it. When the world was finished it was ‘very good,’ declaring the glory of God” (Genesis 1; 2; Exodus 20:8-11; Psalms 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Hebrews 11:3).

### ***Reasons for the Faith and Science Conferences***

Because of the pervasive and growing influence of the theory of evolution, the General Conference Executive Committee (2001 Annual Council) authorized a three-year series of Faith and Science conferences. These conferences were not called to modify the church’s long-held position on creation but to review the contributions and limitations that both faith and science bring to our understanding of origins.

The principal reasons that led to the convening of these conferences involved:

1. *Philosophical questions:* An ever-present challenge exists in defining the relationship between theology and science, between that of faith and reason. Are these two streams of knowledge in partnership or in conflict? Should they be viewed as interactive or are they independent, non-overlapping spheres of knowledge? The dominant worldview in most modern societies interprets life, physical reality, and behavior in ways that are markedly different from the Christian worldview. How should a Christian relate to these things?

2. *Theological questions:* How is the Bible to be interpreted? What does a plain reading of the text require of a believer? To what extent should knowledge from science inform or shape our understanding of Scripture and vice-versa?

3. *Scientific questions:* The same data from nature are available to all observers. What do the data say or mean? How shall we arrive at correct interpretations and conclusions? Is science a tool or a philosophy? How do we differentiate between good and bad science?

4. *The issue of nurture and education for church members:* How is a church member to deal with the variety of interpretations of the Genesis record? What does the church have to say to those who find in their educational curriculum ideas that conflict with their faith? Maintaining silence concerning such issues sends mixed signals; it creates uncertainty and provides fertile ground for unwarranted and dogmatic views.

5. *Development of living faith:* Clarification and reaffirmation of a Bible-based theology of origins will equip members with a framework for dealing with challenges on this topic. The Faith and Science Conferences were not convened simply for the intellectual stimulation

of attendees, but as an opportunity to provide orientation and practical guidance for church members. The church cannot pretend to keep its beliefs in a safe place, secure from all challenge. In doing so they will soon become relics. Church teachings must engage and connect with the issues of the day so that they remain a living faith; otherwise they will amount to nothing more than dead dogma.

### ***The Faith and Science Conferences***

Two International Faith and Science Conferences were held—in Ogden, Utah 2002, and in Denver, Colorado 2004—with widespread international representation from theologians, scientists, and Church administrators. In addition, seven<sup>1</sup> of the church's 13 divisions conducted division-wide or regional conferences dealing with the interaction of faith and science in explanations about origins. The Organizing Committee expresses appreciation to the participants at these conferences for their contributions to this report.

The Ogden conference agenda was designed to acquaint attendees with the range of ways in which both theology and science offer explanations for the origin of the earth and life. The agendas for conferences in divisions were determined by the various organizers, although most included several of the topics dealt with in Ogden. The recent conference in Denver was the concluding conference of the three-year series. Its agenda began with summaries of the issues in theology and science, then moved on to several questions regarding faith-science issues in church life. These questions included:

- The on-going place of scholarship in the church. How does the church maintain the confessional nature of its teachings while being open to further development in its understanding of truth?
- Educational models for dealing with controversial subjects and the ethical issues involved for teachers and church leaders. How shall we teach science courses in our schools in a way that enriches, rather than erodes, faith?
- What ethical considerations come into focus when private conviction differs from denominational teaching? How does personal freedom of belief interface with one's public role as a leader in the church? In other words, what are the principles of personal accountability and the ethics of dissent?
- What are the administrative responsibilities and processes in dealing with variations in, or re-expressions of, doctrinal views?

Scholarly papers by theologians, scientists, and educators were presented and discussed in all the conferences. (The Geoscience Research Institute maintains a file of all papers presented at the conferences.) The Ogden and Denver conferences involved at least some representation from every division of the world field. Well over 200 persons participated in the conferences during the three-year period. More than 130 attended the Denver meeting, most of whom had attended at least one other of the Faith and Science Conferences.

### ***General Observations***

1. We applaud the seriousness and dignity that characterized the conferences.
2. We noted the strong sense of dedication and loyalty to the church that prevailed.
3. We experienced that even though tensions surfaced at times, cordial relations were maintained among the attendees, with fellowship transcending differences in viewpoint.
4. We witnessed in these conferences a high level of concurrence on basic understandings, especially the normative role of Scripture, buttressed by the writings of Ellen G. White, and the belief by all in God as beneficent Creator.
5. We found no support for, or advocacy of, philosophical naturalism, the idea that the universe came into existence without the action of a Creator.
6. We acknowledge that the conflict between the biblical and contemporary worldviews impacts both scientists and theologians.
7. We recognize that tension between faith and understanding is an element of life with which the believer must learn to live.
8. We observe that rejecting contemporary scientific interpretations of origins in conflict with the biblical account does not imply depreciation of either science or the scientist.
9. While we found widespread affirmation of the church's understanding of life on earth, we recognize that some among us interpret the biblical record in ways that lead to sharply different conclusions.
10. We accept that both theology and science contribute to our understanding of reality.

## ***Findings***

1. The degree to which tension exists regarding our understanding of origins varies around the world. In those areas where science has made its greatest progress in society the questions among church members are more widespread. With the advance of science across all societies and educational systems, there will be a corresponding increase in members wondering how to reconcile church teaching with natural theories of origin. Large numbers of Seventh-day Adventist students attend public schools where evolution is taught and promoted in the classroom without corresponding materials and arguments in favor of the biblical account of origins.

2. Reaffirmation of the church's Fundamental Belief regarding creation is strongly supported. Seventh-day Adventist belief in a literal and historical six-day creation is theologically sound and consistent with the teaching of the whole Bible.

3. Creation is a foundational pillar in the entire system of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine—it bears direct relationship to many if not all other fundamental beliefs. Any alternative interpretation of the creation story needs to be examined in light of its impact on all other beliefs. Several of the Faith and Science Conferences reviewed alternative interpretations of Genesis 1, including the idea of theistic evolution. These other interpretations lack theological coherence with the whole of Scripture and reveal areas of inconsistency with the rest of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. They are therefore unacceptable substitutes for the biblical doctrine of creation held by the church.

4. Concern has been expressed regarding what some see as ambiguity in the phrase “In six days” found in the church's statement of belief on creation. It is felt that the intended meaning (that the six-day creation described in Genesis was accomplished in a literal and historical week) is unmentioned. This situation allows for uncertainty about what the church actually believes. Further, it provides room for other explanations of creation to be accommodated in the text. There is a desire for the voice of the church to be heard in bringing added clarity to what is really meant in Fundamental Belief #6.

5. Although some data from science can be interpreted in ways consistent with the biblical concept of creation, we also reviewed data interpreted in ways that challenge the church's belief in a recent creation. The strength of these interpretations cannot be dismissed lightly. We respect the claims of science, study them, and hope for a resolution. This

does not preclude a re-examination of Scripture to make sure it is being properly understood. However, when an interpretation harmonious with the findings of science is not possible, we do not allow science a privileged position in which it automatically determines the outcome. Rather, we recognize that it is not justifiable to hold clear teachings of Scripture hostage to current scientific interpretations of data.

6. We recognize that there are different theological interpretations among us regarding Genesis 1-11. In view of the various interpretations we sensed a high degree of concern that those involved in the Seventh-day Adventist teaching ministry conduct their work ethically and with integrity—by standards of their profession, the teachings of Scripture, and the basic understanding held by the body of believers. Since Seventh-day Adventists recognize their comprehension of truth is a growing experience, there is an ever-present need to continue the study of Scripture, theology, and science in order that the truths we hold constitute a living faith able to address the theories and philosophies of the day.

7. We appreciate and endorse the significant value of ongoing international and interdisciplinary dialog among Seventh-day Adventist theologians, scientists, educators, and administrators.

### ***Affirmations***

As a result of the two international conferences and the seven division conferences, the Organizing Committee reports the following affirmations:

1. We affirm the primacy of Scripture in the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of origins.

2. We affirm the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 that life on earth was created in six literal days and is of recent origin.

3. We affirm the biblical account of the Fall resulting in death and evil.

4. We affirm the biblical account of a catastrophic Flood, an act of God's judgment that affected the whole planet, as an important key to understanding earth history.

5. We affirm that our limited understanding of origins calls for humility and that further exploration into these questions brings us closer to deep and wonderful mysteries.

6. We affirm the interlocking nature of the doctrine of creation with

other Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.

7. We affirm that in spite of its fallenness nature is a witness to the Creator.

8. We affirm Seventh-day Adventist scientists in their endeavors to understand the Creator's handiwork through the methodologies of their disciplines.

9. We affirm Seventh-day Adventist theologians in their efforts to explore and articulate the content of revelation.

10. We affirm Seventh-day Adventist educators in their pivotal ministry to the children and youth of the church.

11. We affirm that the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church identified in Revelation 14:6, 7 includes a call to worship God as Creator of all.

### ***Recommendations***

The Organizing Committee for the International Faith and Science Conferences recommends that:

1. In order to address what some interpret as a lack of clarity in Fundamental Belief #6 the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Genesis narrative be affirmed more explicitly.

2. Church leaders at all levels be encouraged to assess and monitor the effectiveness with which denominational systems and programs succeed in preparing young people, including those attending non-Adventist schools, with a biblical understanding of origins and an awareness of the challenges they may face in respect to this understanding.

3. Increased opportunity be provided for interdisciplinary dialog and research, in a safe environment, among Seventh-day Adventist scholars from around the world.

### ***Conclusion***

The Bible opens with the story of creation; the Bible closes with the story of re-creation. All that was lost by the Fall of our first parents is restored. The One who made all things by the Word of His mouth at the beginning brings the long struggle with sin, evil, and death to a triumphant and glorious conclusion. He is the One who dwelt among us and died in our stead on Calvary. As the heavenly beings sang for joy at the first creation, so the redeemed from earth proclaim: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things,

and by Your will they exist and were created....Worthy is the Lamb who was slain...” (Revelation 4:11; 5:12 NKJV).

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<sup>1</sup>East-Central Africa Division, Euro-Africa Division, North American Division, South Pacific Division, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, Southern Asia Division, West-Central Africa Division.

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*This document, prepared by the Organizing Committee of the International Faith & Science Conferences 2002-2004 was presented to and received by the General Conference Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 11, 2004.*

## **Response for an Affirmation of Creation**

Whereas belief in a literal, six-day creation is indissolubly linked with the authority of Scripture, and;

Whereas such belief interlocks with other doctrines of Scripture, including the Sabbath and the Atonement, and;

Whereas Seventh-day Adventists understand our mission, as specified in Revelation 14:6, 7, to include a call to the world to worship God as Creator,

We, the members of the General Conference Executive Committee at the 2004 Annual Council, state the following as our response to the document, *An Affirmation of Creation*, submitted by the International Faith & Science Conferences:

We strongly endorse the document's affirmation of our historic, biblical position of belief in a literal, recent, six-day Creation.

We urge that the document, accompanied by this response, be disseminated widely throughout the world Seventh-day Adventist Church, using all available communication channels and in the major languages of world membership.

We reaffirm the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the historicity of Genesis 1-11: that the seven days of the Creation account were literal 24-hour days forming a week identical in time to what we now experience as a week; and that the Flood was global in nature.

We call on all boards and educators at Seventh-day Adventist institutions at all levels to continue upholding and advocating the church's position on origins. We, along with Seventh-day Adventist parents, expect students to receive a thorough, balanced, and scientifically rigorous exposure to and affirmation of our historic belief in a literal, recent six-day creation, even as they are educated to understand and assess competing philosophies of origins that dominate scientific discussion in the contemporary world.

We urge church leaders throughout the world to seek ways to educate members, especially young people attending non-Seventh-day Adventist schools, in the issues involved in the doctrine of creation.

We call on all members of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family to proclaim and teach the church's understanding of the biblical doctrine of Creation, living in its light, rejoicing in our status as sons and daughters of God, and praising our Lord Jesus Christ—our Creator and Redeemer.

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*As a response to the “An Affirmation of Creation—Report”, this document was accepted and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 13, 2004.*

## **A Statement of Consensus on Care for the Dying**

For people whose lives are guided by the Bible, the reality of death is acknowledged as part of the current human condition, affected by sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5; Hebrews 9:27). There is “a time to be born, and a time to die” (Ecclesiastes 3:2). Although eternal life is a gift that is granted to all who accept salvation through Jesus Christ, faithful Christians await the second coming of Jesus for complete realization of their immortality (John 3:36; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54). While waiting for Jesus to come again, Christians may be called upon to care for the dying and to face personally their own death.

Pain and suffering afflict every human life. Physical, mental, and emotional traumas are universal. However, human suffering has no expiatory or meritorious value. The Bible teaches that no amount or intensity of human suffering can atone for sin. The suffering of Jesus Christ alone is sufficient. Scripture calls Christians not to despair in afflictions, urging them to learn obedience (Hebrews 5:7-8), patience (James 1:2-4), and endurance in tribulations (Romans 5:3). The Bible also testifies to the overcoming power of Jesus Christ (John 16:33) and teaches that ministry to human suffering is an important Christian duty (Matthew 25:34-40). This was the example and teaching of Jesus (Matthew 9:35; Luke 10:34-36), and this is His will for us (Luke 10:37). Christians look in anticipation to a new day when God will end suffering forever (Revelation 21:4).

Developments in modern medicine have added to the complexity of decisions about care for the dying. In times past, little could be done to extend human life. But the power of today’s medicine to forestall death has generated difficult moral and ethical questions. What constraints does Christian faith place upon the use of such power? When should the goal of postponing the moment of death give way to the goal of alleviating pain at the end of life? Who may appropriately make these decisions? What limits, if any, should Christian love place on actions designed to end human suffering?

It has become common to discuss such questions under the heading of euthanasia. Much confusion exists with regard to this expression. The original and literal meaning of this term was “good death.” Now the term is used in two significantly different ways. Often euthanasia refers to “mercy killing,” or intentionally taking the life of a patient in order to avoid painful dying or in order to alleviate burdens for a patient’s family

or society (this is so-called active euthanasia). However, euthanasia is also used, inappropriately in the Seventh-day Adventist view, to refer to the withholding or withdrawal of medical interventions that artificially extend human life, thus allowing a person to die naturally (this is so-called passive euthanasia). Seventh-day Adventists believe that allowing a patient to die by foregoing medical interventions that only prolong suffering and postpone the moment of death is morally different from actions that have as their primary intention the direct taking of a life.

Seventh-day Adventists seek to address the ethical issues at the end of life in ways that demonstrate their faith in God as the Creator and Redeemer of life and that reveal how God's grace has empowered them for acts of neighborly love. Seventh-day Adventists affirm God's creation of human life, a wonderful gift worthy of being protected and sustained (Genesis 1-2). They also affirm God's wonderful gift of redemption that provides eternal life for those who believe (John 3:15; 17:3). Thus they support the use of modern medicine to extend human life in this world. However, this power should be used in compassionate ways that reveal God's grace by minimizing suffering. Since we have God's promise of eternal life in the earth made new, Christians need not cling anxiously to the last vestiges of life on this earth. Nor is it necessary to accept or offer all possible medical treatments that merely prolong the process of dying.

Because of their commitment to care for the whole person, Seventh-day Adventists are concerned about the physical, emotional, and spiritual care of the dying. To this end, they offer the following biblically based principles:

1. A person who is approaching the end of life, and is capable of understanding, deserves to know the truth about his or her condition, the treatment choices, and the possible outcomes. The truth should not be withheld but shared with Christian love and with sensitivity to the patient's personal and cultural circumstances (Ephesians 4:15).
2. God has given human beings freedom of choice and asks them to use their freedom responsibly. Seventh-day Adventists believe that this freedom extends to decisions about medical care. After seeking divine guidance and considering the interests of those affected by the decision (Romans 14:7) as well as medical advice, a person who is capable of deciding should determine whether to accept or reject life-extending medical interventions. Such persons should not be forced to submit to medical treatment that they find unacceptable.
3. God's plan is for people to be nourished within a family and a

faith community. Decisions about human life are best made within the context of healthy family relationships after considering medical advice (Genesis 2:18; Mark 10:6-9; Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 5-6). When a dying person is unable to give consent or express preferences regarding medical intervention, such decisions should be made by someone chosen by the dying person. If no one has been chosen, someone close to the dying person should make the determination. Except in extraordinary circumstances, medical or legal professionals should defer decisions about medical interventions for a dying person to those closest to that individual. Wishes or decisions of the individual are best made in writing and should be in agreement with existing legal requirements.

4. Christian love is practical and responsible (Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13; James 1:27; 2:14-17). Such love does not deny faith nor obligate us to offer or to accept medical interventions whose burdens outweigh the probable benefits. For example, when medical care merely preserves bodily functions, without hope of returning a patient to mental awareness, it is futile and may, in good conscience, be withheld or withdrawn. Similarly, life-extending medical treatments may be omitted or stopped if they only add to the patient's suffering or needlessly prolong the process of dying. Any action taken should be in harmony with legal mandates.

5. While Christian love may lead to the withholding or withdrawing of medical interventions that only increase suffering or prolong dying, Seventh-day Adventists do not practice “mercy killing” or assist in suicide (Genesis 9:5- 6; Exodus 20:13; 23:7). They are opposed to active euthanasia, the intentional taking of the life of a suffering or dying person.

6. Christian compassion calls for the alleviation of suffering (Matthew 25:34-40; Luke 10:29-37). In caring for the dying, it is a Christian responsibility to relieve pain and suffering, to the fullest extent possible, not to include active euthanasia. When it is clear that medical intervention will not cure a patient, the primary goal of care should shift to relief from suffering.

7. The biblical principle of justice prescribes that added care be given the needs of those who are defenseless and dependent (Psalms 82:3- 4; Proverbs 24:11-12; Isaiah 1:1-18; Micah 6:8; Luke 1:52-54). Because of their vulnerable condition, special care should be taken to ensure that dying persons are treated with respect for their dignity and without unfair discrimination. Care for the dying should be based on their spiritual and

medical needs and their expressed choices rather than on perceptions of their social worthiness (James 2:1-9).

As Seventh-day Adventists seek to apply these principles, they take hope and courage from the fact that God answers the prayers of His children and is able to work miraculously for their well-being (Psalms 103:1-5; James 5:13-16). Following Jesus' example, they also pray to accept the will of God in all things (Matthew 26:39). They are confident that they can call on God's power to aid them in caring for the physical and spiritual needs of suffering and dying individuals. They know that the grace of God is sufficient to enable them to endure adversity (Psalms 50:14-15). They believe that eternal life for all who have faith in Jesus is secure in the triumph of God's love.

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*This consensus statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 9, 1992.*

## **Chemical Use, Abuse, and Dependency**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, officially organized in 1863, early in its history addressed the use of beverage alcohol and tobacco. The church condemned the use of both as destructive to life, family, and spirituality. She adopted, in practice, a definition of temperance, which urged “total abstinence from that which is injurious, and the careful and judicious use of that which is good.”

The position of the church with respect to the use of alcohol and tobacco has not changed. In recent decades the church has actively promoted anti-alcohol and anti-drug education within the church, and united with other agencies to educate the wider community in the prevention of alcoholism and drug dependency. The church created a “Stop-smoking Program” in the early 1960’s, which has had a worldwide outreach and helped tens of thousands of smokers to quit. Originally known as the “Five-Day Plan” to stop smoking, it may well be the most successful of all cessation programs.

The creation of hundreds of new drugs in laboratories, and the rediscovery and popularization of age-old natural chemicals, such as marijuana and cocaine, have now gravely complicated a once comparatively simple problem and pose an ever-increasing challenge to both the church and society. In a society which tolerates and even promotes drug use, addiction is a growing menace.

Redoubling its efforts in the field of the prevention of dependency, the church is developing new curricula for its schools and support programs to assist youth to remain abstinent.

The church is also seeking to be an influential voice in calling the attention of the media, public officials, and legislators to the damage society is suffering through continued promotion and distribution of alcohol and tobacco.

The church continues to believe that Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 19:20 is applicable today, that “Our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Ghost” and we “should glorify God” in our bodies. We belong to God, we are witnesses to His Grace. We must endeavor to be at our best, physically and mentally, in order that we may enjoy His fellowship and glorify His name.

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*This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana.*

## **Statement on Child Sexual Abuse**

Child sexual abuse occurs when a person older or stronger than the child uses his or her power, authority, or position of trust to involve a child in sexual behavior or activity. Incest, a specific form of child sexual abuse, is defined as any sexual activity between a child and a parent, a sibling, an extended family member, or a step/surrogate parent.

Sexual abusers may be men or women and may be of any age, nationality, or socio-economic background. They are often men who are married with children, have respectable jobs, and may be regular churchgoers. It is common for offenders to strongly deny their abusive behavior, to refuse to see their actions as a problem, and to rationalize their behavior or place blame on something or someone else. While it is true that many abusers exhibit deeply rooted insecurities and low self-esteem, these problems should never be accepted as an excuse for sexually abusing a child. Most authorities agree that the real issue in child sexual abuse is more related to a desire for power and control than for sex.

When God created the human family, He began with a marriage between a man and a woman based on mutual love and trust. This relationship is still designed to provide the foundation for a stable, happy family in which the dignity, worth, and integrity of each family member is protected and upheld. Every child, whether male or female, is to be affirmed as a gift from God. Parents are given the privilege and responsibility of providing nurture, protection, and physical care for the children entrusted to them by God. Children should be able to honor, respect, and trust their parents and other family members without the risk of abuse.

The Bible condemns child sexual abuse in the strongest possible terms. It sees any attempt to confuse, blur, or denigrate personal, generational, or gender boundaries through sexually abusive behavior as an act of betrayal and a gross violation of personhood. It openly condemns abuses of power, authority, and responsibility because these strike at the very heart of the victims' deepest feelings about themselves, others, and God, and shatter their capacity to love and trust. Jesus used strong language to condemn the actions of anyone who, through word or deed, causes a child to stumble.

The Adventist Christian community is not immune from child sexual abuse. We believe that the tenets of the Seventh-day Adventist

faith require us to be actively involved in its prevention. We are also committed to spiritually assisting abused and abusive individuals and their families in their healing and recovery process, and to holding church professionals and church lay leaders accountable for maintaining their personal behavior as is appropriate for persons in positions of spiritual leadership and trust.

***As a Church we believe our faith calls us to:***

1. Uphold the principles of Christ for family relationships in which the self-respect, dignity, and purity of children are recognized as divinely mandated rights.

2. Provide an atmosphere where children who have been abused can feel safe when reporting sexual abuse and can feel that someone will listen to them.

3. Become thoroughly informed about sexual abuse and its impact upon our own church community.

4. Help ministers and lay leaders to recognize the warning signs of child sexual abuse and know how to respond appropriately when abuse is suspected or a child reports being sexually abused.

5. Establish referral relationships with professional counselors and local sexual assault agencies who can, with their professional skills, assist abuse victims and their families.

6. Create guidelines/policies at the appropriate levels to assist church leaders in:

a. Endeavoring to treat with fairness persons accused of sexually abusing children,

b. Holding abusers accountable for their actions and administering appropriate discipline.

7. Support the education and enrichment of families and family members by:

a. Dispelling commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up child sexual abuse.

b. Building a healthy sense of personal worth in each child which enables him or her to respect self and others.

c. Fostering Christlike relationships between males and females in the home and in the church.

8. Provide caring support and a faith-based redemptive ministry within the church community for abuse survivors and abusers while

enabling them to access the available network of professional resources in the community.

9. Encourage the training of more family professionals to facilitate the healing and recovery process of abuse victims and perpetrators. (The above statement is informed by principles expressed in the following scriptural passages: Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25; Leviticus 18:20; 2 Samuel 13:1-22; Matthew 18:6-9; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:5-8.)

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*This statement was voted during the Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee on Tuesday, April 1, 1997, in Loma Linda, California.*

## **The Dangers of Climate Change: A Statement to Governments of Industrialized Countries**

Scientists warn that the gradual warming of the atmosphere as a result of human activity will have serious environmental consequences. The climate will change, resulting in more storms, more floods, and more droughts.

To keep climate change within bearable limits, the emissions of greenhouse gasses, especially carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), need to be significantly reduced. Industrialized countries are the main source of these emissions, while the first victims are the small island states and low-lying coastal countries.

Despite the clear risks, governments appear slow to act.

The world membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church requests that the governments concerned take steps necessary to avert the danger:

1. By fulfilling the agreement reached in Rio de Janeiro (1992 Convention on Climate Change) to stabilize carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2000 at 1990 levels,
2. By establishing plans for further reductions in carbon dioxide emissions after the year 2000, and
3. By initiating more forcefully public debate on the risks of climate change.

In signing this statement, Seventh-day Adventists declare their advocacy of a simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people do not step on the treadmill of unbridled consumerism and production of waste. They call for respect of creation, restraint in the use of the world's resources, and reevaluation of our needs as individuals.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) on December 19, 1995.*

## **Activities With Elements of Competition: Perspective and Analysis**

### ***Introduction***

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and its various organizations, in their concern about competition and rivalries, wish to clarify their position and to recommend certain guidelines for activities which may involve competition. These proposals are intended to give direction and guidance to individual members, churches, conferences, and institutions of the church from the perspective of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

### ***God's Plan***

1. *A Better Way*. The ideal is cooperation and unity in God's Church, as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, where the parts of the church, as symbolized by the parts of the body, work together for the good of the whole. There is sympathetic cooperation; there is no rivalry.

2. *God's Plan for His Work*. "Character-building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings; and never before was its diligent study so important as now. ...Never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today. ...God's plan of life has a place for every human being. Each is to improve his talents to the utmost; and faithfulness in doing this, be the gifts few or many, entitles one to honor. In God's plan there is no place for selfish rivalry" (*Education*, 225, 226).

### ***A Balanced Approach to Life***

Seventh-day Adventists believe that man is an integrated being whose physical, mental, spiritual, and social needs are interrelated and interdependent. They are concerned with the total development of each individual, feeling that every person needs consistent and appropriately planned physical exercise. To meet this need, at the turn of the century, Seventh-day Adventist institutions, generally located in rural areas, offered ample opportunities for physical exercise.

Today institutions operate in ever more crowded environs with shrinking opportunities for useful work as a means of recreation. In addition to this shift from a rural to an urban society, occupations demanding physical activity have decreased, tensions have multiplied,

and leisure time is increasingly dominated by sedentary entertainment such as radio, television, and movies. In order to compensate for these changes, a carefully balanced approach to physical activity must be encouraged in the church's schools, churches, and other institutions.

In any church or school situation involving organized physical activities, the results can be beneficial if the following ideals prevail: cooperativeness, helpfulness, selflessness, a cordial spirit, playing for enjoyment rather than only to win, and observing the rules in spirit and not merely in letter.

“Recreation, when true to its name, re-creation, tends to strengthen and build up” (*Education*, 207). It will not foster selfishness, rivalry, hostility, strife, love of dominance, love of pleasure, or unwholesome excitement.

Effective leadership will take the responsibility for achieving these objectives.

### ***Purposes and Goals for Church Activities***

All the programs and activities of the church should contribute to the development of a Christ-like character and effective witnessing. They shall foster the attainment of the following:

1. The full development of Christian love and unselfish consideration of others (1 Corinthians 13).
2. Mutual respect and fellowship among believers, as illustrated in the figure of the church body as a unit (1 Corinthians 12).
3. Emancipation from selfish rivalry and the development of the higher experience of cooperative endeavor.
4. The development of a healthy body, mind, and spirit.
5. Provision for and implementation of wholesome social relationships.
6. Inspiration for and direction toward the acceptable worship of God.
7. The encouragement of individuals to work toward the highest and best of which they are capable in all worthy pursuits.
8. Activation of the enormous human resources of the church for soul-winning.

Any activities which frustrate these basic goals shall be rejected.

### ***Specific Situations***

In keeping with the foregoing statements of purpose, the following are recommended to minimize the use of rivalrous competition as a motivational tool within the church:

1. Exposure to commercialized, highly competitive activities shall not be encouraged.

2. Satisfying, alternative activities which avoid unwholesome competitive involvement shall be sought.

3. In the development of incentives for individual action, participation, and personal advancement in the work of the church, the program shall be so structured that individuals will relate to a standard of performance rather than to a system which involves interpersonal, interchurch, and interinstitutional rivalry.

4 While giving recognition to the efforts or achievements of individuals or groups, it is important that it shall be done in such a manner as to give God the glory for the success of the endeavor rather than to foster glorification of individuals.

5. A program or activity shall be arranged to provide some level of success for every individual, helping to preserve individuality, identity, personality, and constant dependence on God. Each participant shall receive some degree of recognition. Any such recognition shall avoid extravagance and extreme differences.

6. In recognizing achievement, consideration shall be given to improving the recipient's efficiency and effectiveness in the work of the Lord.

7. Statistical reporting involving growth in membership or financial matters shall be used to encourage good works and not as tools expressive of rivalrous attitudes which are created to facilitate the efficiency of organizations.

8. Internal school grading procedures shall reflect the personal growth and development of the individual student and his mastery of the essential requirements of his discipline rather than his relative standing alongside peers.

9. Any activity that restricts potential success to the few shall

- a. Be discontinued, or
- b. Be limited to temporary combinations in recreational settings,

or

- c. Be used as necessary aids to help identify basic skills needed for entry into a particular profession, e.g., aptitude tests or requirements

for entrance to a professional school.

10. The construction and the expansion of church buildings and institutional plants shall be for the purposes of need and function, with due consideration for good taste, aesthetic requirements, and simplicity of architectural beauty. All attempts to erect buildings which will excel or rival buildings of sister institutions and conferences shall be considered as incompatible with Seventh-day Adventist ideals.

“Never are we to rely upon worldly recognition and rank. Never are we, in the establishment of institutions, to try to compete with worldly institutions in size or splendor. We shall gain the victory, not by erecting massive buildings, in rivalry . . . but by cherishing a Christlike spirit—a spirit of meekness and lowliness” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7, p 100).

11. Since rivalry and many selfish attitudes can originate in the home, it is imperative that parents cultivate in their children attitudes which will avoid a pattern of selfish rivalry in later life.

### ***Church-Sponsored Activities With Elements of Competition***

Standards of achievement and the pressures resulting therefrom shall not be confused with destructive rivalry. It is recognized that in all areas of church activity there may be standards of achievement set by organizations and controlling committees. The above guidelines shall be applied to all the activities and programs of the church, conferences, and institutions, such as the following:

1. Campaigns
2. Contests: College Bowl, Pathfinder, oratorical, Bible quiz, debates
3. Recreation, including athletic programs
4. Grading systems\*
5. Scholarships, academic honors
6. Striving after position
7. Design, style, and dimensions of buildings
8. Achieving church goals.

### ***Controlling Motivational Programs***

Because enlightened leadership is essential in implementing and controlling motivational programs, the following observations are apropos:

1. *Leadership*. In selecting leaders for church programs, the following qualifications shall be emphasized:

- a. Spirituality, dedication, experience, and ability to organize.
- b. The capability of commanding the respect of students and other leaders and maintaining the proper authority and discipline.
- c. Commitment to the purpose and goals stated in this statement.
- d. The ability to challenge and inspire participants to take part enthusiastically in realizing the goals projected herein.
- e. Knowledge about activities in which they are involved and of the implications thereof—physical, mental, spiritual, and social.

2. *Safeguards and Controls*. Experience has demonstrated the necessity of establishing adequate safeguards and controls in church activity.

Implementation includes the following:

- a. Obtaining and using acceptable equipment and facilities with all appropriate safety precautions.
- b. Planning for the transportation of church groups under the guidance and direction of responsible adults.
- c. Respecting the Sabbath by refraining from travel related to secular activities and, so far as possible, religious activities.
- d. Securing sufficient insurance protection for participants and equipment including transportation.
- e. Safeguarding the health and safety of touring groups by refraining, as far as possible, from night-time travel, irregular meals, and poor housing arrangements.

### ***Organized Physical and Recreational Activities***

#### *1. Objectives of Physical Activities.*

- a. To improve the physical development and the body function of the participant.
- b. To develop the individual's neuromuscular control in the fundamental movements, overall body mechanics, and basic skill in activities which harmonize with the principles outlined in this statement.
- c. To eliminate defects that can be corrected and improve the general physical condition of the person insofar as these may be influenced by a properly designed exercise program.
- d. To achieve mental and intellectual development by the use of strategy, decision under pressure, and organization of thought necessary to function successfully.
- e. To develop the character to include self-discipline, self-reliance, emotional control, respect for the rights of others, and moral

and ethical conduct based on Christian ideals.

f. To provide proper physical experiences and recognition of achievement that will contribute to self-discovery, emotional stability, and cooperative social relationships.

g. To develop the spiritual qualities and social traits that make up a good citizen with Christian morals and ethics to guide in human relationships.

h. To develop recreational skills that have a beneficial function as activities for leisure time throughout life.

i. To develop safety and self-defense skills that will increase the capacity for protecting oneself and assisting others in daily activities and in emergencies. Training in the martial arts and physical activities which emphasize aggressiveness and competitiveness are to be avoided.

j. To develop an awareness of the aesthetic values inherent in physical and recreational activities.

k. To promote a love for nature and the out-of-doors and a realization of the contributions one can make toward living a happier, more abundant life.

l. To aid in the development of a philosophy of life that includes proper attitudes and practices in regard to the care of one's body. This balanced approach to physical, mental, spiritual, and social development has been and may be promoted through such activities as the following:

1) Outdoor recreation and nature activities such as swimming, cycling, horsemanship, skiing, canoeing, gymnastics, gardening, hiking, camping, rock collecting, scuba diving, spelunking, and other recreations.

2) Avocations such as ceramics, rock-cutting, auto mechanics, agriculture, woodwork, leather craft, sculpture, and photography.

3) Formally organized and properly directed intramural programs involving participation of all team members desiring to take part.

### ***Intramural and Recreational Activities***

Intramural means “within walls,” and such activities are confined to and among individuals of each specific church, school, or institution. When properly conducted, they will develop character, physical fitness, and wholesome group interaction. To ensure the wholesome benefits that may be derived from an organized program of intramural and recreational activities, the following objectives are recommended:

1. A committee of representative leaders and participants should be

established to plan and control organized recreational activities in any church, school, or institution.

2. Directors of physical activities should be aware of the participants' need for a balanced program which should include recreation from sources other than organized sports.

3. Appropriate classification of participants should be established on such factors as physical size, age, and skills, and provision should be made to include all who wish to participate.

4. Care should be taken to provide adequate equipment and facilities in the interest of health and safety.

5. Participant and spectator orientation to the philosophy and objectives stated in this statement should be requisite to organized physical activities.

6. Excesses in team and crowd reaction should be avoided and qualified officials should be in charge to ensure a wholesome spirit of participation.

7. Team participants should be rotated periodically to de-emphasize rivalry.

### ***Interschool Sports***

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is opposed to interschool league play (commonly known as varsity athletics) in its educational system. The major rationale for this is:

1. The inherent hazards of competitive rivalry have the potential to be exaggerated in interorganizational events; and

2. The commitments of time, personnel, and finances are usually disproportionate to the number of individuals able to participate.

### ***Conclusions***

1. Christians should function with the highest motives in their quest for athletic excellence.

2. Occasional friendship games or matches involving institutions at joint social gatherings are not classified as intermural or interschool athletics.

3. All people have talents—some more, some less. God expects faithfulness in service regardless of talents or pay (Matthew 20:1-16). Even though talents are distributed differently, God expects individuals to develop what they have to the best of their ability; and they will be given responsibility according to their faithfulness. The Scriptures

remind us, “Whatever you are doing, put your whole heart into it, as if you were doing it for the Lord and not for men, knowing that there is a Master who will give you your heritage as a reward for your service” (Colossians 3:23, NEB).

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\* It is recognized that in many educational systems, promotion from one level of education to another is based on scoring high marks in competitive examinations. Admission to professional and graduate schools, necessary in preparation for certain vocations, is granted to those who excel above their peers in such examinations or by the achievement of high grades in classes. Also success in many crowded vocations can be achieved only by performing at a higher level than others. Since some aspects of competition are inherent to modern life, the genuine Christian will minimize these as much as possible. It is hoped that the guidelines herein stated will be helpful in eradicating the selfish rivalry or unwholesome competition which is detrimental to the development of Christian character.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Nairobi, Kenya, October 7, 1988.*

## **A Statement on Drugs**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church urges every individual and every nation to cooperate in stamping out the worldwide drug epidemic that undermines the social structure of nations, and on the individual level often kills its victims or leads them into lives of crime.

Seventh-day Adventists believe the Bible teaches that each human body is a “temple of the living God,” which should be cared for intelligently (2 Corinthians 6:15-17).

The church’s Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 21 states, “Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible. ... Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them. ... Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness.”

For vibrant living, Seventh-day Adventists urge everyone to follow a lifestyle that avoids tobacco products, alcoholic beverages, and the misuse of drugs.

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*This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, June 1985, at the General Conference Session in New Orleans, Louisiana.*

## **A Statement on the Environment**

Seventh-day Adventists believe that humankind was created in the image of God, thus representing God as His stewards, to rule the natural environment in a faithful and fruitful way.

Unfortunately, corruption and exploitation have been brought into the management of the human domain of responsibility. Increasingly men and women have been involved in a megalomaniacal destruction of the earth's resources, resulting in widespread suffering, environmental disarray, and the threat of climate change. While scientific research needs to continue, it is clear from the accumulated evidence that the increasing emission of destructive gasses, the depletion of the protective mantle of ozone, the massive destruction of the American forests, and the so-called greenhouse effect, are all threatening the earth's eco-system.

These problems are largely due to human selfishness and the egocentric pursuit of getting more and more through ever-increasing production, unlimited consumption, and depletion of nonrenewable resources. The ecological crisis is rooted in humankind's greed and refusal to practice good and faithful stewardship within the divine boundaries of creation.

Seventh-day Adventists advocate a simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people do not step on the treadmill of unbridled consumerism, goods-getting, and production of waste. We call for respect of creation, restraint in the use of the world's resources, reevaluation of one's needs, and reaffirmation of the dignity of created life.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.*

## **Statement on Stewardship of the Environment**

It is the belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that humankind was created in the image of God, and is thus to represent God as His steward and to manage the natural environment in a faithful and fruitful way. Nature is a gift from God.

Unfortunately, men and women have been increasingly involved in an irresponsible destruction of the earth's resources, resulting in widespread suffering, environmental degradation, and the threat of climate change. While scientific research needs to continue, it is clear from the accumulated evidence that the increasing emission of destructive gasses, the massive destruction of the American rain forests, and the depletion of the protective mantle of ozone (the so-called greenhouse effect), are all threatening the earth's eco-system. There are dire predictions of global warming, rising sea levels, increasing frequency of storms and destructive floods, and devastating desertification and droughts.

These problems are largely due to human selfishness and greed which result in ever-increasing production, unlimited consumption, and depletion of nonrenewable resources. Solidarity with future generations is discussed, but the pressure of immediate interests is given priority. The ecological crisis is rooted in humankind's greed and refusal to practice good and faithful stewardship.

The government and people of Costa Rica are to be commended for their support of a comprehensive policy of sustainable development in harmony with nature.

Seventh-day Adventism advocates a simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people do not step on the treadmill of unbridled over-consumption, accumulation of goods, and production of waste. A reformation of lifestyle is called for, based on respect for nature, restraint in the use of the world's resources, reevaluation of one's needs, and reaffirmation of the dignity of created life.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) for release by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the Annual Council Session in San Jose, Costa Rica, October 1-10, 1996.*

## **An Affirmation of Family**

The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred of any human relationship on earth. God instituted the family as the primary provider of the warm and caring relationships for which the human heart yearns.

In the family circle, deep and abiding needs for belonging, love, and intimacy are met in significant ways. God blesses the family and intends that its members will help each other in reaching complete maturity and wholeness. In the Christian family, the personal worth and dignity of each member is affirmed and safeguarded in an environment of respect, equality, openness, and love. In this intimate circle the individual's earliest and most lasting attitudes toward relationships are developed and values are conveyed from one generation to another.

God also intends that a revelation of Himself and His ways be gained from the family relationship. Marriage, with mutual love, honor, intimacy, and lifelong commitment as its fabric; mirrors the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the bond between Christ and His church. The training and correcting of children by their parents and the loving response of offspring to the affection shown them, reflects the experience of believers as children of God. By God's grace the family may be a powerful agency in leading its members to Christ.

Sin has perverted God's ideals for marriage and family. Furthermore, the increasing complexity of society and the enormous stresses which fall upon relationships, lead to crises within many families today. The results are evidenced in lives and relationships that are broken, dysfunctional, and characterized by mistrust, conflict, hostility, and estrangement. Many family members, including parents and grandparents, but especially wives and children, suffer from family violence. Abuse, both emotional and physical, has reached epidemic proportions. The rising number of divorces signals a high degree of marital discord and unhappiness.

Families need to experience renewal and reformation in their relationships. This will help change the destructive attitudes and practices prevalent in many homes today. Through the power of the gospel, family members are enabled to acknowledge their individual sinfulness, to accept each other's brokenness, and to receive Christ's redemptive healing in their lives and relationships. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, and restoration from damaging experiences may not be fully accomplished, where the love of Christ

reigns, His Spirit will promote unity and harmony making such homes channels of life-giving joy and power in the church and community.

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*This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana.*

## Family Violence

Family violence involves an assault of any kind—verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, or active or passive neglect—that is committed by one person or persons against another within a family, whether they are married, related, living together or apart, or divorced. Current international research indicates that family violence is a global problem. It occurs between individuals of all ages and nationalities, at all socioeconomic levels, and in families from all types of religious and non-religious backgrounds. The overall rate of incidence has been found to be similar for city, suburban, and rural communities.

Family violence manifests itself in a number of ways. For example, it may be a physical attack on one's spouse. Emotional assaults such as verbal threats, episodes of rage, depreciation of character, and unrealistic demands for perfection are also abuse. It may take the form of physical coercion and violence within the marital sexual relationship, or the threat of violence through the use of intimidating verbal or nonverbal behavior. It includes behavior such as incest and the mistreatment or neglect of underage children by a parent or another guardian that results in injury or harm. Violence against the elderly may be seen in physical, psychological, sexual, verbal, material, and medical abuse or neglect.

The Bible clearly indicates that the distinguishing mark of Christian believers is the quality of their human relationships in the church and in the family. It is in the spirit of Christ to love and accept, to seek to affirm and build others up, rather than to abuse or tear one another down. There is no room among Christ's followers for tyrannical control and the abuse of power or authority. Motivated by their love for Christ, His disciples are called to show respect and concern for the welfare of others, to accept males and females as equals, and to acknowledge that every person has a right to respect and dignity. Failure to relate to others in this way violates their personhood and devalues human beings created and redeemed by God.

The apostle Paul refers to the church as “the household of faith” which functions as an extended family, offering acceptance, understanding, and comfort to all, especially to those who are hurting or disadvantaged. Scripture portrays the church as a family in which personal and spiritual growth can occur as feelings of betrayal, rejection, and grief give way to feelings of forgiveness, trust, and wholeness. The

Bible also speaks of the Christian's personal responsibility to protect his or her body temple from desecration because it is the dwelling place of God.

Regrettably, family violence occurs in many Christian homes. It can never be condoned. It severely affects the lives of all involved and often results in long term distorted perceptions of God, self, and others.

It is our belief that the church has a responsibility:

1. To care for those involved in family violence and to respond to their needs by:

a. Listening to and accepting those suffering from abuse, loving and affirming them as persons of value and worth.

b. Highlighting the injustices of abuse and speaking out in defense of victims both within the community of faith and in society.

c. Providing a caring, supportive ministry to families affected by violence and abuse, seeking to enable both victims and perpetrators to access counseling with Seventh-day Adventist professionals where available or other professional resources in the community.

d. Encouraging the training and placement of licensed Seventh-day Adventist professional services for both church members and the surrounding communities.

e. Offering a ministry of reconciliation when the perpetrator's repentance makes possible the contemplation of forgiveness and restoration in relationships. Repentance always includes acceptance of full responsibility for the wrongs committed, willingness to make restitution in every way possible, and changes in behavior to eliminate the abuse.

f. Focusing the light of the gospel on the nature of husband-wife, parent-child, and other close relationships, and empowering individuals and families to grow toward God's ideals in their lives together.

g. Guarding against the ostracism of either victims or perpetrators within the family or church community, while firmly holding perpetrators responsible for their actions.

2. To strengthen family life by:

a. Providing family life education which is grace-oriented and includes a biblical understanding of the mutuality, equality, and respect indispensable to Christian relationships.

b. Increasing understanding of the factors that contribute to family violence.

c. Developing ways to prevent abuse and violence and the recurring cycle often observed within families and across generations.

d. Rectifying commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up family violence. For example, while parents are instructed by God to redemptively correct their children, this responsibility does not give license for the use of harsh, punitive disciplinary measures.

3. To accept our moral responsibility to be alert and responsive to abuse within the families of our congregations and our communities, and to declare that such abusive behavior is a violation of Seventh-day Adventist Christian standards. Any indications or reports of abuse must not be minimized but seriously considered. For church members to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and possibly extend family violence.

If we are to live as children of the light, we must illuminate the darkness where family violence occurs in our midst. We must care for one another, even when it would be easier to remain uninvolved.

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The above statement is informed by principles expressed in the following scriptural passages: Exodus 20:12; Matthew 7:12; 20:25-28; Mark 9:33-45; John 13:34; Romans 12:10, 13; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 5:2, 3, 21-27; 6:1-4; Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 1 Timothy 5:5-8.

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*This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) on August 27, 1996, and was sent for consideration by the Annual Council Session in San Jose, Costa Rica, October 1-10, 1996.*

## **A Seventh-day Adventist Statement on Gambling**

Gambling—defined as a paid game of chance—increasingly impacts more and more people all over the world. The concept of winning at the expense of others has become a modern curse. Society pays the escalating cost of associated crime, victim support, and family breakdown which erodes the quality of life. Seventh-day Adventists have consistently opposed gambling as it is incompatible with Christian principles. It is not an appropriate form of entertainment or a legitimate means of raising funds.

Gambling violates Christian principles of stewardship. God identifies work as the appropriate method for gaining material benefit; not the playing of a game of chance while dreaming to gain at the expense of others. Gambling has a massive impact on society. Financial costs result from crime committed to pay for the gambling habit, increased policing, and legal expenses, as well as associated crimes involving drugs and prostitution. Gambling does not generate income; rather it takes from those who often can ill afford to lose and gives to a few winners, the greatest winner of course being the gambling operator. The idea that gambling operations can have a positive economic benefit is an illusion. In addition, gambling violates the Christian sense of responsibility for family, neighbors, the needy, and the church.<sup>1</sup>

Gambling creates false hopes. The gambling dream of “winning big” replaces true hope with a false dream of a statistically improbable chance of winning. Christians are not to put their hope in wealth. The Christian hope in a glorious future promised by God is “sure and certain”- unlike and opposite to the gambling dream. The great gain that the Bible points to is “godliness with contentment.”<sup>2</sup>

Gambling is addictive. The addictive quality of gambling is clearly incompatible with a Christian lifestyle. The church seeks to help, not blame, those suffering from gambling or other addictions. Christians recognize that they are responsible before God for their resources and lifestyle.<sup>3</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church organization does not condone raffles or lotteries to raise funds and it urges members not to participate in any such activities, however well-intentioned. Neither does the church condone state-sponsored gambling. The Seventh-day Adventist Church calls on all authorities to prevent the ever-increasing availability of gambling with its damaging effects on individuals and society.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church rejects gambling as defined above and will not solicit nor accept funding that is clearly derived from gambling.

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<sup>1</sup>1 Thessalonians 4:11; Genesis 3:19; Matthew 19:21; Acts 9:36; 2 Corinthians 9:8, 9

<sup>2</sup>1 Timothy 6:17; Hebrews 11:1; 1 Timothy 6:6

<sup>3</sup>1 Corinthians 6:19, 20

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*This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), for release at the time of the General Conference Session in Toronto, Canada, June 29-July 9, 2000.*

## **Operating Principles for Health-Care Institutions**

### ***Principles***

1. Christ ministered to the whole person. Following His example, the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church includes a ministry of healing to the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. The ministry of healing includes care and compassion for the sick and the suffering. It also includes the maintenance of health. Teaching the positive benefits of following the laws of health, the interrelationship of spiritual and natural laws, man's accountability to these laws, and the grace of Christ which assures victorious living are integrated in the ministry of healing.

2. Health-care institutions (hospitals, medical/dental clinics, nursing and retirement homes, rehabilitation centers, etc.) function as an integral part of the total ministry of the church and follow church standards including maintaining the sacredness of the Sabbath by promoting a Sabbath atmosphere for staff and patients, avoiding routine business, elective diagnostic services, and elective therapies on Sabbath. These standards also include the promotion of an ovo-lactovegetarian diet free of stimulants and alcohol and an environment free of tobacco smoke. Control of appetite shall be promoted, use of drugs with a potential for abuse shall be controlled, and techniques involving the control of one mind by another shall not be permitted. The institutions are governed as a function of the church with activities and practices clearly identified as the unique Christian witness of Seventh-day Adventists.

3. In harmony with Christ's reaffirmation of the dignity of man and His demonstration of love, which forgives and cares regardless of the past and maintains the right for individual choice in the future, Seventh-day Adventist health-care institutions give high priority to personal dignity and human relationships. This includes appropriate diagnosis and treatment by competent personnel; a safe, caring environment conducive to the healing of mind, body, and spirit; and education in healthful habits of living. It also includes supportive care of the patient and family through the dying process.

4. Health-care policies and medical procedures must always reflect a high regard and concern for the value of human life as well as individual dignity.

5. Seventh-day Adventist health-care institutions operate as part of the community and nation in which they function. In representing the

love of Christ to these communities, the health of the community and the nation is a concern of each institution. Laws of the land are respected and the regulations for the operation of institutions and licensors of personnel are followed.

6. The institutions welcome clergy of all creeds to visit their parishioners.

7. The mission of institutions in representing Christ to the community, and especially to those who utilize their services, is fulfilled through a compassionate, competent staff which upholds the practices and standards of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the development of the staff institutions regularly schedule classes which assist the staff in keeping up to date professionally, growing in understanding, and in sharing the love of God. Long-range staff planning supports formal education of prospective staff including utilizing an institution for clinical practice for students.

8. Institutions must operate in a financially responsible manner and in harmony with the *Working Policy* of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

9. Primary prevention and health education shall be an integral part of the health emphasis of health-care institutions.

10. The administration and operation of individual health-care institutions shall be conducted in consultation with the Health and Temperance Department on a regular and continuing basis. Communication shall include the mission/conference, union, division, and General Conference Health and Temperance Departments as circumstances and occasion may indicate.

### ***Establishment and Closure of Health-Care Institutions***

1. When consideration is being given to the opening of a new institution, building a major addition, or evaluating the continued operation of an existing institution, consideration shall be given to:

a. The long-range plans of the church in that area and whether the institution facilitates the mission of the church.

b. The health-care needs of the area.

c. The available resources, especially finances, personnel, and equipment, to operate the institution.

d. Government regulations for the operation of the institution.

e. Government regulations for closing an institution.

- f. The impact which the opening or closing of the institution will make on the church in the area and on the community at large.
- g. The educational needs of the church.

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*This statement was released by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Nairobi, Kenya, October 1988.*

## **Seventh-day Adventist Call to Commitment to Health and Healing**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms the commitment and objectives of its Health Ministry aiming to achieve the well being of its members and the communities it serves, and improving global health.<sup>1</sup>

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists reiterates its commitment to the principles of human dignity and equity, social justice, freedom, self-determination, access to clean food and water, and non-discriminatory universal access to available health care. Through its ministry of preaching, teaching, healing, and discipling the Church seeks to represent the mission of Jesus Christ in such a way as to be:

1. Regarded globally as teaching a wholistic model of evidence based healthful living in primary health care.
2. Seen at all times as a trusted, transparent ally of organizations with compatible goals and vision, in alleviating suffering and addressing basic health and well-being.
3. Recognized for the unconditional scope of its embrace of all persons seeking this basic health and well-being.
4. Involved not only administratively but also functionally at every level including each congregation and church member in this ministry of health and healing.

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<sup>1</sup> This statement follows the deliberations and recommendations of the Global Conference on Health and Lifestyle held in Geneva July 2009 in collaboration with the World Health Organization, and calls for cooperation with similar credible bodies aiming to improve global health.

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*This document was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland on October 14, 2009.*

## **A Statement on the Holy Scriptures**

The Holy Scriptures lie at the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of purpose, message, and mission. We respect the Bible as the message of God transmitted through human writers. Although the format of the Scriptures manifests itself in human language, background, and historical setting, its content consists of divine messages conveyed to humanity as a whole, and especially to believers in God. Above the diversity reflected in human language stands the unifying truth that ties together the whole into the Word of God.

The Scriptures provide authentic, reliable reports of the Creator God and His activities in bringing into existence the world as well as its inhabitants. They provide knowledge of origins, give meaning to life, and disclose the ultimate destiny of humanity.

Above all, the Scriptures bear testimony to Jesus Christ who is the ultimate revelation, God among us. Both Old and New Testaments bear witness to Him. For these reasons the Holy Scriptures stand as the infallible revelation of God's will, the norm for Christian values and life, the measure of all things within human experience, and the sole reliable guide to salvation in Christ.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.*

## Statement on Home and Family

The health and prosperity of society is directly related to the well-being of its constituent parts—the family unit. Today, as probably never before, the family is in trouble. Social commentators decry the disintegration of modern family life. The traditional Christian concept of marriage between one man and one woman is under assault. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, in this time of family crisis, encourages every family member to strengthen his or her spiritual dimension and family relationship through mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility.

The church's Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 22 states the marital relationship "is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. ... Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving disciplinarian, ever tender and caring, who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God."

Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the church, stated: "The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. Out of the heart are the 'issues of life' (Proverbs 4:23); and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 349).

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*This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on June 27, 1985, at the General Conference Session in New Orleans, Louisiana.*

## Homelessness and Poverty

In a world ravaged by sin, the bitter fruits of greed, war, and ignorance are multiplying. Even in so called “affluent societies” the homelessness and the poor are growing populations. More than 10,000 people starve to death every day. Two billion more are malnourished, and thousands more go blind annually because of dietary deficiency. Approximately two-thirds of the world’s population remains caught in a cycle of hunger-sickness-death.

There are some who bear liability for their condition, but the majority of these individuals and families are destituted by political, economic, cultural, or social events largely beyond their control.

Historically, those in such circumstances have found succor and advocacy in the hearts of the followers of Jesus Christ. Caring institutions are in many cases begun by the church and later assumed by government agencies, or vice versa. These agencies, aside from any ideological altruism, reflect society’s recognition that it is in its own best interest to deal compassionately with the less fortunate.

Social scientists tell us that a number of ills find fertile ground in the conditions of poverty. Feelings of hopelessness, alienation, envy and resentment often lead to antisocial attitudes and behavior. Then society is left to pay for the after-effects of such ills through its courts, prisons, and welfare systems. Poverty and misfortune as such do not cause crime and provide no excuse for it. But when the claims of compassion are denied, discouragement, and even resentment are likely to follow.

The claims upon the Christian’s compassion are not ill-founded. They do not spring from any legal or even social contract theory, but from the clear teaching of scripture: “He has showed you, O man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 7:8 RSV).

The 58th chapter of Isaiah is precious to Seventh-day Adventists. We see our responsibility in this chapter as those raised up to be “The repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in” (verse 12).

The call is to restore and “to loose the bands of wickedness ... to deal thy bread to the hungry ... bring the poor that are cast out to thy house ... when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him” (verses 6, 7). So as repairers of the breach, we are to restore and care for the poor. If we carry out the principles of the law of God in acts of mercy and love, we

will represent the character of God to the world.

In effecting Christ's ministry today, we must do as He did, and not only preach the gospel to the poor, but heal the sick, feed the hungry, and raise the downcast (see Luke 4:18, 19; Matthew 14:14). But verse 16 explains that it was so that "they need not go away." Christ's own example is determinative for His followers.

In Christ's response to Judas' feigned concern for the poor: "For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me" (Matthew 26:11 RSV), we are reminded that it is the "Living Bread" that people most desperately need. However, we also recognize the inseparables between the physical and the spiritual. By supporting those church and public policies that relieve suffering, and by individual and united efforts of compassion, we augment that very spiritual endeavor.

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*This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana.*

## **Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus. We also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Leviticus 20:7-21; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine creation intent: "'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?" So they are no longer two, but one'" (Matthew 19:4-6, NIV). For these reasons Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships.

Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the instruction and example of Jesus. He affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices.

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*This statement was voted during the Annual Council Session of the General Conference Executive Committee on Sunday, October 3, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

## Statement on Ethical Considerations Regarding Human Cloning

For a number of decades, the prospect that new members of the human family might be produced by cloning was considered farfetched. Recent advances in genetic and reproductive biology, however, indicate that techniques for cloning humans may soon be developed. With this prospect comes the Christian responsibility to address profound ethical issues associated with human cloning. As Christians, with firm belief in God's creative and redemptive power, Seventh-day Adventists accept the responsibility to enunciate ethical principles that emerge from their faith commitments.

Cloning includes all those processes by which living plants or animals are replicated by asexual means—methods that do not involve the fusion of egg and sperm. Many natural processes are forms of cloning. For example, microorganisms, like common yeast, reproduce by splitting into two daughter cells that are clones of the parent cell and each other. Cutting a twig from a rose bush or grapevine and propagating it into a complete plant also creates a clone of the original plant. Similarly, many simple animals, such as starfish, can regenerate complete organisms from small parts of a predecessor. Thus the biological principle of cloning is not new.

The new technique is known as *somatic cell nuclear transfer*. The essence of this method is to take a cell from an existing individual and manipulate it so that it behaves like an embryonic cell. Given the proper conditions, an embryonic cell can proliferate and generate a complete individual.

At present, this cellular reprogramming is accomplished by putting a complete adult cell inside a larger egg cell whose nucleus has been removed. The egg that is used in this process serves the role of an incubator, providing an essential environment to reactivate genes of the adult cell. The egg contributes to the offspring only the small amount of genetic material associated with its cytoplasm, not its nuclear genetic material, as occurs in sexual reproduction. The altered egg must then be implanted in an adult female for gestation.

Biologists have developed this technique as a tool for animal husbandry. By this means, they hope to create a herd of valued animals that are genetically identical to a selected individual. The potential

benefits from this technology, including the expectation of products for treating human diseases, are of great interest to researchers and to the biotechnology industry. However, the same technological capacity could be used for human reproduction and thus raises serious ethical concerns.

First among these concerns is medical safety. If the current technique of somatic cell nuclear transfer were to be used in humans, ova would need to be obtained from donors. Most of these would perish because of cellular manipulations during early embryonic growth in the laboratory. Others would be lost after implantation, spontaneously aborted at various stages of fetal development. In this respect, sensitivity to the value of embryonic and fetal life would be similar to the development of other methods of assisted reproduction, such as *in vitro* fertilization. There would likely be an increased risk of birth defects in children brought to term. At present, concern about physical harm to developing human lives is sufficient to rule out the use of this technology.

However, even if the success rates of cloning were to improve and the medical risks were diminished, a number of major concerns would remain. For example, is there anything intrinsically problematic with creating an individual who is not produced through fertilization of an egg by a sperm? Further study is needed to resolve questions regarding the essential nature of procreation in God's design.

Another of the most often expressed concerns is that the dignity and uniqueness of a cloned person may be jeopardized. This risk includes the psychological harm that might be experienced by an individual who would be what some have called the "delayed identical twin" of the individual who provided the initial cell. Do existing persons have the right to exercise such a level of control over the genetic destiny of a new individual?

Concern also exists that human cloning might undermine family relationships. Commitments to both the unitive and the procreative functions of human sexual relationships might be diminished. For example, the questionable practice of using a gestational surrogate may, at times, be considered. The use of a donor cell from an individual other than the married couple may introduce problems of relationships and responsibilities.

An additional major risk is that cloning could lead to expedient uses of those who are cloned, with their value assigned primarily on the basis of their utility. For example, there could be a temptation to clone

individuals to serve as sources of transplantable organs. Others have worried about the deliberate creation of subservient individuals whose autonomy would be violated. Egotistical or narcissistic individuals might be inclined to use the technology in order to “duplicate” themselves.

Finally, the financial costs of cloning would likely be considerable even after significant technological improvements. If human cloning were commercialized, conflicting interests might add to the risk of abuse.

While this is only a partial list of potential risks and misuses of human cloning, it should be sufficient to give pause to Christians who wish to apply the moral principles of their faith to the matter of human cloning. Still, it is important that concerns about the abuses of a technology not blind us to the possibilities of using it to meet genuine human needs.<sup>1</sup> The possibility of human cloning, even if remote, motivates this statement of relevant Christian principles.

The following ethical principles are intended to apply to somatic cell nuclear transfer if that technology is ever applied to human beings. The rapid pace of progress in this field will require periodic review of these principles in light of new developments.

1. *Protection of vulnerable human life.* Scripture is clear in its call to protect human life, especially those lives that are most vulnerable (Deuteronomy 10:17-19; Isaiah 1:16, 17; Matthew 25:31-46). The biological technology of cloning is ethically unacceptable whenever it poses disproportionate risk of harm to human life.

2. *Protection of human dignity.* Human beings were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27) and were thus endowed with personal dignity that calls for respect and protection (Genesis 9:6). Cloning may threaten human dignity in a number of ways and must thus be approached with resolute moral vigilance. Any use of this technology that undermines or diminishes the personal dignity or autonomy of human beings must be rejected. This moral prohibition applies to all human cloning that would value human life primarily for its utilitarian function or commercial value.

3. *Alleviating human suffering.* It is a Christian responsibility to prevent suffering and to preserve the quality of human life (Acts 10:38; Luke 9:2). If it is possible to prevent genetic disease through the use of somatic cell nuclear transfer, the use of this technology may be in keeping with the goal of preventing avoidable suffering.

4. *Family support.* God’s ideal plan is for children to develop in the

context of a loving family with the presence, participation, and support of both mother and father (Proverbs 22:6; Psalms 128:1-3; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Timothy 5:8). Any use of somatic cell nuclear transfer as a means of assisting human reproduction should thus be within the context of the fidelity of marriage and support of stable family life. As with other forms of assisted reproduction, the involvement of third parties, such as surrogates, introduces moral problems that are best avoided.

5. *Stewardship.* The principles of Christian stewardship (Luke 14:28; Proverbs 3:9) are important for all types of assisted human reproduction including the possibility of somatic cell nuclear transfer, which is likely to be very costly. Married couples seeking such assistance should consider the expenses involved in terms of their exercise of faithful stewardship.

6. *Truthfulness.* Honest communication is one of Scripture's mandates (Proverbs 12:22; Ephesians 4:15, 25). Any proposed use of cloning should be informed by the most accurate information available, including the nature of the procedure, its potential risks, and its costs.

7. *Understanding God's creation.* God intends for human beings to grow in their appreciation and understanding of His creation, which includes knowledge regarding the human body (Matthew 6:26-29; Psalms 8:3-9; 139:1-6; 13-16). For this reason, efforts to understand the biological structures of life through ethical research should be encouraged.

Given our present state of knowledge and the current refinement of somatic cell nuclear transfer, the use of this technique for human cloning is deemed unacceptable by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Given our responsibility to alleviate disease and to enhance the quality of human life, continued appropriate research with animals is deemed acceptable.

### ***Glossary:***

*Allele.* One of the alternative forms of a particular gene. Each gene of an organism can exist in slightly different forms. Those small differences are responsible for some of the variations that we observe in different individuals within natural populations. Different alleles for genes that produce the blood protein hemoglobin, for example, will affect how well the blood cells will carry oxygen.

*Clones.* Two or more individuals with identical genetic material. Human clones occur naturally in the form of "identical twins." Though twins begin life with the same genetic material they, nevertheless, develop distinct physical differences (fingerprints, for example).

Furthermore, they become fully unique individuals with distinct personalities as a result of their different experiences and independent choices. An individual conceived by somatic cell nuclear transfer would be at least as different from his or her progenitor as natural twins.

*Cytoplasm.* All the contents of a cell, other than the nucleus. The cytoplasm is the site where many important processes occur, including the assembly of proteins and enzymes, and the manufacture of cell products. The cytoplasm also contains the mitochondria, small bodies that are responsible for the breakdown of food to produce the energy needed for the activities of the cell.

*Embryo.* The early stages of development of a fertilized egg. In somatic cell nuclear transfer, it refers to the early developmental stages of an enucleated egg after it has been fused with a somatic cell.

*Enucleated egg.* An egg cell from which the nucleus has been removed. This is usually accomplished by penetrating the cell with a fine glass needle and withdrawing the nucleus while observing the process under a microscope.

*Germ cell.* Reproductive cell. In mammals and humans, the germ cells are the sperm and eggs (ova).

*Gestation.* The period of time it takes an embryo to develop in the uterus from a fertilized egg to a newborn offspring. Gestation begins with implantation of the embryo in the uterus and ends with birth.

*Nucleus.* The structure within a cell that contains the genetic material or genes. The nucleus is surrounded by a membrane that separates it from the remainder of the cell.

*Ovum* (plural: *ova*). An egg cell. A female productive cell.

*Somatic cell.* Any cell from the body of a mammal or human, other than the germ cells.

*Somatic cell nuclear transfer.* The technical name for the method used to produce the first animal clone, a sheep called “Dolly.” Though the name suggests that a nucleus from a somatic cell was used, in fact, the complete somatic cell was fused with an enucleated egg.

*Sperm.* A male reproductive cell.

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<sup>1</sup>There may be future situations in which human cloning could be considered beneficial and morally acceptable. It is possible, for example, to imagine circumstances in which cloning may be contemplated within the context of marriage as the only available means of reproduction for a couple who cannot participate in normal procreation. In other cases, potential parents may be carriers of defective genetic alleles, and they may wish to avoid the risk of giving birth to a child with a genetic disease. The use of somatic cell nuclear transfer might assist such parents in having a child who would be free of genetic disorder. Of course, many of the concerns about personal identity and dignity would still remain even in the context of family fidelity. As with other forms of assisted human reproduction, potential blessings of somatic cell nuclear transfer must be weighed against the risks.

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*This statement was voted during the Annual Council Session of the General Conference Executive Committee on Sunday, September 27, 1998, in Iguacu Falls, Brazil.*

## **A Statement on Human Relations**

Seventh-day Adventists deplore and seek to combat all forms of discrimination based on race, tribe, nationality, color, or gender. We believe that every person was created in the image of God, who made all nations of one blood (Acts 17:26). We endeavor to carry on the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ, who died for the whole world so that in Him “there is neither Jew nor Greek” (Galatians 3:28). Any form of racism eats the heart out of the Christian gospel.

One of the most troubling aspects of our times is the manifestation of racism and tribalism in many societies, sometimes with violence, always with the denigration of men and women. As a worldwide body in more than 200 nations, Seventh-day Adventists seek to manifest acceptance, love, and respect toward all, and to spread this healing message throughout society.

The equality of all people is one of the tenets of our church. Our Fundamental Belief No. 13 states: “In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him, and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.”

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.*

## **Statement on 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

From its very inception in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has supported human rights. Inspired by biblical values, the early Adventists were involved in the struggle against slavery and injustice. They claimed the right of every person to choose beliefs according to conscience and to practice and teach his or her religion in full freedom, without discrimination, always respecting the equal rights of others. Seventh-day Adventists are convinced that in religion the exercise of force is contrary to God's principles.

In promoting religious freedom, family life, education, health, mutual assistance, and meeting crying human need, Seventh-day Adventists affirm the dignity of the human person created in the image of God.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights was written and adopted by individuals who had emerged from the unprecedented destruction, disorientation, and distress of World War II. This harrowing experience gave them a vision of and desire for a future world of peace and freedom. Coming from the best and highest part of the human heart, the Universal Declaration is a fundamental document standing firmly for human dignity, liberty, equality, and non-discrimination of minorities. Article 18, which upholds unconditionally religious liberty in belief and practice, is of special importance, because freedom of religion is the basic human right which undergirds and upholds all human rights.

Today the UDHR is often violated, not least Article 18. Intolerance frequently raises its ugly head, despite the human rights progress accomplished in many nations. The Seventh-day Adventist Church urges the United Nations, government authorities, religious leaders and believers, and non-government organizations to consistently work for the implementation of this Declaration. Politicians, trade union leaders, teachers, employers, media representatives, and all opinion leaders should give strong support to human rights. This would respond to and help reduce growing and violent religious extremism, intolerance, hate crimes and discrimination based either on religion or anti-religious

secularism. In this way, the Universal Declaration will grow in practical importance and luster, and never risk becoming an irrelevant document.

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*This statement was voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee, November 17, 1998, and released by the General Conference Office of Public Affairs.*

## **Seventh-day Adventist Church Statement on the Crisis in Kosovo**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church expresses its grave concern regarding the situation in Yugoslavia, in particular in the Kosovo province. While being concerned about the well-being of its many members and operation of its church organization in this part of the world, the church is even more concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in Kosovo and elsewhere in the region, with hundreds of thousands of displaced and homeless people.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a worldwide religious community and, as a matter of principle, endeavors not to be involved in political issues. The church has consistently refused to do so and intends to maintain this position in the current crisis centering on Kosovo. Nevertheless, it rejects the use of violence as a method for conflict resolution, be it ethnic cleansing or bombing.

With the church's long tradition of working actively and quietly for human rights, including in particular religious freedom and the rights of minorities, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is ready to do its part. The church will endeavor to do so through its world organizational structure, in cooperation with the leaders and members of the church in the Balkan region, to foster a deeper understanding of and greater respect for human rights and non-discrimination, to meet crying human needs, and to work for reconciliation between national, ethnic, and religious communities.

In the current crisis, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to doing what it can, through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA, the humanitarian agency established by the church), to bring relief to the many thousands of refugees, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or social status, who have fled from the Kosovo province into neighboring states, while also closely monitoring the situation and needs of the civilian population in Yugoslavia, in and outside of Kosovo. The church will utilize its infrastructure in the region in its relief efforts.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church urges the international community and government authorities involved to push for an early end to the crisis on the basis of Christian, moral, and ethical principles of human rights, and good faith negotiations that are fair to all concerned and which may lead to better relationships.

The church further asks all its members, and the faith community in

general, to pray for divine assistance in restoring peace and goodwill to this suffering region.

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*This statement was voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee, April 6, 1999, and released by the General Conference Office of Public Affairs.*

## A Statement on Literacy

The Seventh-day Adventist Church values the unique role that women play in fulfilling the church's mission to spread the gospel. Part of that mission involves meeting the physical, intellectual, and social needs of those around us, just as Jesus did when He lived on earth.

Research indicates that six major challenges in the lives of all human beings—women in particular—are: literacy, poverty, abuse, health, work hours and conditions, and opportunities for training and mentoring. To better meet these needs, the Office of Women's Ministries of the Adventist Church has launched a major thrust on literacy training for 1995.

The inability to read impacts every aspect of a person's life—earning power, career opportunities, access to health-care information, and even the ability to raise a child properly. Without the skill of reading, few doors of opportunity can ever be opened.

Teaching reading creates endless possibilities for people to be informed concerning such topics as careers, health, parenting, and marriage, and offers the teacher unexcelled opportunities for touching lives through ministry.

Adventists recognize a more vital reason to share the gift of reading. We believe that the ability to read God's Word—the good news of salvation—should not be reserved for the privileged few. We assert that every man, woman, and child should have access to the truths and uplifting power of the Bible.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.*

## **An Affirmation of Marriage**

Issues related to marriage can be seen in their true light only as they are viewed against the background of the divine ideal for marriage. Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus Christ to be both monogamous and heterosexual, a lifelong union of loving companionship between a man and a woman. In the culmination of His creative activity, God fashioned humankind as male and female in His own image; and He instituted marriage, a covenant-based union of the two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as “one flesh.”

Arising from the diversity of the two human genders, the oneness of marriage images in a singular way the unity within diversity of the Godhead. Throughout Scripture, the heterosexual union in marriage is elevated as a symbol of the bond between Deity and humanity. It is a human witness to God’s self-giving love and covenant with His people. The harmonious affiliation of a man and a woman in marriage provides a microcosm of social unity that is time-honored as a core ingredient of stable societies. Further, the Creator intended married sexuality not only to serve a unitive purpose, but to provide for the propagation and perpetuation of the human family. In the divine purpose, procreation springs from and is entwined with the same process whereby husband and wife may find joy, pleasure, and physical completeness. It is to a husband and wife whose love has enabled them to know each other in a deep sexual bond that a child may be entrusted. Their child is a living embodiment of their oneness. The growing child thrives in the atmosphere of married love and unity in which he or she was conceived and has the benefit of a relationship with each of the natural parents.

The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is affirmed as the divinely ordained foundation of the family and social life and the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression. However, the estate of marriage is not God’s only plan for the meeting of human relational needs or for knowing the experience of family. Singleness and the friendship of singles are within the divine design as well. The companionship and support of friends looms in importance in both biblical testaments. The fellowship of the church, the household of God, is available to all regardless of their married state. Scripture, however, places a solid demarcation socially and sexually

between such friendship relations and marriage.

To this biblical view of marriage the Seventh-day Adventist Church adheres without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. Because marriage has been corrupted by sin, the purity and beauty of marriage as it was designed by God needs to be restored. Through an appreciation of the redemptive work of Christ and the work of His Spirit in human hearts, the original purpose of marriage may be recovered and the delightful and wholesome experience of marriage realized by a man and a woman who join their lives in the marriage covenant.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) on April 23, 1996.*

## A Statement on Peace

One of the great political and ethical issues of our day is the question of war and peace. It is both complicated and convoluted. Despair hovers around hears and minds, for millions expect a nuclear holocaust without the basic hope of afterlife or eternal life.

Today there is a new situation, unparalleled in history. Human beings have developed the means of humanity's own destruction, means that are becoming more and more "effective" and "perfected"—although these are hardly the right words. Since World War II, civilians are no longer just occasionally or incidentally harmed; they have become the target.

Christians believe that war is the result of sin. Since the Fall of man, strife has been a perennial fact of human existence. "Satan delights in war. . . . It is his object to incite nations to war against one another" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 589). It is a diversionary tactic to interfere with the gospel task. While global conflict has been prevented during the past 40 years, there have been perhaps 150 wars between nations and within nations, with millions perishing in these conflicts.

Today virtually every government claims it is working for disarmament and peace. Often the known facts appear to point in a different direction. Nations spend a huge portion of their financial resources to stockpile nuclear and other war materials, sufficient to destroy civilization as it is known today. News reports focus on the millions of men and women and children who suffer and die in wars and civil unrest and have to live in squalor and poverty. The arms race, with its colossal waste of human funds and resources, is one of the most obvious obscenities of our day.

It is therefore right and proper for Christians to promote peace. The Seventh-day Adventist Church urges every nation to beat its swords into plowshares" and its "spears into pruninghooks" (Isaiah 2:4). The church's Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 7 states that men and women were "created for the glory of God" and were "called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment," not to destroy or hurt one another. Christ Himself said, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

While peace cannot be found in official church pronouncements, the authentic Christian church is to work for peace between the first and second advents of Christ. However, hope in the Second Coming must not

live in a social vacuum. The Adventist hope must manifest and translate itself into deep concern for the well-being of every member of the human family. True, Christian action today and tomorrow will not of itself usher in the coming kingdom of peace; God alone brings this kingdom by the return of His son.

In a world filled with hate and struggle, a world of ideological strife and of military conflicts, Seventh-day Adventists desire to be known as peacemakers and work for worldwide justice and peace under Christ as the head of a new humanity.

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*This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on June 27, 1985, at the General Conference Session in New Orleans, Louisiana.*

## **A Seventh-day Adventist Call for Peace**

We are living in an increasingly unstable and dangerous world. Recent events have resulted in a heightened sense of vulnerability and personal or corporate fear of violence. Throughout the world, countless millions are haunted by war and apprehension and are oppressed by hate and intimidation.

### ***Total War***

Humanity has, since the middle of the last century, been living in an age of total war. Total war implies the theoretical possibility that, except for the providence of God, earth's inhabitants could wipe out their entire civilization. Nuclear weapons and biochemical arms of mass destruction are aimed at centers of population. Whole nations and societies are mobilized or targeted for war, and when such war erupts it is carried on with the greatest violence and destruction. The justification of war has become more complex, even though advances in technology make possible greater precision in destroying targets with a minimum of civilian casualties.

### ***A New Dimension***

While both the United Nations and various religious bodies have proclaimed the first decade of the 21st century as a decade for the promotion of peace and security in the place of violence in its various forms, a new and insidious dimension of violence has emerged: organized international terrorism. Terrorism itself is not new, but worldwide terrorist networks are. Another new factor is the appeal to so-called divine mandates as the rationale for terrorist activity under the guise of culture war, or even "religious" war.

The rise of international terrorism makes it clear that it is not only a nation or state that makes war, but human beings in various combinations. As one of the leading founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church pointed out a century ago, "The inhumanity of man toward man is our greatest sin."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, human nature is prone to violence. From a Christian perspective, all this inhumanity is really part of a cosmic war, the great controversy between good and evil.

### ***Terrorism Exploits the Concept of God***

Terrorists, in particular those having motivations based on religion, claim that their cause is absolute and that taking lives indiscriminately is fully justified. While they claim to be representing the justice of God, they wholly fail to represent the great love of God.

Furthermore, such international terrorism is totally at odds with the concept of religious liberty. The former is based on political and/or religious extremism and fundamentalistic fanaticism which arrogate the right to impose a certain religious conviction or worldview and to destroy those who oppose their convictions. Imposing one's religious views on other people, by means of inquisition and terror, involves an endeavor to exploit and manipulate God by turning Him into an idol of evil and violence. The result is a disregard for the dignity of human beings created in the image of God.

While it is inevitable that nations and people will try to defend themselves by responding in a military way to violence and terror which sometimes results in short-term success-lasting answers to deep problems of division in society cannot be achieved by using violent means.

### ***The Pillars of Peace***

From both a Christian and practical perspective, any lasting peace involves at least four ingredients: dialogue, justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

*Dialogue.* There needs to be dialogue and discussion in place of diatribe and the cry for war. Lasting peace does not result from violent means, but is achieved by negotiation, dialogue, and, inevitably, political compromise. In the long run, reasoned discourse has superior authority over military force. In particular, Christians should always be ready to “reason together,” as the Bible says.

*Justice.* Unfortunately, the world is rampant with injustice and a fallout of injustice is strife. Justice and peace join hands, as do injustice and war. Poverty and exploitation breed discontent and hopelessness, which lead to desperation and violence.

On the other hand, “God’s word sanctions no policy that will enrich one class by the oppression and suffering of another.”<sup>2</sup>

Justice requires respect for human rights, in particular religious liberty which deals with the profoundest human aspirations and undergirds all human rights. Justice requires nondiscrimination, respect

for human dignity and equality, and a more equitable distribution of the necessities of life. Economic and social policies will either produce peace or discontent. Seventh-day Adventist concern for social justice is expressed through the support and promotion of religious liberty, and through organizations and departments of the church which work to relieve poverty and conditions of marginalization. Such efforts on the part of the church can, over time, reduce resentment and terrorism.

*Forgiveness.* Forgiveness is usually thought of as necessary to heal broken interpersonal relationships. It is highlighted in the prayer Jesus asked His followers to pray (Matthew 6:12). However, we must not overlook the corporate, societal, and even international dimensions. If there is to be peace, it is vital to drop the burdens of the past, to move beyond well-worn battle grounds, and to work toward reconciliation. At a minimum, this requires overlooking past injustices and violence; and, at its best, it involves forgiveness which absorbs the pain without retaliating.

Because of sinful human nature and the resulting violence, some form of forgiveness is necessary in order to break the vicious cycle of resentment, hate, and revenge on all levels. Forgiveness goes against the grain of human nature. It is natural for human beings to deal in terms of revenge and the return of evil for evil.

There is, therefore, first of all the need to foster a culture of forgiveness in the church. As Christians and church leaders, it is our duty to help individuals and nations to liberate themselves from the shackles of past violence and refuse to reenact year after year, and even generation after generation, the hatred and violence generated by past experiences.

*Reconciliation.* Forgiveness provides a foundation for reconciliation and the accompanying restoration of relationships that have become estranged and hostile. Reconciliation is the only way to success on the road to cooperation, harmony, and peace.

We call upon Christian churches and leaders to exercise a ministry of reconciliation and act as ambassadors of goodwill, openness, and forgiveness. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17-19.) This will always be a difficult, sensitive task. While trying to avoid the many political pitfalls along the way, we must nevertheless proclaim liberty in the land—liberty from persecution, discrimination, abject poverty, and other forms of injustice. It is a Christian responsibility to endeavor to provide protection for those who are in danger of being violated, exploited, and terrorized.

### ***Support of Quality of Life***

Silent efforts of religious bodies and individuals behind the scenes are invaluable. But this is not enough: “We are not just creatures of a spiritual environment. We are actively interested in everything that shapes the way we live and we are concerned about the well-being of our planet.” The Christian ministry of reconciliation will and must “contribute to the restoration of human dignity, equality, and unity through the grace of God in which human beings see each other as members of the family of God.”<sup>3</sup>

Churches should not only be known for spiritual contributions—though these are foundational—but also for their support of quality of life, and in this connection peacemaking is essential. We need to repent from expressions or deeds of violence that Christians and churches, throughout history and even more recently, have either been involved in as actors, have tolerated, or have tried to justify. We appeal to Christians and people of good will all around the world to take an active role in making and sustaining peace, thus being part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

### ***Peacemakers***

The Seventh-day Adventist Church wishes to stand for the uncoercive harmony of God’s coming kingdom. This requires bridge-building to promote reconciliation between the various sides in a conflict. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, “You will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell” (Isaiah 58:12). Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, wants His followers to be peacemakers in society and hence calls them blessed (Matthew 5:9).

### ***Culture of Peace Through Education***

The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates what may be the second largest worldwide parochial school system. Each of its more than 6,000 schools, colleges, and universities is being asked to set aside one week each school year to emphasize and highlight, through various programs, respect, cultural awareness, nonviolence, peacemaking, conflict resolution, and reconciliation as a way of making a specifically “Adventist” contribution to a culture of social harmony and peace. With this in mind, the church’s Education Department is preparing curricula and other materials to help in implementing this peace program.

The education of the church member in the pew, for nonviolence, peace, and reconciliation, needs to be an ongoing process. Pastors are being asked to use their pulpits to proclaim the gospel of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation which dissolves barriers created by race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and religion, and promotes peaceful human relations between individuals, groups, and nations.

### ***The Christian Hope***

While peacemaking may seem to be a forbidding task, there is the promise and possibility of transformation through renewal. All violence and terrorism are really one aspect of the ongoing controversy, in theological terms, between Christ and Satan. The Christian has hope because of the assurance that evil—the mystery of iniquity—will run its course and be conquered by the Prince of Peace and the world will be made new. This is our hope.

The Old Testament, despite the record of wars and violence, looks forward to the new creation and promises, like the New Testament, the end of the vicious cycle of war and terror, when arms will disappear and become agricultural implements, and peace and knowledge of God and His love will cover the whole world like the waters cover the oceans (see Isaiah 2:4, 11:9).

In the meantime, we need, in all relationships, to follow the golden rule, which asks us to do unto others as we would wish them to do unto us (see Matthew 7:12), and not only love God, but love as God loves (see 1 John 3:14, 15; 4:11, 20, 21).

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing*, p. 163

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid*, p. 187

<sup>3</sup>Quote from Pastor Jan Paulsen, President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

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*This statement was voted during the Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee on April 18, 2002 in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

## **A Statement on the Peace Message to All People of Good Will**

Ours is a world of international tension, habitual exploitation, economic chaos, frequent terrorism, and repeated appeals to arms. These hostilities and uncertainties endanger the peace and civilization of this planet. They create obstacles in the way of Christian witness across frontiers and tend to inhibit evangelism. They can lead to restrictions being placed on religious freedom.

When confronted with this stormy and confused world, the Adventist conscience is aroused. The delegates to the fifty-third session of the General Conference invite God's people in all lands to earnestly pray for world peace and the holding back of the winds of strife and war. Adventists, by precept and example, must stand and work for peace and good will toward men—and thus be known as peacemakers and bridge builders.

We call on all Seventh-day Adventists and other people of good will, inasmuch as in them lies, to help create atmospheres of cooperation and brotherhood, leading to exchanges between different cultures and ideological systems and better understanding between men of all races, faiths, and political persuasions.

Because time is short, and in view of the countless opportunities open to God's people for witness and gospel advance, while a preapocalyptic situation still prevails, we urgently call upon every child of God to participate in the concerted evangelistic program launched on all continents and guided "By His Spirit."

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*This statement was adopted by the General Conference Session in Dallas, Texas, April 1980.*

## A Statement on Pornography

Diverse courts and cultures may debate the definitions and consequences of pornography (the literature of sexual deviance), but on the basis of eternal principles, Seventh-day Adventists of whatever culture deem pornography to be destructive, demeaning, desensitizing, and exploitative.

It is *destructive* to marital relationships, thus subverting God's design that husband and wife cleave so closely to each other that they become, symbolically, "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

It is *demeaning*, defining a woman (and in some instances a man) not as a spiritual-mental-physical whole, but as a one-dimensional and disposable sex-object, thus depriving her of the worth and the respect that are her due and right as a daughter of God.

It is *desensitizing* to the viewer/reader, callousing the conscience and "perverting the perception," thus producing a "depraved person" (Romans 1:22, 28, NEB).

It is *exploitative*, pandering to prurience, and basally abusive, thus contrary to the Golden rule, which insists that one treat others as one wishes to be treated (Matthew 7:12). Particularly offensive is child pornography. Said Jesus: "If anyone leads astray even one child who believes in me, he would be better off thrown into the depths of the sea with a millstone hung around his neck" (see Matthew 18:6).

Though Norman Cousins may not have said it in Biblical language, he has perceptively written: "The trouble with this wide open pornography ... is not that it corrupts but that it desensitizes; not that it unleashes the passions but that it cripples the emotions; not that it encourages a mature attitude, but that it is a reversion to infantile obsessions; not that it removes the blinders, but that it distorts the view. Prowess is proclaimed but love is denied. What we have is not liberation but dehumanization" (*Saturday Review of Literature*, Sept. 20, 1975).

A society plagued by plunging standards of decency, increasing child prostitution, teenage pregnancies, sexual assaults on women and children, drug-damaged mentalities, and organized crime can ill afford pornography's contribution to these evils.

Wise, indeed, is the counsel of Christianity's first great theologian: "If you believe in goodness and if you value the approval of God, fix your minds on the things which are holy and right and pure and beautiful

and good” (Philippians 4:8, 9, Phillips). This is advice that all Christians would do well to heed.

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*This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana.*

## **A Seventh-day Adventist Statement on Religious Liberty, Evangelism, and Proselytism**

Seventh-day Adventists believe that freedom of religion is a basic human right. As Christians, they are persuaded that the dissemination of religion is not only a right, but a joyful responsibility based on a divine mandate to witness.

God has called Christians to evangelism--the proclamation of the good news of salvation in Christ (Matt 28:19, 20). This is central to Christian life and witness. Thus Christianity is missionary by its very nature.

In affirming global mission and evangelization, Adventists are motivated by willing obedience to Christ's commission and by a sincere desire that every human being be saved and inherit eternal life. They are also motivated by a sense of urgency in expectation of the imminence of Christ's return. In endeavoring to fulfill the gospel commission, Seventh-day Adventists are thus witnessing, preaching, and serving today in more than 200 countries.

In the context of the dissemination of religion, the issue of "proselytism" has arisen because the term "proselytism" is defined in a number of ways and increasingly is being given a pejorative connotation, associated with unethical means of persuasion, including force. Seventh-day Adventists unequivocally condemn the use of such methods. They believe that faith and religion are best disseminated when convictions are manifested and taught with humility and respect, and the witness of one's life is in harmony with the message announced, evoking a free and joyous acceptance by those being evangelized.

Evangelistic and missionary activity needs to respect the dignity of all human beings. Individuals need to be truthful and transparent when dealing with other religious groups. Terminology should be used which avoids offending other religious communities. Statements which are false or ridicule other religions should not be made.

Conversion is an experience of the Spirit, and should therefore in no way be connected to offering and receiving material inducements. While the right to engage in humanitarian activities must be fully recognized, such action must never be linked to evangelism in a way that exploits vulnerable people by offering financial and material incentives to entice them to change religion.

Seventh-day Adventists are committed to serving their fellow men by preaching the everlasting gospel to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people (Rev 14:6).

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*This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), for release at the time of the General Conference Session in Toronto, Canada, June 29-July 9, 2000.*

## **A Statement on Racism**

One of the odious evils of our day is racism, the belief or practice that views or treats certain racial groups as inferior and therefore justifiably the object of domination, discrimination, and segregation.

While the sin of racism is an age-old phenomenon based on ignorance, fear, estrangement, and false pride, some of its ugliest manifestations have taken place in our time. Racism and irrational prejudices operate in a vicious circle. Racism is among the worst of ingrained prejudices that characterize sinful human beings. Its consequences are generally more devastating because racism easily becomes permanently institutionalized and legalized and in its extreme manifestations can lead to systematic persecution and even genocide.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church deplors all forms of racism, including the political policy of apartheid with its enforced segregation and legalized discrimination.

Seventh-day Adventists want to be faithful to the reconciling ministry assigned to the Christian church. As a worldwide community of faith, the Seventh-day Adventist Church wishes to witness to and exhibit in her own ranks the unity and love that transcend racial differences and overcome past alienation between races.

Scripture plainly teaches that every person was created in the image of God, who “made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). Racial discrimination is an offense against our fellow human beings, who were created in God’s image.

In Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek” (Galatians 3:28). Therefore, racism is really a heresy and in essence a form of idolatry, for it limits the fatherhood of God by denying the brotherhood of all mankind and by exalting the superiority of one’s own race.

The standard for Seventh-day Adventist Christians is acknowledged in the church's Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 13, "Unity in the Body of Christ." Here it is pointed out: "In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation."

Any other approach destroys the heart of the Christian gospel.

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*This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on June 27, 1985, at the General Conference Session in New Orleans, Louisiana.*

## **A Statement on Religious Freedom**

For more than a century Seventh-day Adventists have been active promoters of religious freedom. We recognize the need to champion freedom of conscience and religion as a fundamental human right, in harmony with the instruments of the United Nations.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a presence in 209 countries. With some exceptions, however, Adventists constitute a religious minority, and have at times been subject to restrictions and discrimination. Consequently, they have felt it necessary to stand up for human rights.

As loyal citizens, Adventists believe they have the right to freedom of religion, subject to the equal rights of others. This implies the freedom to meet for instruction and worship, to worship on the seventh day of the week (Saturday), and to disseminate religious views by public preaching, or through the media. This freedom further includes the right to change one's religion, as well as to respectfully invite others to do so. Every person has a right to demand consideration whenever conscience does not allow the performance of certain public duties, such as requiring the bearing of arms. Whenever churches are given access to public media, Adventists should in all fairness be included.

We will continue to cooperate and network with others to defend the religious liberty of all people, including those with whom we may disagree.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.*

## **Statement on Religious Liberty, Evangelism, and Proselytism**

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God has called Christians to evangelism—the proclamation of the good news of salvation in Christ (Matthew 28:19, 20). This is central to Christian life and witness. Thus Christianity is missionary by its very nature.

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In the context of the dissemination of religion, the issue of “proselytism” has arisen because the term “proselytism” is defined in a number of ways and increasingly is being given a pejorative connotation, associated with unethical means of persuasion, including force. Seventh-day Adventists unequivocally condemn the use of such methods. They believe that faith and religion are best disseminated when convictions are manifested and taught with humility and respect, and the witness of one’s life is in harmony with the message announced, evoking a free and joyous acceptance by those being evangelized.

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Seventh-day Adventists are committed to serving their fellow men by preaching the everlasting gospel to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people (Revelation 14:6).

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*This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), for release at the time of the General Conference Session in Toronto, Canada, June 29-July 9, 2000.*

## **Religious Minorities and Religious Freedom: A Statement of Commitment and Concern**

Throughout history religious minorities have often been subject to discrimination and outright persecution. Today religious intolerance and prejudice are again on the rise. Notwithstanding the affirmation of the freedom of everyone to hold and disseminate religious views and to change one's religion—an affirmation sustained in the United Nations instruments and documents comprising an “International Bill of Rights”—many countries deny this right to their citizens.

International instruments condemn discrimination against minorities, but tragically, some nations have published lists of religious groups described as potentially dangerous sects. Anti-sect commissions have been set up, investigative personnel have been trained, and restrictive laws passed. Hundreds of thousands of innocent believers are now under official suspicion and are treated as second-class citizens. All this violates religious freedom, which is the most basic and essential of the fundamental rights of humankind. Seventh-day Adventists believe in obeying the laws of the land as long as they do not conflict with the laws of God. However, we oppose any law, policy, or activity which discriminates against religious minorities.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church stands for religious freedom for everyone, as well as for the separation of church and state. Scripture teaches that the God who gave life also gave freedom of choice. God only accepts homage that is freely given. Seventh-day Adventists further believe that the law must be applied evenly and without capricious favor. We submit that no religious group should be judged because some adherents may appear to be extremists. Religious freedom is limited when aggressive or violent behavior violates the human rights of others.

In support of Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments, and in harmony with its beliefs and its history, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is fully committed to promote, defend, and protect religious freedom for everyone, everywhere. To that end, we will continue to cooperate with the United Nations Human Rights Commission and other international agencies and religious organizations to encourage every nation to implement the fundamental right of religious freedom. In addition, we will continue to promote dialogue and better

understanding between governmental authorities and people who belong to religious minorities.

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*This statement was voted during the Annual Council Session of the General Conference Executive Committee on Wednesday, September 29, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

## **How Seventh-day Adventists View Roman Catholicism**

Seventh-day Adventists regard all men and women as equal in the sight of God. We reject bigotry against any person, regardless of race, nationality, or religious creed. Further, we gladly acknowledge that sincere Christians may be found in other denominations, including Roman Catholicism, and we work in concert with all agencies and bodies that seek to relieve human suffering and to uplift Christ before the world.

Seventh-day Adventists seek to take a positive approach to other faiths. Our primary task is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of Christ's soon return, not to point out flaws in other denominations.

The beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists are rooted in the biblical apostolic teachings and thus share many essential tenets of Christianity in common with the followers of other Christian churches. However, we have a specific identity as a movement. Our compelling message for Christians and non-Christians alike is to communicate hope by focusing on the quality of life that is complete in Christ.

As Adventists relate to Roman Catholicism in particular, both the past and the future enter into our thinking. We cannot erase or ignore the historical record of serious intolerance and even persecution on the part of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic system of church governance, based on extra-biblical teachings such as papal primacy, resulted in severe abuses of religious freedom as the church was allied with the state.

Seventh-day Adventists are convinced of the validity of our prophetic views, according to which humanity now lives close to the end of time. Adventists believe, on the basis of biblical predictions, that just prior to the second coming of Christ this earth will experience a period of unprecedented turmoil, with the seventh-day Sabbath as a focal point. In that context, we expect that world religions—including the major Christian bodies as key players—will align themselves with the forces in opposition to God and to the Sabbath. Once again the union of church and state will result in widespread religious oppression.

To blame past violations of Christian principles on one specific denomination is not an accurate representation of either history or the concerns of Bible prophecy. We recognize that at times Protestants,

including Seventh-day Adventists, have manifested prejudice and even bigotry. If, in expounding on what the Bible teaches, Seventh-day Adventists fail to express love to those addressed, we do not exhibit authentic Christianity.

Adventists seek to be fair in dealing with others. Thus, while we remain aware of the historical record and continue to hold our views regarding end-time events, we recognize some positive changes in recent Catholicism, and stress the conviction that many Roman Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.

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*This statement was recorded on April 15, 1997, by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and released by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg.*

## Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same-Sex Unions—A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage

Over the past several decades the Seventh-day Adventist Church has felt it necessary to clearly state in various ways its position in regards to marriage, the family, and human sexuality. These subjects are at the heart of many pressing issues facing society. That which for centuries has been considered to be basic Christian morality in the marriage setting is now increasingly called into question, not only in secular society but within Christian churches themselves.

The institutions of family and marriage are under attack and facing growing centrifugal forces that are tearing them apart. An increasing number of nations are now debating the topic of “same-sex unions,” thus making it a world issue. The public discussion has engendered strong emotions. In light of these developments, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is clearly restating its position.

We reaffirm, without hesitation, our long-standing position. As expressed in the church’s Fundamental Beliefs, “marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship.”<sup>1</sup> Though “sin has perverted God’s ideals for marriage and family,” “the family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred of any human relationship,” and thus “families need to experience renewal and reformation in their relationships” (*An Affirmation of Family*, 1990).<sup>2</sup> God instituted “marriage, a covenant-based union of two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as ‘one flesh.’” “The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is . . . the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression.” “Any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal” (*An Affirmation of Marriage*, 1996).<sup>3</sup>

Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disorder and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by sin coming into the world. While everyone is subject to fallen human nature, “we also believe that by God’s grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God’s Word” (*Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality*, 1999).<sup>4</sup>

We hold that all people, no matter what their sexual orientation, are children of God. We do not condone singling out any group for scorn and derision, let alone abuse. However, it is very clear that God’s Word does not countenance a homosexual lifestyle; neither has the Christian Church throughout her 2000 year history. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the biblical teaching is still valid today, because it is anchored in the very nature of humanity and God’s plan at creation for marriage.

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<sup>1</sup>*Seventh-day Adventists Believe—A Biblical Exposition of 27*

*Fundamental Doctrines*, Doctrine 22 on “Marriage and the Family”.

<sup>2</sup>Public Statement, *An Affirmation of Family*, released July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>3</sup>Statement voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee on April 23, 1996.

<sup>4</sup>Statement voted by the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee, October 3, 1999.

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*This document was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), March 9, 2004.*

## **A Statement of Concern on Sexual Behavior**

In His infinite love and wisdom God created mankind, both male and female, and in so doing based human society on the firm foundation of loving homes and families.

It is Satan's purpose, however, to pervert every good thing; and the perversion of the best inevitably leads to that which is worst. Under the influence of passion unrestrained by moral and religious principle, the association of the sexes has, to a deeply disturbing extent, degenerated into license and abuse which results in bondage. With the aid of many films, television, video, radio programs, and printed materials, the world is being steered on a course to new depths of shame and depravity. Not only is the basic structure of society being greatly damaged but also the breakdown of the family fosters other gross evils. The results in distorted lives of children and youth are distressing and evoke our pity, and the effects are not only disastrous but also cumulative.

These evils have become more open and constitute a serious and growing threat to the ideals and purposes of the Christian home. Sexual practices which are contrary to God's expressed will are adultery and premarital sex, as well as obsessive sexual behavior. Sexual abuse of spouses, sexual abuse of children, incest, homosexual practices (gay and lesbian), and bestiality are among the obvious perversions of God's original plan. As the intent of clear passages of Scripture (see Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:22, 23, 29 and 20:13; Matthew 5:27, 28; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; Romans 1:20-32) is denied and as their warnings are rejected in exchange for human opinions, much uncertainty and confusion prevail. This is what Satan desires. He has always attempted to cause people to forget that when God as Creator made Adam, He also created Eve to be Adam's female companion ("male and female he created them," Genesis 1:24 NEB). In spite of the clear moral standards set forth in God's Word for relationships between man and woman, the world today is witnessing a resurgence of the perversions and depravity that marked ancient civilizations.

The degrading results of the obsession of this age with sex and the pursuit of sensual pleasure are clearly described in the Word of God. But Christ came to destroy the works of the devil and reestablish the right relationship of human beings with each other and with their Creator. Thus, though fallen in Adam and captive to sin, those who turn to Christ

in repentance receive full pardon and choose the better way, the way to complete restoration. By means of the cross, the power of the Holy Spirit in the “inner man,” and the nurturing ministry of the church, all may be freed from the grip of perversions and sinful practices.

An acceptance of God’s free grace inevitably leads the individual believer to the kind of life and conduct that “will add luster to the doctrine of our God and Savior” (Titus 2:10 NEB). It will also lead the corporate church to firm and loving discipline of the member whose conduct misrepresents the Savior and distorts and lowers the true standards of Christian life and behavior.

The church recognizes the penetrating truth and powerful motivations of Paul’s words to Titus: “For the grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all mankind; and by it we are disciplined to renounce godless ways and worldly desires, and to live a life of temperance, honesty, and godliness in the present age, looking forward to the happy fulfillment of our hope when the splendor of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus will appear. He it is who sacrificed himself for us, to set us free from all wickedness and to make us a pure people marked out for his own, eager to do good” (Titus 2:11-14, NEB; see also 2 Peter 3:11-14.)

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Washington, D.C., October 12, 1987.*

## **Statement on Meeting the Challenges of Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

The contemporary world is confronted by grave ethical, medical, and social problems resulting from increasing sexual permissiveness and associated promiscuity. Because Christians are a part of the larger social community, these attitudes and behaviors have infiltrated the Seventh-day Adventist Church as well, demanding that we address them.

So serious are the challenges presented by sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) that the United Nations, in conjunction with most of the world's governments, the health-care community, religious, political, and economic leaders, has instituted a series of major research and health-education programs that focus on prevention and treatment. The goal is to prevent, cure, and minimize the effects—or at least slow the spread—of these diseases.

At particular risk are youth entering puberty at increasingly younger ages, when they are especially vulnerable to peer pressure and a barrage of media and peer messages that treat casual sex outside marriage as acceptable and normal. Many youth are sexually active early in their teen years and soon become well established in patterns of sexual activity.

Correlated with increased sexual activity is a dramatic increase in STDs associated with serious physical and emotional problems.

Advances have been made along several lines:

- research has provided more accurate data;
- benefits of using condoms to reduce unwanted pregnancy and the spread of STDs have been documented;
- dangers of promiscuity have been recognized;
- more effective treatment has reduced the spread and progression of many STDs;
- risk of long-term emotional damage resulting from casual sex has been recognized; and support has grown for the position that abstinence from extramarital sex preserves sexual and emotional health.

These advances, despite their limitations, have proved beneficial and should be encouraged for their positive effects. Seventh-day Adventist care givers should be encouraged to participate in promoting such efforts and deserve the support of church members as they do so. A pragmatic approach to dealing with these serious

problems and the use of appropriate interventions should by no means be interpreted as endorsement or encouragement of sexual activity outside marriage or of unfaithfulness within marriage. Instead, these efforts must be seen as compassionate attempts to prevent or reduce the negative consequences of detrimental sexual behaviors.

At times, family members, and pastors, teachers, counselors, physicians, and others in helping professions may find themselves working with individuals who, despite strong counsel, refuse to turn from sexual decadence and live by God's high standard of morality. In such cases, those entrusted with ministry may, as a last resort, counsel specific individuals to use contraceptive and prophylactic methods such as condoms in an attempt to prevent pregnancy and reduce the risk of spreading life-decimating STDs. Utmost care should be taken when making such an intervention to make it clear to the individual(s) and members of the community involved that this extreme measure should in no way be misconstrued as a scriptural sanction for sexual intimacy outside marriage. Such action on the part of professionals should be considered interim and utilized only in individual cases. Though such interventions may provide a little time for grace to do its work in human hearts, they do not provide a viable long-term solution. The church must remain committed to making the most of every opportunity to reinforce the wisdom of God's design for human sexuality and to calling men and women to the highest standard of moral conduct.

### ***Biblical Principles:***

Although the efforts described above are in many ways beneficial, they are only a response to existing situations created by the impact of sin. In the Scriptures, God has set out a superior plan to guide our use of His gift of sexuality. Built upon a series of guiding principles, it presents in practical terms God's ideal for His people who must live in a sin-stricken world.<sup>1</sup> Sexual intimacy is reserved for marriage. Sexuality is a loving gift of the Creator to humanity (Genesis 1:26, 27). The gospel calls believers to an appreciation for and stewardship of their sexuality in harmony with the divine purposes (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:13-20; Ephesians 5:1-8; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). In God's plan, sexual intimacy is reserved for a man and a woman within the bounds of the marriage covenant (Genesis 2:24, 26; Exodus 20:14; Proverbs 5; Song of Solomon 4:12; 8:8-10; 2:6, 7; 3:5; 8:3, 4; Hosea 3:3;

Hebrews 13:4). Sexual fidelity within marriage is crucial to convey a full understanding of God's metaphor comparing marriage to His relationship with His people (Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:14-23; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:6-9; 21:9).

2. Sexual intimacy outside of marriage is immoral and harmful. Such intimacy has detrimental effects on individuals (Leviticus 18:6-3; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:18), as well as on the marriage relationship (Proverbs 5:1-23). It is identified by Scripture as part of the sinful life (Galatians 5:19; Colossians 3:5).

3. God recognizes human frailty. His divine will for human beings and His intent for creation are unchangeable (Malachi 3:6; Matthew 5:17-20; Acts 20:27). His absolute love for human beings and His redemptive intent are equally unchangeable (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 8:35-39; Ephesians 1:1-14; 3:14-19; 1 John 4:7-10). The gospel message, centered in Jesus Christ, binds these truths together (Psalms 85:10; 1 John 2:1,2).

God's grace is the only hope for fallen humanity (Romans 3:23, 24; 5:1, 2, 20; Ephesians 2:1-5). He is patient and long-suffering with human frailty (Numbers 14:18, 19; Psalms 86:15; 103:13, 14; Hosea 11:8, 9; Jonah 3:1; 4:10, 11; Matthew 23:37; 1 Timothy 1: 15, 16). Though God's grace does not give license to sin (Romans 6:1, 2), it is through such grace that God accomplishes His redemptive intent in the circumstances resulting from sin (Romans 5:12-21). God's practical dealings in cases of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-5; Ezra 10:10, 11; Matthew 19:7, 8), polygamy (Exodus 21:10; Deuteronomy 17:17; 21:15-17; Matthew 19:4, 5), the introduction of flesh foods (Genesis 1:11, 12, 29, 30; 9:3; Leviticus 3:17; 11:47), and provision for an earthly monarch (1 Samuel 8:7; 10:19; Hosea 13:11) offer examples of interventions short of God's ideal. Through such cases, we see His grace and mercy at work in a world deformed by sin.

4. The church conducts its mission in a fallen world. Existing conditions contrast sharply with God's ideal. Both believers and unbelievers are vulnerable to sexual immorality as one of the tragic results of sin (John 17:15; 1 John 2:15). The church is called to minister to believers and unbelievers alike, reaching and reclaiming sinners (Matthew 28:19; Mark 2:17; 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21), nurturing the growth of believers (Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:11-13, 15; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 2 Peter 3:18), uplifting the infinite worth of each individual (Isaiah 43:3, 4, 7; Matthew 12:12; Luke 12:7; 15:1-32; 1 Peter 1:18, 19),

protecting the weak and vulnerable (Romans 15:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 13:3), promoting and preserving life and health (John 10:10; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 3 John 2), and calling men and women to take up their lofty position as God's chosen and holy people (Ephesians 4:1; 5:8; 1 Peter 1:15, 16; 2:5, 9). The ministry of the church is both to meet individuals where they are (1 Corinthians 3:1, 2; 7:1-28), and to call them to a higher standard (Luke 19:5-10; John 8:3-11; Acts 17:18-34).

5. A spiritual development process is anticipated in the Christian life. Change for the Christian involves both conversion (John 3:3, 7; Acts 3:19; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17) and growth (Proverbs 4:18; Luke 2:52; Ephesians 3:17-19; 4:11-15; 2 Peter 3:18). At conversion, believers accept Christ's perfect life as their own by faith and experience a Spirit-led transformation of values (John 3:5; Galatians 2:20). Both external and internal forces may provoke relapses in thought or conduct (Galatians 5:16-18; 1 John 3:20), but commitment to grace-induced progress in the Christian life (1 Corinthians 15:10; Philippians 3:12-14; Colossians 1:28, 29) and reliance upon God-provided resources (Romans 8:5-7; Galatians 5:24, 25) will produce growth toward Christlikeness (Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 5:1).

The Scriptures call for human beings to progress morally and spiritually throughout their lives (Luke 2:52; 1 Corinthians 13:11; 14:20). Planning for and facilitating such growth is integral to fulfilling the gospel commission (Matthew 28:20; Ephesians 3:14-24). It is the task of religious education to attend to individual development and to present truth in ways that hearers can understand (Matthew 11:15), causing them to stretch but not to stumble (Romans 14:1-21; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13). Though some allowance may be made for the unlearned or immature (Matthew 13:34; John 16:12; Acts 17:30; 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2), over time individuals should progress toward a more complete understanding of God's will (John 16:13) and a fuller expression of love for God and one another (Matthew 22:37-39; John 13:35; 8:9; 13:11; 1 John 3:14; 4:11, 12). Under God's blessing, the clear presentation of the gospel and careful attention to the disciple-making process will bear spiritual fruit, even among those who have been involved in sexual sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

### ***Implications:***

1. The church affirms the biblical view of sexuality as a wholesome attribute of human nature created by God to be enjoyed and used

responsibly in marriage as part of Christian discipleship.

2. The church is committed to sharing a biblical view of human sexuality in an intentional and culturally sensitive manner. Emphasis is placed on appreciating and understanding the human body and its functions, upholding sexual chastity outside and fidelity within marital relationships, and developing skills for decision-making and communication about sexual behavior. The church is committed to conveying the truth that the misuse of one's own sexuality and the abuse of power in relationships are contrary to God's ideal.

3. The church calls people to dedicate themselves before God to sexual abstinence outside the marriage covenant and sexual faithfulness to one's spouse. Apart from the wholesome expression of sexual intimacy in marriage, abstinence is the only safe and moral path for the Christian. In any other context, sexual activity is both harmful and immoral. This high standard represents God's intention for the use of His gift, and believers are called upon to uphold this ideal, regardless of the prevailing standards in the culture around them.

4. The church recognizes the sinfulness of humanity. Human beings make mistakes, use poor judgment, and may deliberately choose to engage in sexual practices that are contrary to God's ideal. Others may not know where to turn for help to live sexually pure lives. Nothing, however, can spare such individuals from the consequences of departing from the divine plan. Emotional and spiritual wounds left by sexual activity that violates God's plan inevitably leave scars. But the church extends Christ's ministry of mercy and grace by offering God's forgiveness, healing, and restorative power. It must seek to provide the personal, spiritual, and emotional support that will enable the wounded to lay hold of the gospel's resources. The church must also help persons and families identify and access the full network of professional resources available.

5. The church recognizes as morally acceptable the use of contraceptive measures, including condoms, by married couples who seek to control conception. Condoms in particular may be indicated in some marital circumstances—for example, when one partner has been exposed to or has contracted a sexually transmitted disease, thus putting the spouse at high risk for infection.

On the other hand, the premarital or extramarital use of condoms—either in an attempt to lower the risk of unwanted pregnancy or to prevent the transmission of a sexually transmitted disease raises moral

concerns. These concerns must be considered in the context of the divine plan for human sexuality, the relationship between God’s creative intent and His regard for human frailty, the process of spiritual growth and moral development within individuals, and the nature of the church’s mission.

Though condoms have proved to be somewhat effective in preventing pregnancy and the spread of disease,<sup>1</sup> this does not make sex outside of marriage morally acceptable. Neither does this fact prevent the emotional damage that results from such behavior. The church’s appeal to youth and adults alike, believers and nonbelievers, is to live lives worthy of the grace extended to us in Christ, drawing as fully as possible upon divine and human resources to live according to God’s ideal for sexuality.

6. The church acknowledges that in cases where a married person may be at risk for transmitting or contracting a sexually transmitted disease such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) from his or her marriage partner, the use of a condom is not only morally acceptable but also strongly recommended if the husband and wife decide to continue having sexual intercourse. Users of condoms must be alerted to the importance of using them properly and to the limits of their effectiveness in preventing the transmission of HIV infection.

### ***Appeal:***

We are facing a crisis that threatens the lives and well-being of many people, including church members. Both youth and adults are in peril. The church must develop, without delay, a comprehensive strategy of education and prevention. The resources of health, social services, educational, ministerial, and other professionals, both within and without the church, must be mobilized. This crisis demands priority attention—using every legitimate resource and method at the church’s disposal to target the home, school, church, and community. The destiny of an entire generation of human beings is at stake, and we are in a race against time.

<sup>1</sup>Research indicates that condoms, when correctly used, have about a 97 percent success rate in prevention of pregnancy and about an 85 to 90 percent success rate in prevention of virus transmission, as used by the general population. In those groups who use them consistently and correctly, the effectiveness is about 97 percent.

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*This statement was voted during the Annual Council Session of the General Conference Executive Committee on Sunday, September 27, 1998, in Iguacu Falls, Brazil.*

## A Statement Regarding Smoking and Ethics

Smoking is the single greatest preventable cause of death in the world. It is a universal ethical concept that prevention is better than cure. When it comes to smoking, most countries are faced by an ethical paradox: while many decades of research have provided incontrovertible evidence of the health hazards of cigarette smoking, the tobacco industry still flourishes, often with either tacit or overt government support. The ethics of smoking are made even more serious by alarming revelations about the deaths and health risks caused by second-hand smoke.

A serious question of international ethics is the exportation of cigarettes to developing countries, especially cigarettes higher in lethal ingredients than admissible elsewhere.

For over a century, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has warned its youth and the general public regarding the addictive and health destroying nature of tobacco smoking. Cigarettes are a world-wide health hazard because of the combination of addiction coupled with the economic greed of the tobacco industry and segments of the marketing community. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the ethics of prevention require public policies that will reduce smoking, such as:

1. A uniform ban on all tobacco advertising;
2. Regulations protecting children and youth who are being targeted by the tobacco industry;
3. Stricter laws prohibiting smoking in public places;
4. More aggressive and systematic use of the media to educate young people about the risks of smoking;
5. Substantially higher taxes on cigarettes; and
6. Regulations requiring the tobacco industry to pay for the health costs associated with the use of its products.

Policies such as these would save millions of lives every year.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) for release by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the Annual Council Session in San Jose, Costa Rica, October 1-10, 1996.*

## **A Statement on Smoking and Tobacco**

For more than a century, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has warned its youth and the general public regarding the addictive and health destroying nature of tobacco smoking.

Cigarette smoking is the single greatest preventable cause of death in the world. One of the firm ethical concepts of most, if not all societies, is that prevention is better than cure. When it comes to smoking, most countries are faced by an ethical paradox: while many decades of research have provided incontrovertible evidence of the hazards of cigarette smoking, the tobacco industry still flourishes, often with either tacit or overt government support. The ethics of smoking is made even more serious by alarming revelations about the cancer deaths and other health risks caused by second-hand smoke.

We believe that the ethics of prevention requires in every country a uniform ban on all tobacco advertising, stricter laws prohibiting smoking in non-residential public places, more aggressive and systematic public education, and substantially higher taxes on cigarettes. These measures would save millions of lives every year.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.*

## A Statement of Confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy

We, the delegates assembled in Utrecht for the fifty-sixth session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, express praise and thanksgiving to God for His gracious gift of the Spirit of Prophecy.

In Revelation 12, John the Revelator identifies the church in the last days as the “remnant ... which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (verse 17). We believe that in this brief prophetic picture the Revelator is describing the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which not only keeps “the commandments of God” but has “the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which is “the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).

In the life and ministry of Ellen G. White (1827-1915), we see God’s promise fulfilled to provide the remnant church with the “spirit of prophecy.” Although Ellen G. White did not claim the title “prophet,” we believe she did the work of a prophet, and more. She said: “My commission embraces the work of a prophet, but it does not end there” (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 36); “If others call me by that name [prophetess], I have no controversy with them” (*ibid.*, p. 34); “My work includes much more than this name signifies. I regard myself as a messenger, entrusted by the Lord with messages for His people” (*ibid.*, p. 36).

Ellen G. White’s chief burden was to direct attention to the Holy Scriptures. She wrote: “Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light” (*Review and Herald*, January 20, 1903). She believed that although her writings are a “lesser light,” they are light, and that the source of this light is God.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that “in His Word God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 7). We consider the biblical canon closed. However, we also believe, as did Ellen G. White’s contemporaries, that her writings carry divine authority, both for godly living and for doctrine. Therefore, we recommend:

1. That as a church we seek the power of the Holy Spirit to apply to our lives more fully the inspired counsel contained in the writings of Ellen G. White, and

2. That we make increased efforts to publish and circulate these writings throughout the world.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 30, 1995.*

## **Spiritual Renewal Impacts Social Change**

The very real presence of evil in the world and the sinfulness of human beings, compounded by rapid shifts in education, industry, technology and the economy, continue to embroil our planet in massive societal change. Individuals and families often feel powerless and victimized by systems and circumstances over which they perceive they have no control.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church sees as part of its mission the extending of the ministry of Christ into the world of suffering. His was a ministry of comfort, of empowerment, of liberation, and of reconciliation. Alongside other Christians, we are a healing and stabilizing force in times of change. When all is turbulent about us, the church provides assurance that there is One who sits above the turmoil of this world who is changeless and whose purposes will ultimately prevail. The church serves as a watchman in society and as an empowering community, urging individuals and families to evaluate conditions around them, upholding that which is good, and transcending and altering that which is detrimental.

It was said of the early Christians, “Here are they that have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). The gospel of Christ is itself an agent of change. In the gospel there is compassion for human frailty; and at the same time there is encouragement to form perfect relationships with God and with one another, as was the divine plan at Creation. We believe that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we become new creatures (Ephesians 4:22-24), we come out of darkness into light (1 Peter 2:9), and we experience now the transforming power of the world to come (Hebrews 6:5). This spiritual renewal permeates society as salt provides seasoning and as light illumines darkness. The presence of spiritually renewed persons in the community can do a work that political and social initiatives alone cannot accomplish. Christians who have experienced the transforming power of Christ are stabilizing, strengthening pillars in society, and they preserve life-affirming values.

They act as agents of change in the face of moral decay. Their active presence in the community provides hope, as individuals and families are ennobled by Christian principles and their lives and relationships impact others around them.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) for release by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the Annual Council Session in San Jose, Costa Rica, October 1-10, 1996.*

## **Historic Stand for Temperance Principles and Acceptance of Donations Statement Impacts Social Change**

From the very inception of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, temperance has been a major focus and the church has played a key role in struggling against the inroads of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and other drugs. While some Christian denominations have lessened their emphasis on temperance, Seventh-day Adventists have continued to vigorously oppose the use of alcohol, tobacco, and improper drugs. The stand of the church advocating abstinence from harmful substances is well established in the church's fundamental beliefs.

There is evidence indicating that in some areas there has been a relaxation in the promotion within the church of the principles of true temperance. This development, coupled with the relentless advertising campaigns of the alcohol and tobacco industries, has revealed that some Seventh-day Adventists have not been impervious to such negative and insidious influences.

An issue that arises from time to time is the offer of funds to religious organizations by the alcohol or tobacco industries. It is the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that such offers of funds shall not be accepted by the church, nor by any of its institutions. Such money is tainted by human misery, and in the case of the alcohol industry, "has come through the loss of souls of men" (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, May 15, 1894). The gospel mandate of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to rebuke evil and not praise or encourage those who manufacture "poisons that bring misery and ruin" and whose "business means robbery" (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 337).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reaffirms its historic stand for the principles of temperance, upholds its policies and programs supporting Article 21 of the Fundamental Beliefs, and calls upon each member to affirm and reveal a life commitment to abstinence from any form of alcohol and tobacco and irresponsible use of drugs. The 1992 Annual Council calls for a revival of temperance principles within the church and urges individuals and church organizations to refuse donations and favors from identifiable alcohol or tobacco industries.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 11, 1992.*

## **A Statement on Theological and Academic Freedom and Accountability**

### ***Document One: A Statement on Theological and Academic Freedom***

#### ***The Church and Its Institutions***

Freedom for the Seventh-day Adventist pastor/worker, hereinafter referred to as worker, is based on the theological premise that God values freedom) and that without it there can be no love, truth, or justice. Love asks for affection and commitment to be given without constraint; the acceptance of truth requires a willing examination and reception of evidence and argument; justice demands respect for personal rights and freedom. The presence of these elements within the church nurtures the spirit of unity for which our Lord prayed (John 17:21-23; of Psalms 133).

Seventh-day Adventists have derived their distinctive world view from the Old and New Testaments. They believe that Biblical truth and freedom of conscience are vital issues in the great controversy between good and evil. By its very nature evil depends on deception and falsehood, and sometimes force, to maintain itself. Truth thrives best in a climate of freedom, persuasion, and a sincere desire to do God's will (John 7:17; Psalms 111:10).

Consequently, it is consistent with Adventist administrative practice to recognize the worker's privilege to study the Bible for himself in order to "prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). It would be inconsistent for the church to preach that truth and freedom cannot exist without each other and then to deny its workers the right to freely investigate all claims to truth. This means, therefore, that the church will not obstruct the quest for truth but will encourage its workers and constituents to engage in serious study of the Scriptures and to appreciate the spiritual light they disclose (Psalms 119:130).

Although the worker is free to pursue his studies, he may not assume that his personal, limited perspective does not need the insights and corrective influence of the church he serves. What he thinks to be truth may be regarded by the larger community of believers to be error. And workers and members are called upon to be in agreement on essential points "that there be no divisions" in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Freedom for the individual Christian grows out of his belonging to the community of Christ. No one is free in the Biblical sense who is out of relationship with God or others. Theological truth, therefore, is affirmed by community study and confirmation. One person may stimulate the community to study a question, but only God's people and church as a whole can decide what is or is not true in the light of Scripture. No member or worker can ever serve as an infallible interpreter for anyone else.

Inasmuch as deceptive teachings, harmful to the eternal welfare of souls, may at times arise from within the church itself (of Acts 20:29-31; 2 Peter 2:1), its only safety is to receive and to foster no new doctrine or interpretation without first submitting it to the judgment of experienced brethren, for "in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

Even a genuine insight into truth discovered by a worker may not be acceptable to the corporate body upon first exposure to it. If such a teaching is divisive, it should not be taught or preached until evaluated in the manner described above. The apostles themselves provide an example of this approach (of Acts 15:2, 6; Galatians 2:2). It would be an irresponsible use of a worker's freedom to press a viewpoint that would endanger the unity of the church body which is as much a part of truth itself as are the formulated statements of doctrine (see Philippians 1:27; Romans 15:5,6).

Furthermore, workers should distinguish between doctrines that cannot be compromised without destroying the gospel in the framework of the three angels' messages and other beliefs that are not church supported. An example of this distinction may be seen in the Jerusalem Council's decision (Acts 15). The apostle Paul's concern was to establish the truth of Christian liberty in the gospel for the Gentiles. Once that principle was accepted by the church, he was willing to make concessions on matters of less significance (Romans 14:5-13) for the sake of unity. Allowing a principle or a new truth time to translate itself into the daily life of the church shows respect for the integrity of the body of Christ.

But where shall the line be drawn between freedom and responsibility? An individual entering into employment with the church is expected to assume the privilege of representing God's cause in a responsible and honorable manner. He is expected to expound the Word

of God conscientiously and with Christian concern for the eternal welfare of the persons under his care. Such a privilege precludes the promotion of theological views contrary to the accepted position of the church.

Should a worker violate this trust, the church must move to maintain its own character (Acts 20:28-31) inasmuch as the community of faith stands to be divided by the promulgation of divergent doctrinal views. The worker's privileges consequently stand in jeopardy. This is particularly so because the worker, being in the service of the church, is accountable for the preservation of its order and unity (of Mark 3:24, 25; Ephesians 4:1-3; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

In the interest of genuine progress in spiritual understanding (2 Peter 3:18), the church will arrange for a worker's divergent views, if he believes them to be new light, to be examined by a competent committee. Listening to alternatives will always advance truth. Either the alternative will strengthen and enlarge upon the truth, or it will stand exposed as false, thereby confirming present positions.

To ensure fairness and a mature assessment, therefore, the following guidelines are to be followed by the administrations concerned when dealing with a worker alleged to hold conflicting views on doctrine.

### ***Guidelines for Assessing Divergent Views and for the Disciplining of Dissidents: Churches, Conferences, X-12 Institutions, and Nonacademic Institutions***

The church reserves the right to employ only those individuals who personally believe in and are committed to upholding the doctrinal tenets of the church as summarized in the document, "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists" (1980). Such individuals are issued special credentials by their respective church bodies identifying them as continuing workers in the church.

As church members, employees continue to be subject to the conditions for church membership as stated in the *Church Manual*. This document also relates to employment as salaried workers.

It is understood that the disciplining of such a church employee who persists in propagating doctrinal views differing from those of the church is viewed not as a violation of his freedom, but rather as a necessary protection of the church's integrity and identity. There are corporate church rights as well as individual freedoms. The worker's privileges do

not include the license to express views that may injure or destroy the very community that supports and provides for him.

In spite of a careful process of screening and selection, there still may be occasions when a worker's theological views are brought under critical review. If a hearing is necessary, the following process is recommended:

1. *Private Consultation Between the Chief Executive Officer and the Worker.* Consultation should be in a spirit of conciliation allowing the worker every opportunity to freely express his convictions in an open and honest manner. If this preliminary conversation indicates the individual is in advocacy of doctrinal views divergent from accepted Adventist theology and is unwilling to refrain from their recital, the chief executive officer shall refer the matter to the conference/institutional executive committee, which will then arrange for a select committee to review the situation with the worker.

At the time of consultation between the chief executive officer and the worker, the officer's perception of the point in question shall determine the administrative options that shall be pursued.

a. If the worker voluntarily initiates a consultation and informs the chief executive officer of his theological uncertainties, and if his attitude is open to counsel without compulsion to promulgate his doubts and views, the following course of action is recommended:

1) The worker will continue to function at his post and will render a written report of his position before the end of six months.

2) If within that period the matter is satisfactorily resolved, no further action is necessary.

3) If the matter is not resolved, the executive committee of the conference/institution in which the worker is employed shall arrange for a hearing before a review committee. (See below for its composition and function.)

b. If the worker actively promotes his divergent doctrinal opinions and his chief executive officer is obligated to initiate the consultation, the following course of action is recommended:

1) The worker, at the discretion of the conference/institutional executive committee, shall either remain in his position with express instructions to refrain from private or public presentation of his views or shall be placed on administrative leave during the period of the hearing.

2) The executive committee of the conference/institution in

which the worker is employed shall arrange for a hearing before a review committee. (See below for its composition and function.)

2. *The Review Committee—Its Composition and Function.*

a. The Review Committee, including peers chosen by the conference/institution executive committee with the concurrence of the next higher organization, shall give bearing to and judgment upon the doctrinal issue.

b. The doctrinal views of the worker shall be submitted by him to the review committee in writing previous to the meeting. At the time of review he shall be available for discussion with the committee.

c. The review committee shall conduct its business with serious purpose, complete honesty, and scrupulous fairness. After a careful adjudication of the points at issue, it shall give a detailed, written report of the discussion with its recommendations to the conference/institutional executive committee. If agreement is not reached within the committee, a minority report shall also be included.

d. If the review committee finds that the views of the worker are compatible with the Fundamental Beliefs of the church, no further action will be necessary. However, if the worker's theological position is at variance with Seventh-day Adventist doctrine, the review committee shall discuss its conclusions with the worker and advise him:

1) To restudy his theological position in the hope that this will eliminate his theological divergence.

2) To refrain from the promulgation of his divergent doctrinal views.

e. If the worker is unable to reconcile his theological views with the denominational positions and also feels constrained by his conscience to defend his views both privately and publicly, the review committee shall recommend to his executive committee that his credentials be withdrawn.

f. If the worker has discovered a new position that is accepted as valid by the review committee, his view shall be studied by the union conference officers (in the case of a division/General Conference institution, the officers of the division/General Conference) and, with appropriate recommendations, shall be referred to the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference for final disposition.

3. *Provision for Appeal.*

a. The dissenting worker may make an appeal and appearance before an appeal committee of seven members appointed by the union

executive committee (or the division committee in the case of a division/General Conference institution). This committee shall be chaired by the union conference president or his designate and shall include the ministerial secretary of the union, two representatives named by the division/General Conference executive committee, the conference/institutional chief executive officer, and two of the worker's peers selected from among five names submitted by him.

b. Any recommendations of the union conference (division, if in a division institution) appeal committee shall be referred to the union conference (division) executive committee. The union conference (division) officers through their chief executive officer shall notify the worker of their collective decision.

c. Any recommendations of the union conference (division) executive committee shall be referred back to the conference/institutional executive committee for final action on the worker's employment.

d. A last appeal may be made by the worker to the executive committee of the division of the General Conference in which he resides. Their decision shall be final and shall be communicated to the executive committee of the employee's conference/institution.

e. During the period of hearing, review, and appeal, the worker shall refrain from public discussion of the issues involved.

### ***Document Two: Academic Freedom in Seventh-day Adventist Institutions of Higher Education***

All learning and all teaching take place within the framework of a world view of the nature of reality, man, knowledge, and values. Roots of the Christian university are found in a principle that has long undergirded the development of all higher education—the belief that the best education is attained when intellectual growth occurs within an environment in which Biblically based concepts are central to the aims of education. This is the goal of Seventh-day Adventist education.

In the Seventh-day Adventist college and university, as in any institution of higher learning, the principle of academic freedom has been central to establishing such aims. This principle reflects a belief in freedom as an essential right in a democratic society, but with a particular focus in an academic community. It is the guarantee that teachers and students will be able to carry on the functions of learning, research, and teaching with a minimum of restrictions. It applies to subjects within the

professor's professional expertise within which there is a special need for freedom to pursue truth. It also applies to the atmosphere of open inquiry necessary in an academic community if learning is to be honest and thorough.

For the church college or university, academic freedom has an additional significance. It is more important than it is in the secular institution, not less, for it is essential to the well-being of the church itself. This places a responsibility on the Christian professor to be a self-disciplined, responsible, and mature scholar, to investigate, teach, and publish within the area of his academic competence, without external restraint, but with a due regard for the character and aims of the institution which provides him with credentials, and with concern for the spiritual and the intellectual needs of his students.

Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities, therefore, subscribe to principles of academic freedom generally held important in higher education. These principles make possible the disciplined and creative pursuit of truth. They also recognize that freedoms are never absolute and that they imply commensurate responsibilities. The following principles of academic freedom are stated within the context of accountability, with special attention to limitations made necessary by the religious aims of a Christian institution.

### ***The Freedoms***

1. *Freedom of Speech.* While the right to private opinion is a part of the human heritage as creatures of God, in accepting employment at a Seventh-day Adventist college or university the teacher recognizes certain limits to expression of personal views.

As a member of a learned profession, he must recognize that the public will judge his profession by his utterances. Therefore, he will be accurate, respectful of the opinions of others, and will exercise appropriate restraint. He will make it clear when he does not speak for the institution. In expressing private views he will have in mind their effect on the reputation and goals of the institution.

2. *Freedom of Research.* The Christian scholar will undertake research within the context of his faith and from the perspective of Christian ethics. He is free to do responsible research with proper respect for public safety and decency.

3. *Freedom to Teach.* The teacher will conduct his professional activities and present his subject matter within the world view described

in the opening paragraph of this document. As a specialist within a particular discipline, he is entitled to freedom in the classroom to discuss his subject honestly. However, he will not introduce into his teaching controversial matter unrelated to his subject. Academic freedom is freedom to pursue knowledge and truth in the area of the individual's specialty. It does not give license to express controversial opinions on subjects outside that specialty nor does it protect the individual from being held accountable for his teaching.

### ***Shared Responsibilities***

Just as the need for academic freedom has a special significance in a church institution, so do the limitations placed on it reflect the special concerns of such an institution. The first responsibility of the teacher and leaders of the institution, and of the church, is to seek for and to disseminate truth. The second responsibility is the obligation of teachers and leaders of the institution and the church to counsel together when scholarly findings have a bearing on the message and mission of the church.

The true scholar, humble in his quest for truth, will not refuse to listen to the findings and the advice of others. He recognizes that others also have discovered and are discovering truth. He will learn from them and actively seek their counsel regarding the expression of views inconsistent with those generally taught by his Church, for his concern is for the harmony of the church community.

On the other hand, church leaders are expected to foster an atmosphere of Christian cordiality within which the scholar will not feel threatened if his findings differ from traditionally held views. Since the dynamic development of the church depends on the continuing study of dedicated scholars, the president, board of trustees, and Church leaders will protect the scholar, not only for his sake but also for the cause of truth and the welfare of the church.

The historic doctrinal position of the church has been defined by the General Conference in session and is published in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook under the title, "Fundamental Beliefs." It is expected that a teacher in one of the church's educational institutions will not teach as truth what is contrary to those fundamental truths. Truth, they will remember, is not the only product of the crucible of controversy; disruption also results. The dedicated scholar will exercise discretion in presenting concepts which might threaten church unity and the

effectiveness of church action.

Aside from the fundamental beliefs there are findings and interpretations in which differences of opinions occur within the church, but which do not affect one's relationship to it or to its message. When expressing such differences, a teacher will be fair in his presentation and will make his loyalty to the church clear. He will attempt to differentiate between hypotheses and facts and between central and peripheral issues.

When questions arise dealing with matters of academic freedom, each university and college should have clearly stated procedures to follow in dealing with such grievances. Such procedures should include peer review, an appeal process, and a review by the board of trustees. Every possible care should be taken to insure that actions will be just and fair and will protect both the rights of the teacher and the integrity of the institution. The protection of both is not only a matter of justice but on a college or university campus it is also a matter of creating and protecting collegiality. It is also a protection against the disruptive, the servile, and the fraudulent.

### ***Implementation***

It is recommended that the above Statement on Academic Freedom be presented to each university/college faculty and board by its administration to be used as the basis for the preparation of the institution's academic freedom statement.

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*This position paper was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Washington, D.C., October 11, 1987.*

## A Statement on Tolerance

Seventh-day Adventists support the United Nations proclamation of 1995 as the *Year of Tolerance*. This proclamation comes at an opportune time when intolerance is abounding on all continents—bigoted religious extremism, racism, tribalism, ethnic cleansing, linguistic enmity, and other forms of terrorism and violence. Christians carry their share of the blame for prejudice and inhumanity toward humans.

Tolerance, the capacity to *endure* unfavorable circumstances, is only a beginning. Christians and all people of good will, must go well beyond this negative concept and develop sympathy for beliefs or practices that not only differ, but even conflict with their own. Dialogue is certainly much better than diatribe. Human beings must learn to agree or disagree without violence; they must be able to discuss varying viewpoints without hate or rancor. This does not mean docility or abject submission, but partnership and respect for the equal rights of others. Every person has the right and the responsibility to express both ideas and ideals with verve and vigor, but without reaching the boiling point of violent words or actions.

Finally, tolerance at its best means not only acceptance of other views and people, but moving in benevolence, responsiveness, and understanding toward others—every other human being.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.*

## Values Statement

### *Our Values*

Seventh-day Adventist values are rooted in the revelation of God provided through the Bible and the life of Jesus Christ. Our sense of identity and calling grows from an understanding of Bible prophecies, especially those concerning the time immediately preceding the return of Jesus. Consequently all of life becomes a growing experience and demonstration of involvement with God and His kingdom.

Our sense of mission is driven by the realization that every person, regardless of circumstances, is of infinite value to God and thus deserving of respect and dignity. Through God's grace every person is gifted for and needed in the diverse activities of the church family.

Our respect for diversity, individuality and freedom is balanced by regard for community. We are one—a worldwide family of faith engaged in representing the reign of God in our world through ethical conduct, mutual regard, and loving service. Our faithfulness to God involves commitment to and support of His body, the church.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 10, 2004.*

## **Seventh-day Adventist Church Statement On War in Congo**

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States - The Seventh-day Adventist Church expresses its grave concern about the ongoing violence in North-Eastern Congo, which continues to bring loss of life, misery and suffering to innocent men, women and children. The church is concerned about the well-being of its members and the operation of the church's organizations in the region, and is equally concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in Congo and elsewhere in the region. Hundreds of thousands of innocent people live in fear, and are displaced and homeless.

Seventh-day Adventists join the calls on all those engaged in the conflict in Congo to cease military activities and resort to peaceful methods of resolving any issues that might be causing the hostilities. Dialogue and negotiations are preferable to violence and the cry for war.

The church also urges the international community to intensify efforts to end the crisis. Christian, moral and ethical principles of human rights and good faith negotiations that are fair to all concerned prompts this appeal.

Apart from its commitment to participate in humanitarian response, the church also calls upon all those who are touched by the war situation in Congo to respond sympathetically to alleviate suffering and misery in the region.

Some media reports have claimed General Laurent Nkunda, leader of the National Council for the Defense of the People is affiliated with the church. He never served as a Seventhday Adventist pastor. While at times he has chosen to attend the church, he is not regarded as an active church member. His conduct and reported involvement in the conflict does not represent Adventist values and lifestyle.

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*This official statement on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was released on December 2, 2008, by the Communication Department, General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.*

## **Seventh-day Adventist Church Statement On War in Iraq**

With the commencement of hostilities in Iraq, the Communication Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters, on behalf of the President's Office, issues the following statement:

The outbreak of war in Iraq is yet another opportunity for people of faith to stand for hope in the face of despair. Seventh-day Adventist Christians are people of peace who join with their fellow world citizens in praying for a speedy end to the current hostilities.

As a faith community active in every nation on Earth, we cannot view any country as a nation of villains, but rather see them as people for whom God's Son, Jesus Christ, died. We remember the hundreds of Seventh-day Adventist Church members in Iraq, who worship in three congregations including Baghdad and the ancient city of Nineveh; our fervent prayers are with them and for all who are connected with this conflict.

We recommit ourselves to minister hope in the midst of hopelessness. We wish to offer healing and be responsive to those whose lives have been shattered, wherever they are. This is an integral part of our calling.

Churches should not only be known for spiritual contributions -- though these are foundational -- but also for their support of quality of life, and in this connection peacemaking is essential. We appeal to Christians and people of good will all around the world to take an active role in making and sustaining peace, thus being part of the solution rather than part of the problem.<sup>1</sup>

As we pray and work for peace to prevail, we also recognize -- and declare -- that the only true peace will come when that blessed hope of Christ's return to Earth is a reality. May that day come soon, and may that hope shine brightly even in these dark hours.

<sup>1</sup>"A Seventh-day Adventist Call for Peace," General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, April 18, 2002.

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*Statement released on March 20, 2003 by the Communication Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters, on behalf of the President's Office, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.*

## Statement on Well-being and Value of Children

Seventh-day Adventists affirm the right of every child to a happy and stable home environment, and the freedom and support to grow up to be the person God intended. In 1989, the United Nations General Assembly recognized the fundamental importance of children by voting the “Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

In harmony with many of these lofty principles, and considering the value Jesus placed on children when He said, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14, NIV), we seek to aid children who suffer from the following destructive influences:

*Poverty*—Poverty impacts children’s development, robbing them of necessary food, clothing, and shelter, and adversely affecting their health and education.

*Illiteracy*—Illiteracy makes it difficult for the parents to earn wages or care for their family or for the child to reach his or her potential.

*Poor health-care*—Millions of children have no access to health-care because they lack the proper insurance coverage or they live where medical care is unavailable.

*Exploitation and vulnerability*—Children are corrupted and exploited when they are used for cheap labor, sweat shops, armed conflict, and the perverted sexual pleasure of adult predators, and are exposed to sexually explicit materials in the mass media and on the Internet.

*Violence*—Every year many children die violent deaths. The vast majority of individuals who suffer in armed conflicts are women and children. Children bear deep physical and psychological scars, even after the fighting stops.

In response to the above issues and needs, Seventh-day Adventists stand for the following rights of children:

1. The right to a loving and stable home where there is safety and freedom from abuse.
2. The right to adequate food, clothing, and shelter.
3. The right to proper health/medical care.
4. The right to an education that prepares children for a positive role in society by developing their personal potential and giving them earning capacity.
5. The right to a religious and moral education in the home and church.

6. The right to freedom from discrimination and exploitation.

7. The right to personhood, respect, and the development of positive self-esteem.

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*This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), for release at the time of the General Conference Session in Toronto, Canada, June 29-July 9, 2000.*

## **A Statement on Women's Issues**

Seventh-day Adventists believe that all people, male and female, are created equal, in the image of a loving God. We believe that both men and women are called to fill a significant role in accomplishing the primary mission of the Adventist Church: working together for the benefit of humanity. Yet we are painfully aware that throughout the world, in developing and developed nations, adverse societal conditions often inhibit women from fulfilling their God-given potential.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has identified several major problems, well-documented by research, that often keep women from making valuable contributions to society. Stress, the environment, and increased demands have placed women at greater risk for health problems. Poverty and heavy workloads not only deprive women of their ability to enjoy life, but also impair their physical and spiritual well-being. Family violence takes a heavy toll on its victims.

Women are entitled to the God-given privileges and opportunities intended for every human being—the right to literacy, to education, to adequate health-care, to decision making, and to freedom from mental, physical, or sexual abuse. We also maintain that women should play an increased role in the leadership and decision-making bodies of both church and society.

Ultimately, we believe that the church will fulfill its mission only when women are empowered to achieve their full potential.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the president, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.*

## **Statement About Adventism and the Year 2000**

Seventh-day Adventists anchor their hope in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and joyfully look forward to the consummation of that hope in the soon return of Jesus. Adventists base their faith on the teachings of Scripture and believe that the passage of time is significant inasmuch as it brings us closer to the most wonderful event that ever will be witnessed by human eyes. We eagerly expect the visible return of Christ. Yet we do not speculate about the precise historical moment when that event will take place. Jesus told us, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority” (Acts 1:7, NIV).

Consequently, Adventists do not attach religious significance to the ending of one millennium and the beginning of a new one. The year 2000 has no particular prophetic significance; it is not mentioned in the Bible, and any speculation concerning its religious meaning is to be rejected. However, we see each year that passes as bringing us closer to the return of our Lord.

We realize that the turn of a millennium has a significant emotional impact on the human race. No one alive has experienced such an event. Many are filled with concern, expectation, and even fear as we approach the year 2000. While many people are apprehensive in the face of turmoil in nature and in society, our Lord says, “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1, KJV). Thus, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we share the hope of a glorious future that will become a reality at God’s appointed time.

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*This statement was voted during the Annual Council Session of the General Conference Executive Committee on Wednesday, September 29, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

**GUIDELINES**

## Guidelines on Abortion

### *Guidelines*

Many contemporary societies have faced conflict over the morality of abortion.\* Such conflict also has affected large numbers within Christianity who want to accept responsibility for the protection of prenatal human life while also preserving the personal liberty of women. The need for guidelines has become evident, as the church attempts to follow scripture, and to provide moral guidance while respecting individual conscience. Seventh-day Adventists want to relate to the question of abortion in ways that reveal faith in God as the Creator and Sustainer of all life and in ways that reflect Christian responsibility and freedom. Though honest differences on the question of abortion exist among Seventh-day Adventists, the following represents an attempt to provide guidelines on a number of principles and issues. The guidelines are based on broad biblical principles that are presented for study at the end of the document.\*\*

1. Prenatal human life is a magnificent gift of God. God's ideal for human beings affirms the sanctity of human life, in God's image, and requires respect for prenatal life. However, decisions about life must be made in the context of a fallen world. Abortion is never an action of little moral consequence. Thus prenatal life must not be thoughtlessly destroyed. Abortion should be performed only for the most serious reasons.

2. Abortion is one of the tragic dilemmas of human fallenness. The church should offer gracious support to those who personally face the decision concerning an abortion. Attitudes of condemnation are inappropriate in those who have accepted the gospel. Christians are commissioned to become a loving, caring community of faith that assists those in crisis as alternatives are considered.

3. In practical, tangible ways the church as a supportive community should express its commitment to the value of human life. These ways should include:

- a. strengthening family relationships
- b. educating both genders concerning Christian principles of human sexuality
- c. emphasizing responsibility of both male and female for family planning

- d. calling both to be responsible for the consequences of behaviors that are inconsistent with Christian principles
- e. creating a safe climate for ongoing discussion of the moral questions associated with abortion
- f. offering support and assistance to women who choose to complete crisis pregnancies
- g. encouraging and assisting fathers to participate responsibly in the parenting of their children.

The church also should commit itself to assist in alleviating the unfortunate social, economic, and psychological factors that add to abortion and to care redemptively for those suffering the consequences of individual decisions on this issue.

4. The church does not serve as conscience for individuals; however, it should provide moral guidance. Abortions for reasons of birth control, gender selection, or convenience are not condoned by the church. Women, at times however, may face exceptional circumstances that present serious moral or medical dilemmas, such as significant threats to the pregnant woman's life, serious jeopardy to her health, severe congenital defects carefully diagnosed in the fetus, and pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. The final decision whether to terminate the pregnancy or not should be made by the pregnant woman after appropriate consultation. She should be aided in her decision by accurate information, biblical principles, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, these decisions are best made within the context of healthy family relationships.

5. Christians acknowledge as first and foremost their accountability to God. They seek balance between the exercise of individual liberty and their accountability to the faith community and the larger society and its laws. They make their choices according to scripture and the laws of God rather than the norms of society. Therefore, any attempts to coerce women either to remain pregnant or to terminate pregnancy should be rejected as infringements of personal freedom.

6. Church institutions should be provided with guidelines for developing their own institutional policies in harmony with this statement. Persons having a religious or ethical objection to abortion should not be required to participate in the performance of abortions.

7. Church members should be encouraged to participate in the ongoing consideration of their moral responsibilities with regard to abortion in light of the teaching of scripture.

## **Principles for a Christian View of Life**

### ***Introduction***

“Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3, NIV). In Christ is the promise of eternal life; but since human life is mortal, humans are confronted with difficult issues regarding life and death. The following principles refer to the whole person (body, soul, and spirit), an indivisible whole (Genesis 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

### ***Life: Our valuable gift from God***

1. God is the Source, Giver, and Sustainer of all life (Acts 17:25,28; Job 33:4; Genesis 1:30, 2:7; Psalms 36:9; John 1:3,4).

2. Human life has unique value because human beings, though fallen, are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; Romans 3:23; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 3:2; John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18,19).

3. God values human life not on the basis of human accomplishments or contributions but because we are God’s creation and the object of His redeeming love (Romans 5:6,8; Ephesians 2:2-6; 1 Timothy 1:15; Titus 3:4,5; Matthew 5:43-48; Ephesians 2:4-9; John 1:3, 10:10).

### ***Life: Our response to God’s gift***

1. Valuable as it is, human life is not the only or ultimate concern. Self-sacrifice in devotion to God and His principles may take precedence over life itself (Revelation 12:11; 1 Corinthians 13).

2. God calls for the protection of human life and holds humanity accountable for its destruction (Exodus 20:13; Revelation 21:8; Exodus 23:7; Deuteronomy 24:16; Proverbs 6:16,17; Jeremiah 7:3-34; Micah 6:7; Genesis 9:5,6).

3. God is especially concerned for the protection of the weak, the defenseless, and the oppressed (Psalms 82:3,4; James 1:27; Micah 6:8; Acts 20:35; Proverbs 24:11,12; Luke 1:52-54).

4. Christian love (agape) is the costly dedication of our lives to enhancing the lives of others. Love also respects personal dignity and does not condone the oppression of one person to support the abusive behavior of another (Matthew 16:21; Philippians 2:1-11; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:8-11; Matthew 22:39; John 18:22,23; John 13:34).

5. The believing community is called to demonstrate Christian love

in tangible, practical, and substantive ways. God calls us to restore gently the broken (Galatians 6:1,2; 1 John 3:17,18; Matthew 1:23; Philippians 2:1-11; John 8:2-11; Romans 8:1-14; Matthew 7:1,2, 12:20; Isaiah 40:42, 62:2-4).

***Life: Our right and responsibility to decide***

1. God gives humanity the freedom of choice, even if it leads to abuse and tragic consequences. His unwillingness to coerce human obedience necessitated the sacrifice of His Son. He requires us to use His gifts in accordance with His will and ultimately will judge their misuse (Deuteronomy 30:19,20; Genesis 3; 1 Peter 2:24; Romans 3:5,6, 6:1,2; Galatians 5:13).

2. God calls each of us individually to moral decision making and to search the scriptures for the biblical principles underlying such choices (John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 1 Peter 2:9; Romans 7:13-25).

3. Decisions about human life from its beginning to its end are best made within the context of healthy family relationships with the support of the faith community (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 5,6).

4. Human decisions should always be centered in seeking the will of God (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 6:6; Luke 22:42).

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\*Abortion, as understood in these guidelines, is defined as any action aimed at the termination of a pregnancy already established. This is distinguished from contraception, which is intended to prevent a pregnancy. The focus of the document is on abortion.

\*\*The fundamental perspective of these guidelines is taken from a broad study of scripture as shown in the “Principles for a Christian View of Human Life” included at the end of this document.

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*These guidelines were approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 12, 1992.*

## **The Seventh-day Adventist Church and the AIDS Epidemic—Guidelines**

### ***Rationale***

The global epidemic of AIDS profoundly impacts the worldwide gospel mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Church leaders are called to respond through initiatives in education, prevention, and community service, and through personal acts of kindness to persons and families involved in the crisis. AIDS is no respecter of national boundaries, church membership, gender, marital status, education, income, or position in life. In many countries of the world, it is decimating the population, taking the lives of many individuals, including Seventh-day Adventist Church members. All persons, especially young people growing up in an era of moral laxity, need to be taught biblical principles regarding sexuality and God's design that sexual intimacy be experienced within the protection of the marriage covenant. Leadership should provide credible information to members—presented in their own language and sensitive to their own culture. The church is called to be both a prophetic and a compassionate voice—the mouthpiece and hands of God as it extends the ministry of Christ into the community.

The global mission of the church, in reaching out to all races and peoples, draws into church fellowship many who are infected by the AIDS virus prior to joining the church or who are affected by having family members with AIDS. The epidemic is of such magnitude that no family will ultimately remain untouched. Many are infected through no action of their own. A judgmental attitude is always inappropriate, especially since the source of the infection cannot be determined with certainty. Many have experienced shame, fear, and agony as family members suffered and died with AIDS, often feeling compelled to secrecy regarding their painful situation. Just as Christ came to offer healing to a suffering world, so Seventh-day Adventists are commissioned to compassionately care for those who suffer and are affected with the virus of AIDS. Members can safely serve as care givers, at home or in health-care facilities, if they are educated in appropriate ways of doing so.

### ***Recommendations***

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes its Christian

responsibility to respond to the global AIDS crisis and its devastating affect on humanity and wishes to respond in multiple ways which include:

1. Extending the teaching and healing ministry of Christ, who without prejudice cared for all in need, by engaging in efforts to reduce the risk of individuals acquiring AIDS, and compassionately and nonjudgmentally caring for all those affected when an individual suffers from AIDS.

2. Designating a person in each division, along with such personnel and financial resources as may be secured, to respond to AIDS challenges through appropriate initiatives and cooperative efforts with other entities in the community or country at large.

3. Developing and managing AIDS education programs using the resource *HIV/AIDS Guide* when applicable.\* Programs should be contextualized for relevant cultural and linguistic needs and directed to:

a. *Pastors*: Through continuing education and ministerial meetings designed to equip pastors to deal with members touched by the AIDS crisis. Pastors need information on prevention, compassionate ministry, and applied ecclesiastical functions such as conducting a funeral service for a person infected with AIDS.

b. *Teachers*: As continuing education and in-service training with emphasis on conveying spiritual values and developing skills among youth for coping with sexual pressures.

c. *Parents*: By their modeling a lifestyle that upholds Christian values, recognizing that marriage relations and any use of alcohol or other abusive substances has a direct negative effect on their children's sexual values and practices.

d. *Church members*: Through sermons, Sabbath School Bible Study Guides, premarital counseling and marriage-strengthening activities, seminars regarding AIDS, and educational curricula which provides information regarding sexuality in general and AIDS in particular.

e. *Communities*: By recognizing the opportunity for Christian witness and ministry in the community at large, providing appropriate community outreach, and participating in cooperative endeavors.

4. Protecting and strengthening marriage by:

a. Upholding the ideal of abstinence from premarital sex.

b. Advocating premarital HIV testing for both potential partners as part of the church-based preparation for marriage.

c. Elevating God’s ideal for fidelity in marriage.

d. Recommending protective measures against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

5. Intentionally transmitting Christian values to the next generation, recognizing that individual sexual values are established in youth. Priority should be given to providing accurate information, a forum for open discussion, and emphasis on the moral dimension of decision making regarding sexuality.

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*\*Provided by the Health and Temperance Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, in cooperation with the General Conference AIDS Study Commission members.*

## **Guidelines for Employer and Employee Relationships**

### ***Introduction***

Seventh-day Adventist church members, entities, and institutions are located in nearly every political and legal system of the world. From time to time members and church administrators seek guidance on how Christians should respond to requests or demands put upon them by employers, labor organizations, and governments. In view of the wide variety of political, legal and cultural situations it is impossible to offer specific recommendations that apply equally in every location. Biblical principles and spiritual values however, provide a common foundation.

The history of employer-employee relationships is witness of the excesses and shortcomings to which human institutions and organizations are prone. Industrialization of societies introduced major changes in how work was organized, administered, and accomplished. Guilds or associations of persons in the same trade gave way to labor unions that became collective bargaining agents on behalf of employees. Relationships between trade unions and employers have ranged from adversarial to collaborative.

Today the workplace environment is influenced by numerous forces: political systems, legislation and trade policies, economics, technology, labor unions, and professional organizations. These fulfill functions ranging from industry regulation, practitioner licensing, definition of work, employee advocacy and representation, codification of best practices, and the scrutiny of ethical conduct. The multiplicity of organizations and functions defy generalizations. Therefore, it is important to identify and reiterate general principles and values that provide a Christian basis for dealing with particular issues in the workplace.

The Seventh-day Adventist view of employer-employee relationships is based on teachings and narratives in the Bible, especially those dealing with creation, sin and its effects on persons and communities, salvation provided through Jesus Christ, and the ultimate restoration of harmony and perfect order in the universe. Scripture affirms and balances the value of individuals with the importance and good of society as a whole.

The counsel of Ellen G. White on employer-employee relations is rooted in historical situations of her time and a prophetic insight concerning social and economic conditions in the future. She gave stern

warnings about the trade union practices of her day. She was fiercely protective against incursions on the conscience of individuals or the intrusion of barriers to Church mission. Some would assert that the situation is considerably different today. To the extent that things are different one needs careful discernment in identifying and applying principles upon which her counsel rested.

### ***Principles and Values***

1. Human beings, though corrupted by sin, still carry the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). Thus all are to be treated with respect and justice. The freedom to exercise moral and ethical judgment is an essential ingredient in the dignity of personhood.

2. For a Christian, the Lordship of Jesus Christ permeates the whole of life; its attitudes, actions, and relationships (Isaiah 8:13; Matthew 6:24; Acts 5:29, Colossians 3:23, 24). Other authority sources in life are subordinate to Christ's authority and, unless complementary to it, are neither safe nor reliable.

“The world is not to be our criterion. Let the Lord work, let the Lord's voice be heard” (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p 463 ).

“‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.’ These words sum up the whole duty of man. They mean the consecration of the whole being, body, soul, and spirit, to God's service. How can men obey these words, and at the same time pledge themselves to support that which deprives their neighbors of freedom of action? And how can men obey these words, and form combinations that rob the poorer classes of the advantages which justly belong to them, preventing them from buying or selling, except under certain conditions” (Ellen G. White, Letter 26, 1903).

3. The workplace environment should be characterized by an atmosphere of mutual service and mutual respect. Adversarial relationships between employer and employees, born of suspicion, self-interest, and rivalry deny dignity to persons and ignore the larger interests and needs of society (James 5:1-6).

4. The workplace should not dehumanize people. Employees should have access to a process of consultation and genuine discussion in matters affecting their labor and the conduct of the business or industry

that employs their talents and skills (1 Kings 12:6,7; Mark 10:42-45; Philippians 2:3-8).

5. Christians should refrain from violence, coercion, or any method incompatible with Christian ideals as instruments in the attainment of social or economic goals. Nor should Christians lend their support to organizations or employers that resort to such actions (2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 10:3).

6. Seventh-day Adventist employers should support and demonstrate liberty of conscience, fair wages and working conditions, equality of opportunity, justice, and fairness for all (Luke 10:27).

7. Spiritual autonomy and integrity for church entities include freedom to uphold and maintain basic religious tenets and practices, such as Sabbath observance, freedom to establish operating policies in harmony with church objectives, and freedom to employ only those who support church teachings and objectives.

8. In order to fulfill its divine mission the Seventh-day Adventist Church refrains from alignment with or endorsement of political organizations. Church members are urged to preserve and protect their own liberty and independence from alliances that may compromise Christian values and witness.

“We are now to use all our entrusted capabilities in giving the last warning message to the world. In this work we are to preserve our individuality. We are not to unite with secret societies or with trade-unions. We are to stand free in God, looking constantly to Christ for instruction. All our movements are to be made with a realization of the importance of the work to be accomplished for God” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7, p 84 ).

9. Seventh-day Adventists recognize the need for governments and therefore seek to be citizens who support law and order. Social and legal situations vary greatly in different parts of the world. Civil and religious liberties do not exist in equal measure throughout the world. For these reasons divisions of the General Conference may approve more specific working policies, reflecting the spiritual principles stated here, in light of legal, political or cultural realities and practices in their areas. All are encouraged to counsel widely so as to maintain principle-based decisions that preserve the integrity of the church’s witness and mission. (Current examples of division-approved statements include the *North American Division Working Policy* HR 30 and the South Pacific Division Executive Committee

Statement on “Seventh-day Adventists and Trade Unions,” May 22, 2003.)

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*This statement was voted during the Annual Council Session of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on October 14, 2003 in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

## **Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission**

### ***Use of the Bible in Mission Vis-à-vis “Sacred Writings”***

In building bridges with non-Christians, the use of their “sacred writings” could be very useful in the initial contact in order to show sensitivity and to lead persons along paths which are somewhat familiar. They may contain elements of truth that find their fullest and richest significance in the way of life found in the Bible. These writings should be used in a deliberate attempt to introduce people to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and to help them transfer their allegiance to the biblical writings as their source of faith and practice. However, certain risks are involved in the use of these writings. The following guidelines will help to avoid those risks.

1. The Bible should be recognized as the teaching instrument and source of authority to be used in leading a person to Christ and to a life of faith in a society where another religion is dominant.

2. The church should not use language that may give the impression that it recognizes or accepts the nature and authority assigned to the “sacred writings” by the followers of specific non-Christian religions.

3. Those using “sacred writings” as outlined above should develop or create a plan indicating how the transfer of allegiance to the Bible will take place.

4. The nurture and spiritual growth of new believers in non-Christian societies shall be accomplished on the basis of the Bible and its exclusive authority.

### ***Transitional Organizational Structures***

According to Matthew 28:18-20, the mission of the church has three major inseparable components:

1. The mission should lead people to Jesus as their Savior and Lord through conversion and baptism;

2. The mission is to incorporate a community of believers, the church, into an environment where they can grow in faith, knowledge, and the enjoyment of a universal fellowship of believers; and,

3. The mission is to nurture and train members as active disciples who recognize and utilize their spiritual gifts to assist in sharing the gospel. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been founded and organized by the Lord to fulfill that gospel commission. The universal

nature of the church requires the existence of a basic and common organizational structure throughout the world that will facilitate the fulfillment of its mission.

Political and religious conditions in some countries could make it difficult or even impossible for the church to function within its traditional organizational structure. A transitional organizational structure may be needed. In such cases the following guidelines should be employed to deal with the situation:

1. The transitional organizational structure would be justifiable under one of the following conditions:

- a. When new initiatives need to be tested in the mission of reaching resistant or previously unreached peoples;
- b. When regular church work and organization is not permitted due to local religious or political circumstances.

1) Church leaders at the division/union/local field where the transitional organizational structures are being set up should determine the nature of the transitional organization and whether it is appropriate to choose local leadership. They should also define the management of tithes and offerings within the transitional organization.

2) Workers who are providing leadership in the transitional organization should be personally committed to the doctrinal unity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to its worldwide ecclesiastical organization.

3) New converts should, as soon as possible, be made aware of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and that it has a particular message and mission to the world.

4) As soon as it is feasible, the transitional organizational structure should be replaced by the regular church organizational system.

### ***Fundamental Beliefs and Preparation for Baptism***

1. *Fundamental Beliefs and Non-Christians*: The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is an expression of the church's message in language that is meaningful to Christian communities. The challenge is to determine how to make this statement meaningful to societies where Christians are a minority or non-existent. The mission to non-Christians will raise new questions which are not addressed in the Fundamental Beliefs, and relevant biblical answers should be provided. The following suggestions could be of help when addressing this particular issue.

a. The way the Fundamental Beliefs are presented and the language used to present them must be carefully studied and selected in order to facilitate the comprehension of the church's message by non-Christians. The development of locally-prepared Bible studies and teaching instruments is to be encouraged.

b. The task just described should be done at the religious study centers, with the assistance of front-line workers and in consultation with the church community, theologians, missiologists, and administrators.

c. The religious study center directors should refer local questions and concerns not addressed in the fundamental beliefs to the Office of Global Mission of the General Conference for study.

2. *Baptismal Guidelines:* In the preparation of new converts for baptism and membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these sequential guidelines must be followed.

a. A candidate must give clear evidence of a personal experience of salvation by faith in Christ and of a clear understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist message.

b. A candidate must be guided by the local community of believers until the community can testify that the candidate has reached an adequate knowledge and experience of the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

c. The Baptismal Vow, as set forth in the *Church Manual*, must be taken as summarizing the minimum required beliefs and experiences for baptism.

### ***Forms of Worship***

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to come into contact with many different cultures in non-Christian countries, the topic of proper worship practices becomes very relevant. In those settings, deciding what is or is not acceptable in a Seventh-day Adventist worship service is important. Calling people to worship the only true God plays a significant role in the message and mission of the church. In fact, in Adventist eschatology the central element in the closing controversy is the subject of worship and the true object of worship. We should be careful and prudent as we seek ways to contextualize Adventist worship around the world. In this task we should be constantly informed by the following aspects of Adventist worship.

1. God is at the very center of worship as its supreme object. When we approach God in adoration we come in contact with the very source

of life, our Creator, and with the One who in an act of grace redeemed us through the sacrificial death of His beloved Son. No human being should usurp that divine right.

2. Corporate worship is God’s people coming into His presence as the Body of Christ in reverence and humility to honor and give homage to Him through adoration, confession, prayer, thanksgiving, and singing. Believers come together to listen to the Word, for fellowship, for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, for service to all, and to be equipped for the proclamation of the gospel. Our faith invites wholehearted and highly participatory worship where the Word of God is central, prayer is fervent, music is heartfelt, and fellowship in faith is palpable. These elements of worship are indispensable in Adventist worship services around the world and should be part of any attempt to contextualize Adventist worship.

3. We are complex creatures in which reason and emotions play a significant role. True worship expresses itself through our body, mind, spirit, and emotions. The Adventist Church calls for a proper balance of the involvement of these aspects of our personality in worship. It is important to keep in mind that any element of the worship service that tends to place humans at its center must be rejected. The extent to which the body participates in worship will vary from culture to culture, but whatever is done should be done under discipline and self-control, keeping in mind that the central aspect of the worship service is the proclamation of the Word and its call to serve God and others.

4. Adventist worship should draw on the treasure trove of Seventh-day Adventist theology to proclaim with exuberance and joy the communion and unity of believers in Christ and the grand theme of God’s infinite love as seen in creation, the plan of redemption, the life of Christ, His high priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary, and His soon return in glory.

5. Music should be used to praise Him and not as a means to overstimulate emotions that will simply make individuals “feel good” about themselves. Through it worshippers should express their deepest feelings of gratitude and joy to the Lord in a spirit of holiness and reverence. Adventist worship is to celebrate God’s creative and redemptive power.

If the need to contextualize the form of worship in a particular culture arises, the guidelines provided in the document entitled

“Contextualization and Syncretism” should be followed.

### ***Contextualization and Syncretism***

Contextualization is defined in this document as the intentional and discriminating attempt to communicate the gospel message in a culturally meaningful way. Seventh-day Adventist contextualization is motivated by the serious responsibility of fulfilling the gospel commission in a very diverse world. It is based on the authority of the Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit and aims at communicating biblical truth in a culturally-relevant way. In that task contextualization must be faithful to the Scripture and meaningful to the new host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged by the gospel.

Intentional contextualization of the way we communicate our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it the church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, adaptation has taken place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the three angels’ messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. This will continue to happen.

As the church enters more non-Christian areas, the question of syncretism—the blending of religious truth and error—is a constant challenge and threat. It affects all parts of the world and must be taken seriously as we explore the practice of contextualization. This topic is highlighted by the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the great controversy between good and evil which explains Satan’s mode of operation—distorting and compromising truth, not by denying it, but by mixing truth and error, thus robbing the gospel of its true impact and power. In this context of danger and potential distortion, critical contextualization is indispensable.

Since the effects of sin and the need for salvation are common to all humanity, there are eternal truths that all cultures need to know, which in some cases can be communicated and experienced in different and yet equivalent ways. Contextualization aims to uphold all of the Fundamental Beliefs and to make them truly understood in their fullness.

In the search for the best way to contextualize, while at the same time rejecting syncretism, certain guidelines must be followed.

1. Because uncritical contextualization is as dangerous as non-contextualization, it is not to be done at a distance, but within the specific

cultural situation.

2. Contextualization is a process that should involve world church leaders, theologians, missiologists, local people, and ministers. These individuals should have a clear understanding of the core elements of the biblical worldview in order to be able to distinguish between truth and error.

3. The examination of the specific cultural element would necessitate an especially careful analysis by cultural insiders of the significance of the particular cultural element in question.

4. The examination of all the Scripture says about the issue or related issues is indispensable. The implications of scriptural teachings and principles should be carefully thought through and factored into proposed strategies.

5. In the context of reflection and prayer, scriptural insights are normative and must be applied to the specific cultural element in question. The analysis could lead to one of the following results:

a. The particular cultural element is accepted, because it is compatible with scriptural principles;

b. The particular cultural element is modified to make it compatible with Christian principles;

c. The particular cultural element is rejected, because it contradicts the principles of Scripture.

6. The particular cultural element that was accepted or modified is carefully implemented.

7. After a period of trial it may be necessary to evaluate the decision made and determined whether it should be discontinued, modified, or retained.

In the end, all true contextualization must be subject to biblical truth and bear results for God's kingdom. The unity of the global Church requires regular exposure to each other, each other's culture, and each other's insights that "together with all the saints we may grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love" (Ephesians 3:18).

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*NOTE: These guidelines were developed by the Global Mission Issues Committee (ADCOM-S) and edited by the Biblical Research Institute. These are the first of a series of guidelines brought to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee for approval in June and July, 2003. These guidelines are intended to be used, as appropriate, by church administrators, educators, and others when proclaiming the gospel in predominately non-Christian environments. As new guidelines are approved, they will be added in this section.*

## Harassment

1. *Working Environment.* The General Conference recognizes its responsibility to all employees to maintain a working environment free from harassment. It endeavors to achieve this environment through educating employees that harassment violates the law and will not be tolerated by the General Conference. The General Conference also endeavors to prevent harassment by publishing this policy, by developing appropriate sanctions for misconduct, and by informing all employees of their right to complain of harassment.

To maintain a work environment free of harassment and assist in preventing inappropriate workplace conduct, the General Conference shall endeavor to take the following actions:

- a. Each employee shall receive a copy of this harassment policy and complaint procedure;
- b. Each employee shall acknowledge receipt of this policy and complaint procedure, which will be maintained in the employee's personnel file;
- c. The General Conference has designated the HR Director and Associate HR Directors as the persons to whom complaints of harassment can be made, in addition to an employee's department director.

2. *Personal Conduct.* Employees of the General Conference are to exemplify the Christ-like life and should avoid all appearances of wrongdoing. They should not engage in behavior that is harmful to themselves or others or that casts a shadow on their dedication to the Christian way of life. Employees should respect and uplift one another. Employees should never be placed in a position of embarrassment, disrespected or harassed because of their gender, race, color, national origin, age or disability. To do so would be a violation of God's law and civil laws protecting human rights and governing workplace conduct.

3. *Sexual Harassment.* Sexual harassment is a form of harassment and involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or other verbal, written, or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- a. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment; or
- b. Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting an individual; or
- c. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably

interfering with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

4. *Improper Conduct.* Improper conduct by the employer, co-workers and, in some instances, non-employees includes, but is not limited to:

- a. Any subtle or other pressure or request for sexual favors or activity, including any suggestion that an applicant's or employee's giving in to or rejecting sexual advances will have an effect on that person's employment or terms of employment;
- b. Unwelcome sexual flirtation or propositions;
- c. Unnecessary or inappropriate touching of a sexual or abusive nature (e.g., patting, pinching, hugging, repeated brushing against another person's body, etc.);
- d. Displays of sexually suggestive pictures, drawings, cartoons or objects;
- e. Threats or demands for sexual favors;
- f. Unwelcome or derogatory statements related to gender, race, color, national origin, age, or disability (for example, kidding, teasing, jokes degrading or offensive comments or tricks);
- g. Demeaning or degrading comments about an individual's appearance;
- h. Denying an employee the opportunity to participate in training or education on account of gender, race, color, national origin, age, or disability;
- i. Limiting opportunities for promotion, transfer or advancement on account of gender, race, color, national origin, age, or disability; or
- j. Requiring a protected employee to perform more difficult tasks or less desirable work assignments in order to force them to retire or resign from employment.

5. *Reporting Incidents.* Employees who believe that they have been harassed should immediately take the following steps:

- a. Make it clear that such conduct is offensive and should be stopped immediately; and
- b. Report the incident to the immediate department director or to the director or associate directors of HR. The initial report should be followed by a written statement describing the incident and identifying potential witnesses.

6. *Third Party Reports.* Employees who are aware of incidents of potential workplace harassment toward others are to report such incidents

to their department director or the director or associate directors of HR for investigation.

7. *Investigation.* Complaints of harassment shall be promptly handled and maintained in confidence to the extent possible.

8. *Discipline.* A violation of this policy may result in discipline, up to and including dismissal from employment.

9. *Prohibition of Retaliation.* The General Conference prohibits retaliation against employees complaining of harassment.

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*This document was adopted by the General Conference Human Resource Services on March 20, 2000, and reflects the legal context of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.*

## A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music— Guidelines

God has woven music into the very fabric of His creation. When He made all things “the morning stars sang together and the angels shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). The book of Revelation portrays heaven as a place of ceaseless praise, with songs of adoration to God and the Lamb resounding from all (Revelation 4:9-11; 5:9-13; 7:10-12; 12:10-12; 14:1-2; 15:2-4; 19:1-8).

Because God made humans in His image, we share a love and appreciation for music with all His created beings. In fact, music can touch and move us with a power that goes beyond words or most other types of communication.<sup>1</sup> At its purest and best, music lifts our beings into the very presence of God where angels and unfallen beings worship Him in song.

But sin has cast blight over the Creation. The divine image has been marred and well-nigh obliterated; in all aspects this world and God’s gifts come to us with a mingling of good and evil. Music is not morally and spiritually neutral. Some may move us to the most exalted human experience, some may be used by the prince of evil to debase and degrade us, to stir up lust, passion, despair, anger, and hatred.

The Lord’s messenger, Ellen G. White, continually counsels us to raise our sights in music. She tells us, “Music, when not abused, is a great blessing; but when it is put to a wrong use, it is a terrible curse.”<sup>2</sup> “Rightly employed, ... [music] is a precious gift of God, designed to uplift the thoughts to high and noble themes, to inspire and elevate the souls.”<sup>3</sup>

Of the power of song, she writes: “It is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth. How often to the soul hard-pressed and ready to despair, memory recalls some word of God’s—the long-forgotten burden of a childhood song—and temptations lose their power, life takes on new meaning and new purpose, and courage and gladness are imparted to other souls! ... As a part of religious service, singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer. ... As our Redeemer leads us to the threshold of the Infinite, flushed with the glory of God, we may catch the themes of praise and thanksgiving from the heavenly choir round about the throne; and as the echo of the angels’ song is awakened in our earthly homes, hearts will

be drawn closer to the heavenly singers. Heaven’s communion begins on earth. We learn here the keynote of its praise.”<sup>4</sup>

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe and preach that Jesus is coming again soon. In our worldwide proclamation of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12 we call all peoples to accept the everlasting gospel, to worship God the Creator, and to prepare to meet our soon-returning Lord. We challenge all to choose the good and not the bad, to “say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12, 13).

We believe that the gospel impacts all areas of life. We therefore hold that, given the vast potential of music for good or ill, we cannot be indifferent to it. While realizing that tastes in music vary greatly from individual to individual, we believe that the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White suggest principles that can inform our choices.

In this document the phrase *sacred music*—sometimes referred to as religious music—designates music that focuses on God and on biblical and Christian themes. In most cases, it is music composed and intended for worship service, evangelistic meetings, or private devotion and may be both vocal and instrumental music. However, not all sacred/religious music may be acceptable for an Adventist. Sacred music should not evoke secular associations or invite conformity to worldly behavioral patterns of thinking or acting.

*Secular music* is music composed for settings other than the worship service or private devotion. It speaks to the common issues of life and basic human emotions. It comes out of our very being, expressing the human spirit’s reaction to life, love, and the world in which the Lord has placed us. It can be morally uplifting or degrading. Although it does not directly praise and adore God, nevertheless it could have a legitimate place in the life of the Christian. In its selection the principles discussed in this document should be followed.

### ***Principles to Guide the Christian***

The music that Christians enjoy should be regulated by the following principles:

1. All music the Christian listens to, performs, or composes, whether sacred or secular, will glorify God: “So whether you eat or drink or

whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). This is the overriding biblical principle. Anything that cannot meet this high standard will weaken our experience with the Lord.

2. All music the Christian listens to, performs, or composes, whether sacred or secular, should be the noblest and the best: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is right, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8). As followers of Jesus Christ who hope and expect to join the heavenly choirs, we view life on this earth as a preparation for, and foretaste of, the life to come.

On these two foundations—glorifying God in all things and choosing the noblest and the best—depend the other principles listed below for the selection of music by Christians.

3. It is characterized by quality, balance, appropriateness, and authenticity. Music fosters our spiritual, psychological, and social sensitivity, and our intellectual growth.

4. It appeals to both the intellect and the emotions and impacts the body in a positive way. It is wholistic.

5. Music reveals creativity in that it draws from quality melodies. If harmonized,<sup>5</sup> it uses harmonies in an interesting and artistic way, and employs rhythm that complements them.

6. Vocal music employs lyrics that positively stimulate intellectual abilities as well as our emotions and our will power. Good lyrics are creative, rich in content, and of good composition. They focus on the positive and reflect moral values; they educate and uplift; and they correspond with sound biblical theology.

7. Musical and lyrical elements should work together harmoniously to influence thinking and behavior in harmony with biblical values.

8. It maintains a judicious balance of spiritual, intellectual, and emotional elements.

9. We should recognize and acknowledge the contribution of different cultures in worshiping God. Musical forms and instruments vary greatly in the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family, and music drawn from one culture may sound strange to someone from a different culture.

Seventh-day Adventist music-making means to choose the best and above all to draw close to our Creator and Lord and glorify Him. Let us rise to the challenge of a viable alternative musical vision and, as

part of our wholistic and prophetic message, make a unique Adventist musical contribution as a witness to the world regarding a people awaiting Christ's soon coming.

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<sup>1</sup>"It [music] is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth" (*Education*, p. 168).

<sup>2</sup>*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 497. She also states that in the future, "just before the close of probation, 'there will be shouting, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions.' And this is called the moving of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit never reveals itself in such methods, in such a bedlam of noise. This is an invention of Satan to cover up his ingenious methods for making of none effect the pure, sincere, elevating, ennobling, sanctifying truth for this time" (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 37).

<sup>3</sup>*Education*, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup>*Education*, p. 168.

<sup>5</sup>We acknowledge that in some cultures harmonies are not as important as in other cultures.

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*These guidelines were approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 13, 2004.*

## **Sexual Harassment—Guidelines**

1. *Personal Conduct:* Employees of denominational organizations are to exemplify the Christ-like life and should avoid all appearance of wrong doing. They should not for one moment indulge in sexual behavior that is harmful to themselves or others and that cast a shadow on their dedication to the Christian way of life.

2. *Mutual Respect:* Employees should respect and uplift one another. They must never place another employee in a position of embarrassment or disrespect due to sexual overtones. To do so would be a violation of God's law and the law of the land which protects human rights in the workplace.

3. *Definition:* Sexual harassment includes but is not limited to the following:

a. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature affecting an individual's employment status. Such advances constitute sexual harassment when:

1) Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment;

2) Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual;

3) Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment; and

4) Threats or suggestions are made that the individual's job, future promotions, wages, etc., depend on whether or not he/she submits to sexual demands or tolerates harassment.

b. Unwelcome sex-oriented comments (kidding, teasing, jokes, etc.);

c. Subtle pressure or requests for sexual activity;

d. Unnecessary touching of an individual (e.g., patting, pinching, hugging, repeated brushing against another person's body, etc.); and

e. Demand for sexual favors.

4. *Working Environment:* Denominational organizations shall inform their employees that sexual harassment in the workplace will not be tolerated. All employees are expected to avoid any unwelcome behavior or conduct toward any other employee which could be interpreted as

sexual harassment. Each organization shall designate a male and a female person to whom complaints can be made.

5. *Reporting Incidents:* If an employee encounters sexual harassment from supervisors, fellow employees, clients, or nonemployees, the following steps shall be taken immediately:

- a. It shall be made clear that such behavior is offensive;
- b. The incidents shall be reported to the appropriate person. If possible, the complaint shall be in written form; and
- c. The discussion shall be conducted in an objective and thorough manner, and the complainant should be advised not to discuss the matter elsewhere due to the sensitivity of the complaint. The person to whom the complaint is made shall keep any information received strictly confidential, except as necessary to investigate or rectify the matter.

6. *Third-party Reports:* All employees who are aware of incidents of apparent sexual harassment in the workplace are responsible for reporting such incidents to the appropriate person for investigation.

7. *Investigation:* Complaints of sexual harassment shall be investigated promptly. The determination of whether or not a particular action constitutes sexual harassment shall be made from the facts on a case-by-case basis. On determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual harassment, the supervisor or appropriate official shall look at the record as a whole and the totality of the circumstances, such as the nature of the sexual overtures and the context in which the alleged incident occurred

8. *Action:* If sexual harassment is found to exist, appropriate officers shall take prompt corrective action. Depending on the severity of the act, the discipline may range from a written warning, a copy of which is placed in the offending person's personnel file, to immediate dismissal.

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*These guidelines were adopted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Nairobi, Kenya, October 6, 1988.*

## **Guidelines on the Use of Tithe**

### ***Introduction***

God's plan for the support of His work on this earth is through the tithe and freewill offerings of His people. The tithe is the main source of funding for the total proclamation of the gospel to all the world by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This includes a balanced and comprehensive evangelistic outreach to the public and the spiritual nurturing of church members. Because the tithe is reserved for a special purpose, freewill offerings must provide the funding for many functions of the gospel work.

### ***Principles Regarding the Use of Tithe***

1. Only conference organizations are authorized to make allocations from tithe funds. The tithe is the Lord's and should be returned to the storehouse, the conference treasury, through the member's home church. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).

"The tithe is sacred, reserved by God for Himself. It is to be brought into His treasury to be used to sustain the gospel laborers in their work" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 226).

2. The conferences and unions should share the tithe with the world church.

"More and more we must come to realize that the means that come into the conference in the tithes and gifts of our people should be used for the support of the work not only in the American cities, but also in foreign fields. Let the means so zealously collected be unselfishly distributed. Those who realize the needs of mission fields will not be tempted to use the tithe for that which is not necessary" (*Manuscript, Ellen G. White*, 11, 1908).

3. A worker's eligibility for support from tithe should be determined by the nature of the work. Thus other factors including the current credentials are not the final criteria for support from the tithe.

"The tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be they men or women" (*Manuscript, Ellen G. White, 149, 1899*).

4. Tithe should only be used for the support of personnel who are engaged in evangelistic and nurturing ministries.

"The tithe is to be used for one purpose, to sustain the ministers whom the Lord has appointed to do His work. It is to be used to support those who speak the words of life to the people, and carry the burdens of the flock of God" (*Manuscript, Ellen G. White, 82, 1904*).

5. The operation of the local church is important but should not be supported from tithe.

a. "The tithe is to be used for one purpose, to sustain the ministers whom the Lord has appointed to do His work. It is to be used to support those who speak the words of life to the people, and carry the burdens of the flock of God" (*Manuscript, Ellen G. White, 82, 1904*).

b. "The tithe is not to be consumed in incidental expenses. That belongs to the work of the church members. They are to support their church by their gifts and offerings" (*Letter, Ellen G. White, 81, 1897*).

### ***Policies Regarding the Use of Tithe: Functions for Which Tithe May Be Used***

1. The support of evangelists, pastors and Bible instructors.

2. The support of personnel who provide administrative leadership and services for the evangelistic outreach and nurturing ministries of the church. These include conference officers, departmental directors, accountants, clerks, and office secretaries.

3. The expenses which are necessary to undergird the total evangelistic outreach and nurturing ministries of the church, such as:

- a. Evangelism expense;
- b. Conference office operating expenses;
- c. Conference office and evangelistic equipment; and
- d. Campground and campmeeting operating expenses

4. The support of functions which are considered essential to the evangelistic outreach and nurturing ministries of the church.

a. Elementary Schools—Allocations of up to 30 percent of the total salaries and expenses of elementary principals and teachers in

recognition of their role as spiritual leaders.

b. Academies—The equivalent of the total support of academy Bible teachers, residence hall deans, and principals.

c. Colleges/Universities—An amount equal to the total cost of college and university Bible departments, residence hall deans, the presidents, and deans of students.

d. Literature Evangelists—Conference allocation on literature evangelists' benefits.

e. Conference Centers/Camps—Allocation on conference center/youth camp operating expense.

f. Media programs—The production of print, radio, and television.

g. Retirees—The retirement benefits of denominational employees (excepting those who are otherwise provided for, e.g. health-care employees).

### ***Policies Regarding the Use of Tithes: Functions for Which Tithes Shall Not Be Used***

1. Local church maintenance and other operating expenses. These should be funded by offerings from members.

2. Elementary school maintenance and other operating expenses. These should be funded from tuition and/or church subsidies.

3. Secondary and higher education maintenance and operating expenses. These should be funded from tuition and other institutional income.

4. Church, conference, or institutional building projects. These should be funded from members and/or other non-tithe sources.

### ***Administration of Tithe Funds Position Statement***

1. *The Role of the Church Family Regarding the Administration of Tithe Funds.* The world church is the family of God on earth. Each member, as a part of that family, enjoys privileges and carries responsibilities as to how the procedures for collection and distribution of tithe funds are determined. The family acting collectively through the General Conference Session and the Annual Council of the General Conference Committee determines policy, in harmony with Scripture and Spirit of Prophecy principles, for the gathering, disbursement, and administration of tithe funds. This statement is the product of much

consultation with a variety of persons within the church-laypersons, pastors, conference administrators, and world leaders. As members of the family, each individual, institution and organization will respect the honor of the family by operating within these guidelines in order to provide a regular, dependable, and ever-increasing financial support system for the proclamation of the gospel to all the world.

2. *The “Storehouse” or “Treasury” of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.* According to Scripture, the tithe is the Lord’s and is to be brought as an act of worship to His storehouse. The Seventh-day Adventist Church accomplishes this by sending the tithe to the conference treasury through the church in which the person’s membership is held. In unusual circumstances church members should consult with the officers of their local conference/mission. Following any other plan causes confusion and competition and undermines the church’s financial structure, thus weakening the church’s ability to fulfill its world mission. In order to continue a strong balanced church program around the world, members should not direct the Lord’s tithe to projects of their own choosing.

3. *Alternate Entryways to the “Storehouse.”*

a. The Lord promises unmeasured blessings to those who return a faithful tithe to the storehouse. The Seventh-day Adventist Church family has determined that the normal entryway to the storehouse is through the local conference/mission.

b. If members, for reasons of confidentiality, choose to send a portion of the tithe to the General Conference or their union conference, those offices may accept such tithe but shall send it without the person’s name to the member’s home conference for distribution to the world church. Such persons should be encouraged to process the tithe through regular channels.

4. *Tithe Sharing.*

a. The tithe-sharing plan is a balanced way of distributing equitably financial resources with the entire world church. This plan is basic and essential to the financial support system for the world work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

b. Churches, conferences, union conferences, the General Conference and divisions of the General Conference will not accept tithe from members who direct usage contrary to the usual percentages that are shared with the various levels of church organization.

c. The local church is authorized only to accept and remit total tithe funds to its local conference/mission treasury.

5. *Soliciting Tithe.* Pastors, conference and mission administrators will not solicit tithe funds from members in other conferences or divisions. The church has made provision for the equalization of financial resources.

6. *Tithe to Institutions.* Denominational organizations, such as Christian Record Braille Foundation, Voice of Prophecy, Faith For Today, It Is Written, Breath of Life will not accept funds that are known to be tithe from Seventh-day Adventists. When members send tithe to a denominational organization, they have a responsibility to indicate that it is tithe.

7. *Tithe of Transferring Members.* Members who move to a new location are urged to transfer their membership within six months and to begin supporting their new home church and conference where they are receiving spiritual nurture, pastoral care, and conference services.

8. *Borrowing Tithe.* Churches, schools (student tithe), conferences, and individuals shall not “borrow” from tithe funds to care for church, conference, or individual needs. Tithe funds shall be held only until the regular remittance date.

9. *Non-acceptance of Tithe.* If, according to these policies, a situation arises where it is not permissible for an organization to accept tithe funds, efforts shall be made to obtain authorization from the member to direct the funds to the regular channels. If such authorization is not obtained, the tithe will be returned with an appropriate explanation and an appeal to the person to participate in the church’s plan for sharing the Lord’s tithe with the church worldwide.

10. *Non-return of Tithe.* Tithe that has been accepted and receipted shall not be returned to persons who for various reasons may so request.

11. *Leadership Responsibility.* Church leadership at all levels is a sacred trust. Failure or refusal to cooperate with agreed-upon policies of the church family regarding the administration of tithe erodes the capacity of the church to accomplish its world mission. Persons who disregard these policies disqualify themselves from church leadership.

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NOTE: The foregoing policies do not apply to offerings. Members make the decision as to where their offerings are directed.

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*These guidelines were adopted and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Washington, D.C., October 14, 1985.*

## Seventh-day Adventist Trademark Guidelines

### *Guidelines*

Church trademarks, such as “Seventh-day Adventist,” “Adventist,” and “Ministry,” may be used only in connection with denominational ministries and non-commercial activities of approved lay and professional groups. Use of these trademarks shall be controlled by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists through its Trademark Committee. Church trademarks shall not be used in any manner that will jeopardize the church’s tax-exempt status.

### *Procedures*

1. *Existing Entities.* Church entities that have denominational status and are included in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook at the time of adoption of this policy and procedure may use the trademarks in their names and ministries.

2. *New Denominational Administrative Entities.* New administrative entities, such as missions, conferences, union conferences, and divisions that are approved by the General Conference Committee may use the trademarks in their names and ministries.

3. *New Denominational Institutions.* When new institutions apply for denominational status (see *NAD Working Policy C 47*), the Retirement Plan Committee shall refer all applications of institutions using one of the trademarks to the Trademark Committee of the General Conference for clearance before the application is approved by the Retirement Plan Committee.

4. *Local Churches.* Local churches and companies may use the trademarks in their ministries once their status has been approved by the local conference or mission.

5. *Lay Groups.* Lay and professional groups must apply for written permission to the secretary of the Trademark Committee of the General Conference. The articles and bylaws of such groups must indicate that they are independent of the church and are not its agents. After receipt of written notice of General Conference approval, such groups may use the trademarks solely for noncommercial purposes.

6. *Revocation of Permission.* For cause the General Conference Committee may revoke permission of any denominational entity or lay group to use the trademarks. “For cause” includes, but is not limited to,

conflict with the objectives or doctrines of the church as determined by the General Conference and commercial use by non-church groups.

### ***Internal Procedure of Seventh-day Adventist Trademark Committee***

1. *Requests for Use of a Church Trademark:*
  - a. Trademark Committee considers request;
  - b. If Trademark Committee approves, it sends request to Officers for consideration;
  - c. If Officers approve, Trademark Committee notifies General Conference Corporation; and
  - d. Trademark Committee sends written notice of approval to applicant.
2. *Evaluation of Unauthorized Use of a Church Trademark*
  - a. Trademark Committee evaluates problem, with input from Office of General Counsel and trademark counsel;
  - b. Trademark Committee reports to Officers;
  - c. If Officers so authorize, Office of General Counsel sends conciliatory letter stating the problem and offering to discuss possible solutions;
  - d. If response is negative, Trademark Committee and then Officers again consider the problem. If Officers so authorize, trademark counsel sends polite cease-and-desist letter; and
  - e. If trademark counsel receives negative response, Trademark Committee and Officers reconsider the situation for possible litigation or other action.
3. Revocation of permission for use of a church trademark will follow the same basic procedure as outlines in subsection b. of this internal procedure, with final action on revocation, however, voted by the General Conference Committee.

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Divisions other than North America are requested to take appropriate actions in harmony with these guidelines.

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*These guidelines were adopted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee for insertion into the GC/NAD Working Policies at the Annual Council Session in Washington, D.C., October 11, 1983.*

**OTHER DOCUMENTS**

## **AIDS—A Seventh-day Adventist Response**

### ***Introduction***

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) looms larger every week. We are afraid for ourselves and for our families. We worry when we see no vaccine or cure in sight for years to come. Above all, wanting to be strong we feel helpless in the face of something that is becoming the plague of our lifetime.

How will Seventh-day Adventists respond to this global crisis? How will our church administration, educational system, medical system, and local churches respond? How will individuals respond? By their response to the AIDS epidemic. Seventh-day Adventists demonstrate their mission and purpose. We must question: “Does our mission and purpose closely reveal the face and heart of God as reflected in the life and actions of Jesus Christ?” Desiring to reveal the redemptive love of Christ we need to separate the disease from the issue of morality, demonstrating a compassionate, positive attitude toward persons with AIDS, offering acceptance and love, and providing for their physical and spiritual needs. We should feel ashamed when we see social rejection of people who have AIDS.

We must be adequately informed as to the dangers of AIDS and how it is spread. We must use that information to protect ourselves as well as share with others the information on prevention.

### ***What is AIDS?***

AIDS is a contagious disease caused by a virus called the human immuno-deficiency virus (HIV). The virus enters the blood and disables a vital part of the body’s immune system. This leaves the body unable to defend itself against a wide variety of infections and certain kinds of cancers.

Medical science is working intensely to combat AIDS. Some medications delay the onset of AIDS and others prove effective against some of the infections which persons with AIDS acquire, but to date there is no vaccine or cure for AIDS and none is likely in the near future.

### ***What are the Symptoms of AIDS?***

Shortly after acquiring the virus, humans can transmit the disease although they feel fine and have no symptoms. The commonly used

blood test for the virus remains negative for two to six months after initial contact and in rare cases, more than 12 months. After the blood test for the virus becomes positive, people usually continue to remain symptom free for several years. During this incubation period they can continue to spread the virus to others. AIDS usually develops within five to fifteen years of first acquiring the infection. As of 1990 it seems that almost everyone infected with HIV will eventually develop symptoms and die of this disease.

An intermediate stage of the infection called AIDS-Related Complex (ARC) shows itself in a variety of symptoms, including: loss of appetite, drastic weight loss, fever, skin rashes, swollen lymph nodes, diarrhea, night sweats, fatigue and weakness. Affected persons may die from ARC without developing the specific infections associated with AIDS. People with AIDS commonly suffer repeated bouts of illness, many due to infections. These may be marked by pneumonia; severe infections of the mouth, throat or bowels; diarrhea; weight loss; prolonged fever; and unusual cancers. The virus can also attack the nervous system and damage the brain, causing loss of memory and coordination, profound weakness and personality changes.

### ***Global Impact of AIDS***

AIDS has been reported in nearly every country of the world. During the 1980's AIDS became an international pandemic, the number of persons with symptoms doubling every 18 to 24 months. Some people are calling AIDS the "plague" of the twentieth century. It is estimated that as many as seven million people are carrying the virus in 1990. At the present, however, well known diseases such as malaria, schistosomiasis and measles afflict and kill far more people worldwide than AIDS does. Yet AIDS remains a major threat to public health in most parts of the world.

The World Health Organization believes that by the beginning of the twenty-first century more than 100 million people around the world will be infected by the virus. One specialist in epidemics, Dr. B. Frank Polk of Johns Hopkins University in the United States, says that some countries may lose 25 percent of their population to AIDS by the mid-1990's.

### ***Can AIDS Be Treated?***

Drugs, such as zidovudine (AZT) effectively slow the progression of AIDS. Many additional drugs are in various stages of testing and may be released in the near future. While awaiting better HIV drugs, patients are treated for the specific infections or cancers as they develop.

Medical treatment in the United States for a person with AIDS costs an average of \$40-60,000 a year. The prevalence of AIDS is straining the capacity of medical facilities in many parts of the world. The expense of treating AIDS threatens to overwhelm the health-care system in even the wealthiest countries.

### ***How People Do and Do Not Get Aids***

AIDS is spread most often through sexual contact. Infected men or women pass it on to partners of either sex. Because the AIDS virus is carried in the blood, it can be transmitted when IV drug users share needles and syringes, by transfusions of infected blood or blood products and by improperly sterilized hypodermic needles. Instruments used for tattooing, ear piercing, cutting tribal scars, or penetrating the skin for any purpose can also carry the organism. Mothers can pass it on to children through pregnancy and/or delivery and, rarely, through nursing.

AIDS is not casually spread. AIDS is not transmitted by shaking hands, touching, hugging, or being close to people who have AIDS so long as there is no sexual contact or contact with blood. It is not caught by touching door knobs, using telephones, eating out in restaurants, swimming in public pools, using public toilets or through the ordinance of foot washing or baptism. Although the AIDS virus is found in very low concentrations in tears, nasal secretions and saliva, it is not easily transmitted by sneezing, coughing, or casual contact. It is not transmitted by mosquito or insect bites or by contact with animals. It cannot be contracted by donating blood.

### ***AIDS and the Worldwide Work of Seventh-day Adventists***

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, because of its far reaching ministry in nearly 200 countries, will encounter the challenges posed by AIDS. Seventh-day Adventist leaders in all institutions and in the local congregations must actively educate for the prevention of HIV infection.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to meeting the challenge of AIDS comprehensively and compassionately. The General

Conference formed an AIDS Committee in 1987. It is composed of experts in medicine, public health, nursing, church administration, minority interests, ethics, theology, and education. Its recommendations must be acted on by the church's executive committees and boards if the church is to have a balanced, comprehensive, and timely approach to AIDS.

### ***AIDS and Pastoral Ministry***

AIDS challenges the ministry of Seventh-day Adventist pastors and chaplains. They already have people with HIV infection in their congregations, communities, and hospitals. The numbers will increase. They should not fear casual physical contact including shaking hands and baptizing. Pastors should continue to call on the sick at their homes or in the hospital. HIV infections should not change patterns of visitation or in any way limit ministry.

The AIDS crisis provides pastors and chaplains the opportunity to speak publicly about AIDS, sexuality, the sanctity and beauty of marriage, interpersonal relationships, and about health practices which provide a barrier against acquiring AIDS. In advocating and educating regarding behaviors that prevent the transmission of HIV, pastors and chaplains demonstrate the love and compassion of God in their Seventh-day Adventist ministry.

### ***AIDS and Pastoral Care***

The fear of AIDS should not compromise our compassion or our witness. Those who test positive for HIV and who may be sick with the disease should find acceptance and fellowship in the local congregation. They should be comfortable in our church services and be welcomed to participate in all activities of the church: baptism, foot washing, and the communion supper. The local church can find many ways to minister to those with AIDS. Church members can join or form a support group and become individually involved in a supportive role to meet the needs of persons and families impacted by AIDS.

### ***AIDS and Seventh-day Adventist Schools***

The HIV infected child must be welcome in Seventh-day Adventist schools even as God welcomes us into a relationship with Him. AIDS predisposes to others infectious diseases such as tuberculoses. If these are present proper precautions may be necessary and the confidentiality of students who test positive for HIV must be protected. Parents and teachers should be educated as to the nature of AIDS and the steps required to prevent its spread. Guidelines for educational institutions and a recommended curriculum for AIDS education is available through the General Conference Education Department.

### ***AIDS and Seventh-day Adventist Health-care Institutions***

Seventh-day Adventist hospitals and clinics should provide an environment in which AIDS patients receive compassionate, quality care. At the same time procedures and policies need to be implemented for the safety of employees to minimize any careless exposure to the AIDS virus. All needles, syringes, and surgical equipment must be adequately sterilized. Blood and blood products should be tested and made as safe as possible. Guidelines for preventing AIDS in medical institutions are available through the General Conference Health and Temperance Department.

### ***AIDS and International Workers***

Workers assigned to fields outside of their homeland are receiving special training for the medical problems in the countries where they will be serving. These workers are receiving AIDS education. The church is advocating that travelers avoid injections where oral substitutes are available. They are advised to carry sterile disposable needles and syringes for their own personal use when injections are necessary, and they are advised to avoid transfusions of untested blood or blood products.

### ***A Final Word About AIDS***

Seventh-day Adventist church members and employees have a Christian obligation to respond to and treat people suffering with AIDS as Jesus our Savior treated the sick and outcast. Tragically, the world responds to AIDS sufferers as it once did to lepers—as sinful carriers of death to be shunned and isolated. But God in Jesus gave us His response.

He went out of His way, often walking for several days, just to touch and heal a person afflicted with leprosy. He always offered love, acceptance, and forgiveness to those afflicted by religious pride and other sins of the day. Through His redemptive love He offered life and freedom from the burden of sin. The Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to engage in the ministry of Christ. It must respond with love and acceptance when dealing with all people, including those with AIDS.

### ***How to Prevent Aids***

1. Limit sexual activity to a monogamous marriage relationship with a person known not to be infected with HIV. When one person is infected and sexual activities are continued, condoms are recommended.
2. Use only sterilized needles or syringes for injections.
3. Test blood prior to transfusions.
4. Sterilize sharp instruments used for scarification, tattoos, and circumcision.
5. Consult your doctor in the early stages of pregnancy.
6. Educate other people about how to prevent AIDS.
7. Choose to avoid high-risk behaviors such as sexual promiscuity and use of unsterile needles.

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*This study document was published by the AIDS Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and was released by the Health and Temperance Department at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana, 1990.*

## Considerations on Assisted Human Reproduction

Developments in medical technology have led to a number of interventions designed to assist human procreation. Procedures such as artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, embryo transfer, and cloning increasingly provide new options in human reproduction. Such interventions raise serious ethical questions for Christians seeking God's will on these issues.

The hope of having children is generally powerful. When this hope is frustrated by problems of infertility, the disappointment of childlessness weighs heavily on many couples. Their sorrow deserves understanding and compassion. It is not surprising that many who suffer sadness because of infertility turn to new reproductive technologies to restore hope. However, with the power of such technologies comes the responsibility to decide whether and when they should be used.

Because of their conviction that God is concerned with all dimensions of human life, Seventh-day Adventists are committed to discovering and following God's principles for human reproduction. The power of procreation is God's gift, and should be used to glorify God and bless humanity. Through a careful study of the Bible and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the community of faith can identify fundamental principles that guide in decision making regarding assisted reproduction. Among the most important of these are:

1. Human reproduction is part of God's plan (Genesis 1:28), and children are a blessing from the Lord (Psalms 127:3; 113:9). Medical technologies that aid infertile couples, when practiced in harmony with biblical principles, may be accepted in good conscience.

2. Childlessness should bear no social or moral stigma, and no one should be pressured to have children with or without medical assistance (1 Corinthians 7:4, 7; Romans 14:4; Matthew 19:10-12; 24:19; 1 Timothy 5:8). Decisions to use or not use reproductive technologies are a deeply personal matter to be settled mutually by a wife and husband, without coercion. There are many acceptable reasons, including health and the special demands of some forms of Christian service (1 Corinthians 7:32, 33), that may lead people to refrain from or limit procreation.

3. God's ideal is for children to have the benefits of a stable family with active participation of both mother and father (Proverbs 22:6;

Psalms 128:1-3; Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:4-7; 1 Timothy 5:8). For this reason, Christians may seek medically assisted reproduction only within the bounds of the fidelity and permanence of marriage. The use of third parties, such as sperm donors, ovum donors, and surrogates, introduces a number of medical and moral problems that are best avoided. Moreover, family and genetic identity are significant to individual well-being. Decisions regarding assisted reproduction must take into consideration the impact on family heritage.

4. Human life should be treated with respect at all stages of development (Jeremiah 1:5; Psalms 139:13-16). Assisted reproduction calls for sensitivity to the value of human life. Procedures such as in vitro fertilization require prior decisions about the number of ova to be fertilized and the moral issues regarding the disposition of any remaining preembryos.

5. Decisions regarding procreation should be based on complete and accurate information (Proverbs 12:22; Ephesians 4:15, 25). Couples considering assisted reproduction should seek such information. Health-care professionals should disclose fully the nature of the procedures, emotional and physical risks, costs, and documented successes and limited probabilities.

6. The principles of Christian stewardship are relevant to decisions concerning assisted reproduction (Luke 14:28; Proverbs 3:9). Some forms of technology are very costly. Couples seeking reproductive assistance should give responsible consideration to the expenses involved.

As Christians seek to apply these principles, they can be confident that the Holy Spirit will assist them in their decisions (John 16:13). The community of faith should seek to understand their aspirations and the issues that childless couples face (Ephesians 4:11-16). Among the alternatives that infertile couples may consider is adoption. As couples make careful decisions they should be able to rely on the compassionate understanding of the church family.

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*This document was recommended by the Christian View of Human Life Committee at Pine Springs Ranch, California, April 10-12, 1994, and was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), Silver Spring, Maryland, July 26, 1994.*

## Christian Principles for Genetic Intervention

### *Introduction*

Most of the new developments in genetics are the result of increased knowledge concerning the fundamental structure of *genes*, not only in humans but throughout all the realms of life on earth (Italicized words are defined in a glossary at the end of this statement). Among these developments are *genetic mapping*, new means for *genetic testing*, new possibilities for *genetic engineering*, and a variety of *eugenic* strategies that would have been unimaginable only a few years ago. In short, new genetic knowledge has produced unprecedented power. With that power has come the potential for immense good or harm. And with such great power also comes great responsibility. From the standpoint of Christian faith, we are accountable for the use of this power not only to global humanity, but also to every realm of created life that God has entrusted to our stewardship. Ultimately we are accountable to the Maker of the universe who holds us responsible for the care of each other and of the earth.

When creation came forth from the Creator's hand it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The genetic endowment which Adam and Eve received from their Creator was without defects. The genetic diseases from which humans now suffer are not the result of normal variation. They have developed through harmful *mutation*. In restoring the human *genome* to a healthier condition, modern health sciences may attempt to recover more of creation's original condition. To the extent that helpful genetic interventions can be conducted in harmony with Christian principles, they are to be welcomed as cooperation with the divine intention of alleviating the painful results of sin. Any attempt to state comprehensive principles of ethics for genetic interventions must confront the complexities of a rapidly changing field of science. Since the discovery of the molecular structure of *DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid)*, knowledge of genetics across an ever wider range of life forms has burgeoned. Many of the increases in information and technological ability have been accompanied by significant ethical concerns. We can only begin to imagine future questions that will arise as genetic science progresses. The complexity of the issues and the pace of change make it likely that statements of relevant Christian principles will require expansion and modification as time passes.

One example of an area of rapid change is *genetic mapping*. An international, scientific effort known as the *Human Genome Project* is attempting to construct a detailed genetic chart, or “map,” of all the human chromosomes. The goal is to provide a comprehensive description of the sequence of the millions of DNA *base pairs* which human chromosomes contain. Researchers plan to use this information to facilitate the identification and isolation of human genes, thereby providing a helpful aid in understanding human development and in treating human diseases. New details about the identity, role, and function of human genes are continually emerging.

Increased knowledge about the identity of human genes has given rise to a variety of new possibilities for genetic testing. In the past, genetic information about an individual was largely inferred from the person’s family history or clinical observations of the person’s *phenotype*, or physical expressions of the person’s genes. Today, a growing number of sophisticated genetic analyses make it possible to identify defective genes that cause genetic diseases such as cystic fibrosis, Huntington’s Chorea, and some types of cancer. Many of these tests can now be performed prenatally. The potential exists for identifying hundreds of genetic characteristics, including a wide range of genetic disorders.

A further result of basic genetic knowledge is the capacity to alter genes intentionally, or genetic engineering. Through the use of *enzymes* which are able to excise specific segments of genes, it is possible to change the genetic makeup of cells by deliberately inserting, removing, or changing specific genes. Genetic engineering presents astonishing new possibilities, including the transfer of genes across biological boundaries, such as from animals to plants. The potential for improving life forms seems endless. Genetically engineered plants, for example, can be made more productive, more resistant to diseases, or less susceptible to internal processes of decay.

Genetic engineering has directly benefited human medicine. It has made possible, for example, the production of human insulin and human growth factor, neither of which was previously obtainable in sufficient quantities. Genetic engineering also makes it possible to treat diseases through genetic alteration. With this type of treatment, a patient whose cells have missing or defective genes receives needed genetic material. No one knows how many genetic diseases may eventually be treated in

this way, but initial successes with diseases such as cystic fibrosis give hope that other genetic disorders may be treatable.

Increased genetic knowledge also produces new possibilities for eugenics, or endeavors to improve the gene pool of various species, including human beings. In broad terms, such attempts fall into two categories. *Negative eugenics* uses strategies whose goal is to prevent harmful genes from being inherited. *Positive eugenics* uses strategies whose goal is to promote the transmission of desirable genes. An example of negative eugenics, common in the past, is the sterilization of individuals considered to have defective genes capable of being inherited. An example of positive eugenics is artificial insemination by donors who have been selected for traits, such as high intelligence, that are deemed desirable.

### ***Ethical concerns***

In order to provide focus, it is helpful to consider a sampling of current ethical concerns for which we seek to state Christian principles. These concerns can be placed in four basic categories: the sanctity of human life, the protection of human dignity, the acceptance of social responsibilities, and the safekeeping of God's creation.

### ***Sanctity of human life***

If genetic determinism reduces the meaning of humanhood to the mechanistic out workings of molecular biology, there is serious potential for devaluing human life. For example, new capacities for prenatal genetic testing, including the examination of human *pre-embryos* prior to implantation, generate questions about the value of human life when it is genetically defective. How serious must a genetic defect, prenatally diagnosed, be before it is an ethically legitimate reason for discarding a pre-embryo or for inducing an abortion? Some conditions, such as trisomy 18, are generally deemed incompatible with life. But the relative seriousness of most genetic defects is a matter of judgment.

### ***Protection of human dignity***

The protection of personal privacy and confidentiality is one of the major concerns associated with the new possibilities for genetic testing. Knowledge about a person's genetic profile could be of significant value to potential employers, insurance companies, and to those related to the

person. Whether genetic testing should be voluntary or mandatory, when and by whom the testing should be done, how much and with whom the resulting information should be shared are matters of significant ethical concern. Difficult decisions must be made about whether there are exceptions to the usual expectation of confidentiality and privacy when other persons may suffer considerable harm because of a lack of information. At stake is the protection of persons from stigma and unfair discrimination on the basis of their genetic makeup.

Another cluster of concerns related to human dignity stems from the possibility of intentionally altering the human gene pool. Medical interventions for genetic diseases may be aimed either at the treatment of bodily cells that are genetically defective or at the alteration of reproductive cells. Changes in human reproductive cells could become a permanent part of the human gene pool. Interventions may also extend beyond the treatment of disease and include attempts to enhance what have formerly been considered normal human characteristics. What are the implications for the meaning of being human, for example, if interventions aimed at enhancing human intelligence or physique become available?

### ***Acceptance of social responsibilities***

The power that results from new genetic knowledge also raises concerns about the ethics of social policies and the boundaries between individual liberties and social responsibilities. For example, should society develop policies designed to encourage either positive or negative eugenics? Should individuals with serious genetic disorders be given full procreative liberty?

Another area of social concern has to do with the use of society's resources. Questions can be raised about the amount of social resources that should be spent for interventions in human genetics when more basic health-care is not fully available. Other questions arise concerning the distribution of the benefits and burdens of genetic interventions and how they will be shared by rich and poor within society.

### ***Stewardship of God's creation***

As the powers of genetic engineering are further developed, many changes could be made in various species that inhabit the earth. These changes have the potential for being both permanent and, to some degree, unpredictable. What limits to genetic change, if any, should be accepted?

Are there boundaries that should not be crossed in transferring genes from one life form to another? We may hope that genetic changes are intended to enhance life on our planet. But there are reasons for concern. For example, consideration has already been given to genetic alterations for the purpose of developing new biological weapons. The exploitation of other life forms for purposes of military security or economic gain should call forth careful, moral scrutiny.

It is with ethical concerns like these in mind that we state the following Christian principles for genetic interventions.

### ***Principles***

1. *Confidentiality.* Christian love requires that trust be maintained in human relationships. The protection of confidentiality is essential to such trust. In order to safeguard personal privacy and protect against unfair discrimination, information about a person's genetic constitution should be kept confidential unless the person elects to share the knowledge with others. In cases where others may suffer serious and avoidable harm without genetic information about another person, there is a moral obligation to share the needed information (Matthew 7:12; Philippians 2:4).

2. *Truthfulness.* The Christian obligation to be truthful requires that the results of genetic testing be honestly reported to the person tested or to responsible family members if the person is incapable of understanding the information (Ephesians. 4:25).

3. *Honoring God's Image.* In all of God's creation, only human beings were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The Christian acknowledgment of God's wisdom and power in creation should lead to caution in attempts to alter permanently the human gene pool (Genesis 1:31). Given current knowledge, genetic interventions in humans should be limited to treatment of individuals with genetic disorders (*somatic cell* therapies) and should not include attempts to change human reproductive cells (*germ cell* alterations) that could affect the image of God in future generations. All interventions in human beings for genetic reasons should be taken with great moral caution and with appropriate protection of human life at all stages of its development (with reference to selective abortion, refer to the principles stated in "Seventh-day Adventist Guidelines on Abortion").

4. *Prevention of suffering.* It is a Christian responsibility to prevent or relieve suffering whenever possible (Acts 10:38; Luke 9:2). For

this reason the primary purpose of human genetic intervention should be the treatment or prevention of disease and the alleviation of pain and suffering. Because of the tendencies of sinful human nature, the possibility of abuse, and unknown biological risks, attempts to modify physical or mental characteristics with genetic interventions for healthy persons who are free of genetic disorders should be approached with great caution.

5. *Freedom of choice.* God values human freedom and rejects the ways of coercion. People who are capable of making their own decisions should be free to decide whether or not to be tested genetically. They should also be free to decide how to act on information that results from testing, except when others may suffer serious and avoidable harm. It may be the morally responsible choice to avoid known risks of serious congenital defects by forgoing procreation. While such decisions about procreation and genetic testing are deeply personal, they should be made by the individual with due consideration for the common good.

6. *Stewardship of creation.* Safeguarding God's creation includes esteem for the diversity and ecological balance of the natural world with its countless species of living creatures (Genesis 1). Genetic interventions with plants and animals should show respect for the rich variety of life forms. Exploitations and manipulations that would destroy natural balance or degrade God's created world should be prohibited.

7. *Nonviolence.* Using genetic manipulation to develop means of warfare is a direct affront to Christian values of peace and life. It is morally unacceptable to abuse God's creation by changing life forms into weapons of destruction (Revelation 11:18).

8. *Fairness.* God loves all human beings, regardless of their perceived social status (Acts 10:34). The benefits of genetic research should be accessible to people in need without unfair discrimination.

9. *Human dignity.* Created in God's image, human beings are more than the sum of their genes (Genesis 1:27; Acts 17:28). Human dignity should not be reduced to genetic mechanisms. People should be treated with dignity and respect for their individual qualities, and not be stereotyped on the basis of their genetic heritage.

10. *Healthfulness.* Christians have a responsibility to maintain the health of their bodies, including their genetic health (I Corinthians 10:31). This means that Christians should avoid that which is likely to be genetically destructive to themselves or to their children, such as drug

abuse and excessive radiation.

### ***Glossary***

*Base pairs.* Pairs of complementary bases forming the DNA structure; the units used to measure the length of DNA. Base pairs consist of adenine (A), which must always pair with thymine (T), and guanine (G), which must always pair with cytosine (C).

*Chromosome.* The condensed rod made up of a linear thread of DNA interwoven with protein that is the gene-bearing structure of living cells. Human beings have twenty-three pairs of chromosomes.

*DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid).* The double helix molecule that encodes genetic information and is the primary hereditary molecule in most species.

*Enzyme.* A protein that facilitates a specific chemical reaction without changing its direction or nature.

*Eugenics.* Strategies for attempting to improve the gene pool of a species either by halting the transmission of unwanted characteristics or increasing the transmission of desired characteristics.

*Gene.* The basic unit of heredity; a section of DNA that contains information for the production of specific protein molecules.

*Gene mapping.* The process of ascertaining the genetic sequence of a species.

*Gene therapy.* The medical replacement or repair of defective genes in living cells.

*Genetic engineering.* The process of altering the genetic makeup of cells or individual organisms by deliberately inserting, removing, or changing specific genes.

*Genetic testing.* The examination of individuals' genetic makeup for the purpose of identifying possible hereditary traits, including defects or abnormalities.

*Germ cell.* Reproductive cell.

*Genome.* All of the genetic material in the chromosomes of a particular organism or individual.

*Genotype.* An individual's genetic makeup.

*Human Genome Project.* The international, scientific effort to construct a detailed map of human genes, identifying their structure and function.

*Implantation.* The attachment of an embryo to the wall of the uterus.

*Mutation.* A permanent alteration of DNA that can be inherited.

*Negative eugenics.* Strategies for preventing the transmission of genetic traits which are deemed undesirable.

*Phenotype.* The observable characteristics resulting from a particular genotype as influenced by environmental factors.

*Positive eugenics.* Strategies for promoting the transmission of genetic traits which are deemed desirable.

*Pre-embryo.* A fertilized ovum (or conceptus) prior to implantation and the beginning of pregnancy.

*Recombinant DNA.* A novel sequence of DNA that is artificially produced by joining segments of DNA.

*Somatic cell.* Any cell of a body other than reproductive cells.

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*This document was adopted by the Christian View of Human Life Committee in March 1995 and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), June 13, 1995.*

## **Declaration of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Church-State Relations**

### ***Preamble***

God is love. His rule of this universe is based on the willing obedience of His creation evoked by His magnificent benevolence.<sup>1</sup> Only a faith that rests in the heart of man,<sup>2</sup> and only actions prompted by love,<sup>3</sup> are acceptable to God. Love, however, is not subject to civil regulation. It cannot be evoked by fiat nor sustained by statute. Therefore, efforts to legislate faith are by their very nature in opposition to the principles of true religion, and thus in opposition to the will of God.<sup>4</sup>

God placed our primordial parents on this earth with the power to choose between good and evil.<sup>5</sup> Subsequent generations born into this world have been granted a similar choice. This freedom to choose, so granted by God, should not be infringed by man.

The appropriate relation between religion and the state was best exemplified in the life of our Savior and example, Jesus Christ. As one of the Godhead, Jesus held unparalleled authority on earth. He had divine insight,<sup>6</sup> divine power,<sup>7</sup> and a Holy charter.<sup>8</sup> If anyone in the history of the world had the right to force others to worship as he dictated, it was Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus never used force to advance the gospel.<sup>9</sup> It is for the followers of Christ to emulate this example.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has, from its inception, attempted to follow the example of Christ by championing freedom of conscience as an integral part of its gospel mission. As the role of the church in society expands, it is appropriate to state the principles that guide our worldwide church in our contacts with the governments of the lands in which we operate.

### ***Freedom of Conscience***

At the heart of the Adventist message is our abiding belief that freedom of conscience must be guaranteed to all. Freedom of conscience includes the freedom to believe and fully practice the religious faith of choice, the freedom not to believe or practice religious faith, freedom to change faiths, and the freedom to establish and operate religious institutions in accordance with religious beliefs. We are dedicated to working for the advancement of legal and political protection of religious freedom and in support of the broad interpretation of national and

international charters that guarantee the protection of this freedom.<sup>10</sup>

As Christians, Seventh-day Adventists recognize the legitimate role of organized government in society.<sup>11</sup> We support the state's right to legislate on secular matters and support compliance with such laws.<sup>12</sup> When we are faced with a situation in which the law of the land conflicts with biblical mandates, however, we concur with the Scriptural injunction that we ought to obey God rather than man.<sup>13</sup>

The Adventist dedication to freedom of conscience recognizes that there are limits on this freedom. Freedom of religion can only exist in the context of the protection of the legitimate and equal rights of others in society. When society has a compelling interest, such as the protection of its citizens from imminent harm, it can therefore legitimately curtail religious practices. Such curtailments should be undertaken in a manner that limits the religious practice as little as possible and still protects those endangered by it. Limitation of freedom of conscience in order to protect society from offense or similar intangible harms, from hypothetical dangers or to impose social or religious conformity by measures such as Sunday laws or other state mandated religious observances, are not legitimate limitations on freedom.

Seventh-day Adventists are called to stand for the principle of liberty of conscience for all. In keeping with our love for others,<sup>14</sup> we must be ready to work on behalf of groups whose freedom of conscience is inappropriately impinged by the state. Such work may result in personal and corporate loss. This is the price we must be willing to pay in order to follow our Savior who consistently spoke for the disfavored and dispossessed.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Participation in Government***

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is mindful of the long history of the involvement of the people of God in civil affairs. Joseph wielded civil power in Egypt.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Daniel rose to the heights of civil power in Babylon and the nation was benefited as a result.<sup>17</sup> In our own church history, Adventists have joined with other religious and secular organizations to exert influence over civil authorities to cease slavery and to advance the cause of religious freedom. Religious influence has not always resulted in the betterment of society, however. Religious persecution, religious wars, and the numerous examples of social and political suppression perpetrated at the behest of religious people, confirms the dangers that exist when the means of the state are used to

advance religious objectives.

The growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has resulted in a corresponding growth in our ability to exert political influence in some areas of the world. This political influence is not in itself problematic. Indeed, Adventists may properly aspire to serve in positions of civil leadership.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, we must remain ever mindful of the dangers that are associated with religious influence on civil affairs and assiduously avoid such dangers.

When Adventists become leaders or exert influence in their wider society, this should be done in a manner consistent with the golden rule.<sup>19</sup> We should therefore work to establish robust religious liberty for all and should not use our influence with political and civil leaders to either advance our faith or inhibit the faith of others. Adventists should take civic responsibilities seriously. We should participate in the voting process available to us when it is possible to do so in good conscience<sup>20</sup> and should share the responsibility of building our communities. Adventists should not, however, become preoccupied with politics, or utilize the pulpit or our publications to advance political theories.<sup>21</sup>

Adventists who are civic leaders must endeavor to adhere to the highest standards of Christian behavior. As modern-day Daniels, God will lead them and their fidelity to Him will inspire their community.

### ***Representation to Governments & International Bodies***

Throughout the history of the People of God, the Lord has seen fit to delegate individuals to represent His message to the rulers of the time. Abraham,<sup>22</sup> Joseph,<sup>23</sup> and Moses<sup>24</sup> all dealt directly with the Pharaoh of their time. Esther's presence in the court of King Ahasuerus resulted in saving God's people from destruction.<sup>25</sup> Daniel was first a representative to the Babylonian Empire,<sup>26</sup> and later to Cyrus the Persian and Darius the Mede.<sup>27</sup> Paul carried the gospel to the ruling class of the Roman Empire.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, many of the great reformers stood before the rulers of their day to advocate their position. We would therefore be remiss if we were not to endeavor to represent Christ to the leaders of this world in our current time.

Indeed, Adventists are called to be a voice for liberty of conscience to this world.<sup>29</sup> Integral to this mission is the development of relationships with temporal rulers.<sup>30</sup> In order to do this, the Seventh-day Adventist Church appoints representatives to governments and

international bodies that have influence over the protection of religious liberty. This work must be viewed as essential to our gospel mission and should be accorded the resources necessary to ensure our representation is of the highest order.

### ***Expectations of Governments***

Governments are established to serve the needs of the governed. As such, they must ensure the protection of the population's fundamental human rights, including freedom of conscience. The state must also endeavor to build communities with public order, public health, a clean environment, and an atmosphere that does not unduly inhibit its citizen's ability to raise families and freely explore the facets of their humanity. It is the state's responsibility to endeavor to eliminate discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, social class, religion, political persuasion, and gender and to guarantee its residents equal access to an impartial judiciary. States have a responsibility not only to protect all those living within its borders but also to work for the protection of human rights in the international community and to provide a haven to those fleeing persecution.

### ***Receipt of Government Funding***

Seventh-day Adventists have long debated whether the church or its institutions should accept government funding. On one hand, the church has taught that the Lord moves upon the hearts of those in civil power and that the church should not build barriers that would cut off assistance for the advancement of His cause.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the church has warned against the union of church and state.<sup>32</sup>

Thus 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 Adventists and to observe without compromise principles expressed in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. In addition, to avoid a union of church and state, government funds should not be accepted to pay for religious activities such as worship services, evangelism, the publishing of religious texts, or for the salaries of those working in church administration or in the gospel ministry, except for the provision of spiritual services to those whose

lives are so fully regulated by the state as to make the provision of such services impracticable without state involvement.<sup>33</sup>

In instances when the acceptance of government funding does not violate the foregoing principles, careful consideration should be given to whether government funds should be accepted. Ongoing government funding, as opposed to single financial contributions, presents a particular danger. It is virtually impossible for institutions not to become at least partially dependent on ongoing governmental funding streams. Such government funding typically is accompanied by governmental regulation. While such regulation may not violate Christian principles when the money is first received, such regulations are subject to change. In the event that regulations governing the receipt of government funds change to require the abandonment of the principles for our institutions described in the Bible and by Ellen G. White, ongoing governmental funding must be refused, even if as a result the institution must be closed, sold or significantly restructured.

When Adventists receive government funding, we must handle such funds with the highest integrity. This includes strict compliance with the regulations attached to the funding and the use of rigorous accounting standards. If procedures are not in place to ensure such compliance, funding must be refused.

In some exceptional circumstances, Adventists can only achieve a presence in a country if we operate programs that are controlled by the government and that forbid an open witness. Considerable prayer and thought must be given to the ramifications of participating in such programs. We should consider whether participation assists the government in maintaining its restrictive policies, whether participation associates the church's name with the coercive government, and whether participation will provide opportunity both in the short and long term for spreading the gospel including the three angels messages<sup>34</sup> in the country concerned. We must assiduously avoid associating the name of Christ with regimes that suppress and brutalize their populace.

### ***Conclusion***

God has put each individual on earth with the capacity to determine right from wrong under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with His Word. This declaration, therefore, is not designed to supercede divine counsel, nor is it designed to be an authoritative interpretation

of that counsel. Rather, the declaration serves to encapsulate the understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at this time.

The way in which Seventh-day Adventists conduct our church-state relations has a significant impact on our worldwide efforts. We must therefore approach this area with significant thought and prayer. Working under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Adventists will continue to champion the gospel principle of freedom of conscience.

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<sup>1</sup>”God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs & Prophets*, p. 34).

<sup>2</sup>Ezekiel 36:26

<sup>3</sup>1 Corinthians 13

<sup>4</sup>The example of ancient Israel under theocratic rule is sometimes used to justify modern efforts to legislate religious mandates. Such justifications misapply Biblical precedent. For a relatively short period of this earth’s history, God used particular methods to preserve His message for the world. These methods were based on a mutually agreed upon covenant between God and a family that grew into a relatively small nation. During this period, God directly ruled in a manner He has not chosen to utilize since. The experience of direct rule by God based on a mutually agreed upon covenant, while of invaluable importance to our understanding of the Lord, is not directly applicable to how modern nations should be ruled. Rather, the more applicable example of the relationship between the church and the state is that provided by Jesus Christ.

<sup>5</sup>Genesis 3

<sup>6</sup>See, e.g., John 4:17-19

<sup>7</sup>See, e.g., John 11

<sup>8</sup>1 John 2:1

<sup>9</sup>Quite the contrary, Jesus explicitly stated that His “kingdom is not of this world” and therefore his servants were not commissioned to exert power through force (John 18:36).

<sup>10</sup>See, e.g., United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 18; The American Convention on Human Rights, Art. 12; The African

Charter on Human and People's Rights, Art. 8; The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Art. 9; Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Art. 15; Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, Art. 5; Constitution of the Republic of South Korea, Art. 20; Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia, Art. 116; Constitution of India, Art. 25-28; Constitution of the United States of America, First Amendment.

<sup>11</sup>1 Peter 2:13-17

<sup>12</sup>Romans 13

<sup>13</sup>Acts 5:29: "The people of God will recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment and will teach obedience to it as a sacred duty within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, the word of God must be recognized as above all human legislation. 'Thus saith the Lord' is not to be set aside for Thus saith the church or the state. The crown of Christ is to be uplifted above the diadems of earthly potentates" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 402).

<sup>14</sup>Matthew 22:39

<sup>15</sup>See, e.g., Luke 4:18; Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 10:30-37

<sup>16</sup>Genesis 41:40-57

<sup>17</sup>Daniel 6:3

<sup>18</sup>"Have you thoughts that you dare not express, that you may one day stand upon the summit of intellectual greatness; that you may sit in deliberative and legislative councils, and help to enact laws for the nation? There is nothing wrong in these aspirations. You may every one of you make your mark. You should be content with no mean attainments. Aim high, and spare no pains to reach the standard" (Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 82).

<sup>19</sup>Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:12).

<sup>20</sup>While Seventh-day Adventists are to vote, they are to cast their vote with prayerful consideration. See Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Vol. 2, p. 337 (admonishing Adventists to vote); Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 475 (stating that Adventists cannot safely vote for political parties); & Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, p. 127 (Adventists become partakers in the sins of politicians if they support candidates that do not support religious liberty).

<sup>21</sup>Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 475.

<sup>22</sup>Genesis 12:15-20

<sup>23</sup>Genesis 41

<sup>24</sup>Exodus 4-12

<sup>25</sup>Esther 8

<sup>26</sup>Daniel 3-5

<sup>27</sup>Daniel 1:21 & 5:31-6:28

<sup>28</sup>Acts 23-26

<sup>29</sup>”We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscious” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 714).

<sup>30</sup>”Kings, governors, and councils are to have a knowledge of the truth through your testimony. This is the only way in which the testimony of light and truth can reach men of high authority” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 15, 1890).

<sup>31</sup>”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 in 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 has moved men to give for the advancement of His cause” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 197-203).

<sup>32</sup>”The union of the church with the state, be the degree never so slight, while it may appear to bring the world nearer to the church, does in reality but bring the church nearer to the world” (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 297).

<sup>33</sup>This category includes chaplains retained by the state to provide spiritual services to those serving in the military, those that are incarcerated, those that are in state hospitals, and those whose lives are similarly restricted to state institutions or whose lives are similarly pervasively regulated by the state.

<sup>34</sup>Revelation 14:6-12

GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE  
October 10, 1994

## **COMMUNICATION STRATEGY COMMISSION - REPORT\***

### **VOTED**

1. To accept the Communication Strategy Commission Report as a study document;
2. To request the divisions to place the document under review and report to the General Conference with recommendations prior to the 1995 Spring Meeting;
3. To refer to the 1995 Spring Meeting for further action the Communication Strategy Commission Report which reads as follows:

The report of the Communication Strategy Commission (COSCO) provides strategies that will address several significant issues affecting the Church in both its internal and external communication.

### **BACKGROUND**

At the 1992 Annual Council, an action was taken providing for the concerns and issues affecting the World Church to be communicated, under the direction of the President of the General Conference, to all levels of the Church through established print media. It proposed the wider use of the electronic media, and urged that administrations give priority to their use.

The goals of this worldwide communication approach include maintaining unity of belief and mission, nurturing the spiritual life of members, providing information on the position of the Church on public issues, and countering divisive elements.

It was not the purpose of the 1993-1994 Communication Strategy Commission to repeat the work of the former commission; rather it sought to reinforce, supplement, and strengthen its proposals.

At the 1993 Annual Council, a further action was taken identifying Communication as one of the six focus issues that needs to be addressed by the Church. The Communication Strategy Commission,

in part, was a direct response to the 1993 action. The report of the Commission addresses the need “to prepare a strategy giving direction to communication within and without the Church.”—Annual Council action 250-93G, “World Survey Commission Report and Recommendations for Strategic Planning,” 1993

*Annual Council Booklet*, p 28.

The report that follows is in two main parts: a proposed strategy, and other actions which include various types of implementation that should enhance the activating and effectiveness of the strategy.

## STRATEGIC STATEMENT AND RATIONALE

Recommended:

1. To adopt the following as the overall strategic statement to govern communication both within and outside the Church:

Seventh-day Adventists will communicate hope by focusing on the quality of life that is complete in Christ.

The summary of all of God’s communication about Himself is “God is Love” (1 John 4:16). This love floods the human heart and creates hope (Rom 5:2). God, who is the ground of hope, communicates joy and peace to the Church and its members, so that hope overflows into the world (Rom 15:13). It is only in Christ that we are complete (Col 2:10).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church looks forward with the “blessed hope” always in view. The Church believes that God provides for humankind a message of hope that enhances the quality of life spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially. Therefore, Seventh-day Adventists will communicate with increasing urgency and insistence this message of hope, in order to change life here and now, and offer the completeness of life that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Ellen G White repeatedly urges the Church to develop its message and mission in a way that addresses the needs of body, mind, and spirit. In a world of decay, disease, and doubt, we are to communicate God’s original plan for the race which provides for the needs of the whole person.

The Church already holds a considerable advantage in how it is viewed by its publics. Many, in all countries, perceive the Church as a preferred source for securing a better quality of life. As the Church takes this perception, augments it through a cohesive and deliberate strategy, Seventh-day Adventists will also be perceived as the stewards of a hope that goes far beyond earthly expectations.

The most effective test of all communication is, Does it demonstrate love and produce hope? The Church's purpose is to create a communication vision designed to fulfill the great commandment—“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” In such communication a quality of life may be offered that brings hope both for the present and the future world.

2. To request each entity of the Church to develop its communication, both internal and external, within this strategy.

The actual choice of words used in communication initiatives may depend on whether the initiative is directed internally or externally, the cultural and social milieu in which the Church may be operating, and the entity that is creating the initiative.

Within this strategy church entities may positively address how best to communicate using the words, slogans, and patterns of thought that are attractive within their culture.

For this strategy to have a global impact there must be agreed priorities in concept and planning. It therefore proposes that the General Conference work with the divisions in formulating plans that will implement the strategy.

3. To incorporate the following guiding principles:

a. The Local Congregation: To make the local congregation the primary focus of internal communication.

The worldwide membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is consistently organized into local churches. These local church communities serve as the basis for all of the essential tasks associated with the development of faith and practice. The purpose of communication is to create communities of faith.

The local church is organized, in God's plan, for the preaching of the gospel and the nurture of the believers. These two tasks unite

individual members into communities, and create the need for communication.

The rapid and diverse growth of the Church creates special challenges and opportunities for communication, which the Church must meet at the level of the local congregation.

Hope and whole-person development are essential parts of internal communication, and these are best provided within the local church community.

### 1) The Church Is Responsible:

a) To examine and, where necessary, adjust its internal communication systems so that the flow of information is to the local congregation.

b) To make essential information available through the local congregations so that each church member may be informed and nurtured.

c) To include the provision of minimum nurturing materials in the appropriate language as one of the criteria for recording a country, area, or people group as entered.

d) To communicate hope to its members by focusing on the quality of life that may be theirs as they are complete in Christ.

e) To communicate in love to its members so that hope may overflow in an effective witness.

### 2) Implementation

a) Each division/union to review its communication systems within the church and prepare recommendations to the division executive committee on systems suitable to, and feasible for, its needs. Reports on actions taken and systems in place are to be forwarded to the General Conference vice president assigned to communication.

b) At least a monthly communication to each congregation from the conference/mission providing nurture, connection with the mission and message of the Church, and information on progress and challenges.

c) The inclusion within the minimum nurturing materials available to every Seventh-day Adventist the following:

(1) How to accept Christ.

(2) How to live as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian.

(3) How to be part of the life of the congregation and society.

(4) The fundamental beliefs of the Church.

The preparation of these materials to be the responsibility of the Ministerial Association working with denominational publishers.

Note: In congregations with nonliterate believers, the minimum materials will be made available in comprehensible formats through the appointed spiritual leader of the congregation.

### 3) Projected Benefits

a) Systems able to communicate effectively and swiftly within the Church.

b) Every member provided with nurture, connection with the message and mission of the Church, and information on progress and challenges.

c) An informed witnessing Seventh-day Adventist presence on which the Church can build and expand its mission.

d) Members from whom love and hope overflow as they demonstrate the quality of life that completeness in Christ creates.

b. Effective Communicators: To enable congregations and church members to be effective communicators within the context of their communities.

### 1) The Church Is Responsible

a) To include the following four elements in internal communication, each in a contextualized setting:

(1) To equip: to train and empower disciples.

(2) To inform: essential information about the Church.

(3) To educate: basic belief system.

(4) To inspire: by examples of others.

b) To provide all internal communication in a way that is sensitive to the varying needs of gender, age, race, language, ethnicity, and culture.

c) To establish administrative initiatives for timely and full delivery of information to congregations.

d) To share information in a candid, honest, and responsible way.

### 2) Implementation

a) A training program designed to equip, to inform, to educate, and to inspire developed by the Communication Department in consultation with administration.

b) Communication methods may include one or more of the following: multimedia, personal presentation, drama, musicals, role playing, and publications.

c) Aggressive pursuit of communication

technology with the goal of developing delivery systems that can be sustained. These systems to be identified and evaluated through the Communication Department.

### 3) Projected Benefits

a) Congregations and church members able to communicate effectively with each other, with other church entities and with their communities.

b) Communication that can be received positively by the whole spectrum of members.

c) Effective delivery of communication.

d) Confidence in leadership and better understanding of issues and challenges affecting the Church and its mission.

c. Quality of Life: The Seventh-day Adventist Church to become the preferred source for whole-person development.

### 1) The Church Is Responsible

a) To relate biblical truth to present needs in a manner that is theologically correct and experientially satisfying.

b) To communicate the assurance of the quality of life to be found through an understanding of the Divine provision for whole-person development (physical, mental, spiritual, social).

c) To enhance the effectiveness of communication, making it sensitive to the needs of the community being addressed, and allowing the people to accept the communication in a way that meets their situation and context.

d) To devise cost effective initiatives and ministries which contain the capacity to become self-funding.

## 2) Implementation

a) All outreach activity must be sensitive to three basic building blocks of evangelism: 1) relevance to the listener; 2) the listener's readiness for truth; and 3) permission from the listener to share the Christian gospel.

b) Ask ministries and institutions to develop instruments to rate themselves, and ask their users to rate them on their effectiveness in communicating a quality of life that finds its completeness in the hope God gives in Jesus Christ.

c) Ask ministries to listen formally to nonmember concerns about quality of life issues at least once per year.

d) Use the results from c) above, to create outreach initiatives. These initiatives should affirm the congregation hosting the event and should lead respondents to prefer the Seventh-day Adventist quality of life.

e) Serving the whole person—spiritually, with compelling evangelistic and worship opportunities; mentally, with high quality education; physically, with information and programs; and socially, through church fellowship and community events.

f) Design resources which enable ministries and institutions to use information about individual users, or user groups, to structure materials specifically applicable to those individuals or user groups.

g) Develop instruments for reporting and evaluating which would measure whether or not the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the preferred source for quality of life and whole-person development, in tandem with information which is traditionally collected.

## 3) Projected Benefits

a) Ministries which communicate the Gospel in a

way that answers felt needs and creates hope in Christ.

b) Institutions that provide whole-person development and communicate hope.

c) A public awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the preferred source of whole-person development.

d) Ministry materials for congregations to use which match individual or user group needs with church resources.

e) Ministries and resources which people use and which have the capacity to be self-funding.

d. Image Perception: To improve the public perception of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its members.

### 1) The Church Is Responsible

a) To create and maintain initiatives that portray Seventh-day Adventists as credible contributors to quality of life for people and communities.

b) To involve all entities, from the local congregation to the General Conference, all institutions from local schools and clinics to major educational, health, publishing and other institutions, in the improving of the public perception of the Church, according to the principles outlined in the communication strategy.

c) To make the communication of hope that focuses on the quality of life that is complete in Christ a key concept in public communication initiatives.

### 2) Implementation

a) Developing at all levels, under the direction of the Communication Department, an active and intentional plan for involvement in the community with participation and recognition of both church entities and their individual members.

b) The creation of an international Seventh-day Adventist news network, under the direction of the Communication Department, to provide news and information to the major world news agencies and non-Seventh-day Adventist church press agencies. News will portray international church activities including those that enhance the quality of life.

c) The development and adoption of a corporate identity package, including logo and signage, under the direction of the Communication Department, for use throughout the World Church.

d) The establishing of an accreditation program by the Communication Department for use in evaluating the image local congregations project in their local communities. Key qualities include appearance of the church, hospitality of the congregation, and community interaction.

e) The instituting of a multi-tiered program of media relations and crisis management to address the information needs of the mass media at all levels of the church, with focus on how Seventh-day Adventists contribute to the quality of life in their communities.

f) The inclusion of basic public relations and mass communication training in all formal theological and pastoral training, and in continuing education programs for pastors.

g) Local church communicators and pastors will receive similar training in how to evaluate and take advantage of local communication opportunities. All such programs are to be built around the communication strategy of the Church.

h) The development and implementation of five- and ten-year image awareness programs by each division which address unique needs in each division.

i) The provision of opportunities for communicating, through a variety of fellowship and worship styles, to meet the needs of diverse communities, just as we recognize the value of language and ethnic diversity within the Church.

### 3) Projected Benefits

a) The public perception of the Church increasingly focussed on its fulfillment of the Gospel Commission in a way that improves the life of the individual and the community.

b) The entire Church working together for better acceptance by its publics as it carries out its mission.

c) Cohesion and consistency in image perception.

### 4. Divisions and Unions

Because of the wide range of different technologies needed in order to communicate with local congregations, the different public perception of the Church in countries within divisions, and the necessity of using communication platforms and approaches adapted to differing contexts in which the Church operates, further development of the strategy must continue at the division and union level.

#### Recommended:

a. To request each division to utilize the participatory process developed for the “six focus issues” to implement and develop the communication strategy, and to provide reports on strategy initiatives for review by the Communication Strategy Council.

b. To request the division/union committees to implement the communication strategy within the division territory, and to set measurable goals for review and assessment of communication initiatives.

### 5. Institutions Utilizing Mass Media Outreaches (including Media Centers and Publishing Houses)

Recommended: To request institutions utilizing mass media outreaches (including media centers and publishing houses):

a. To implement in the world the communication strategy by developing programs consistent with the Strategic Statement.

b. To accept a key role in communicating to the non-Christian and secular audiences.

#### 6. 1994-1997 Planning Cycle

a. Recommended: to adopt the following planning cycle for 1994-1997

##### 1) Administrative Actions

a) Annual Council 1994: Distribution of the Strategy as a study document to Church leadership.

b) Division Yearend Meetings 1994: Explanation and preliminary presentation of the study document at division yearend meetings.

c) Spring Meeting 1995: Discussion and action recommending strategy to the General Conference Session and Annual Council 1995.

d) Division Midyear Meetings 1995: Presentation of the strategy to division midyear meetings.

e) General Conference Session: Discussion and adoption of the core strategy at the General Conference Session.

f) Annual Council 1995: Final action on detailed plan.

g) Division Yearend Meetings 1995: Adoption and implementation of the strategy by division yearend meetings.

##### b. Implementation Plans

The implementation of the strategy requires:

- 1) The distribution of the strategy.
- 2) Training to understand and use the strategy.
- 3) Baseline research to establish standards for evaluation and measurement.
- 4) Trial use of the strategy.
- 5) Contextualizing the strategy for specific regions and activities.
- 6) Adoption of the strategy as the standard for communication.

While this may take a period of several years, measurable results in these areas can be achieved early in the implementation cycle.

c. Recommended:

1) To request the newly established Communication Council to make the development of a three-, five-, and ten-year implementation plan its highest priority.

2) To adopt the following three-year implementation plan as an interim plan until the formal plan is in place. This interim plan is to be coordinated with the larger church calendars. (The work of coordination to be the responsibility of the vice president advising the Communication Department and the Communication Director with assistance with scheduling from the Assistant to the President.)

a) 1995

(1) Third Quarter: Development of a training curriculum for understanding and using the strategy; budgetary provisions made in the 1996 budgets for implementation of the strategy.

(2) Fourth Quarter: Baseline research done in

100 targeted markets, with at least 40 percent of the targets being in areas where the church has little or no activity. The baseline to include 10 basic questions common to all divisions.

b) 1996

(1) First Quarter: Beginning of a year long strategic review by institutions, departments, and world divisions on how to contextualize and adopt the plan to local situations; the development of action plans for implementation commencing in the first quarter 1997.

(2) Second Quarter: Initial reports received from all world divisions of a Crisis Management Plan, including four standard components:

(a) Written crisis management protocols.

(b) Named spokesperson.

(c) Chain of command in a crisis.

(d) Strategies for anticipating crisis response.

(3) Third Quarter: Initial reports received from all world divisions of results of the strategy in the area of evangelism, including three standard components:

(a) Baseline research prior to evangelistic endeavor.

(b) Summary of how the strategy was used in the evangelistic endeavor.

(c) Research following the evangelistic endeavor to measure and evaluate results.

(4) Fourth Quarter: Initial reports received

from all world divisions of public identity activity, including three standard components:

(a) Baseline research in targeted markets.

(b) Three percent improvement of public image in markets with an established Seventh-day Adventist presence.

(c) Five percent improvement of public image in markets with no Seventh-day Adventist presence.

(5) Report to Annual Council 1996 of three trial initiatives.

(a) Crisis Management.

(b) Evangelism.

(c) Public Identity.

(6) Registration of regional implementation plans for 1997.

c) 1997

(1) First Quarter: Launch of regional, contextualized implementation, to continue through all of 1997.

(2) Second Quarter: Report to Spring Council 1997 by world divisions and church institutions of implementation launch.

(3) Third Quarter: Survey of strategic initiatives by the Communication Council.

(4) Fourth Quarter: Report to Annual Council 1997 on progress of regional initiatives.

d) 1998

First Quarter: Review and evaluation of regional initiatives by each region.

7. Communication Strategy Council

a. Recommended: To appoint a Communication Strategy Council for the General Conference as follows:

1) Membership:

Chairman, Vice President assigned to  
Communication

Secretary, Director of Communication Department

In addition to the chairman and secretary, fifteen persons representing various communication functions and skills including the following:

One person from each division

Communication department leadership

Editors

Public Affairs and Religious Liberty

Broadcast ministries

Institutional Public Relations

Lay communication specialists

2) Terms of Reference

a) Implement the theme of communicating “hope

by focusing on a quality of life that is complete in Christ.”

b) Recommend action plans to departments, divisions, and/or institutions to assist them in creating communication that is coherent and consistent with the strategy.

c) Report to divisions or other entities on specific ideas that the division and other entities can use to solve problems the divisions have presented to the council during its annual meeting.

d) Identify and disseminate creative communication initiatives of the divisions and institutions.

e) Access individuals who can assist the council in developing plans and ideas for recommendation.

f) Set priorities in the developing of strategic communication initiatives.

g) Establish costs for projects and initiatives recommended for implementation.

h) Receive and review reports from divisions on development of the communication strategy.

### 3) Administrative basis

a) Constituted by and report to the General Conference Administrative Committee.

b) Report to the General Conference Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committee through the Administrative Committee.

c) Meetings will alternate annually between Maryland, USA and locations in the world divisions, the General Conference to fund travel expenses.

Other Recommendations from the Commission:

## 1. Communication Structure for the General Conference

### a. Recommended:

1) To organize communication at the General Conference level so that it is a part of the President's office under the direction of a General Conference vice president assigned to communication (see attached diagram).

2) To define the role of the general vice president with the communication assignment as follows:

a) Responsible to the General Conference President for the total communication program of the General Conference in both internal and external communication.

b) Chairman of the Board for the Adventist Media Center and for Adventist World Radio.

c) Presidential advisor to the Communication Department.

d) Presidential advisor to the Office of Mission Awareness.

3) To assign authority to speak to the general public and the media on behalf of the General Conference as follows:

a) The church spokesperson(s) to be carefully selected by administration, and perform functions designated by administration using the following criteria for selection and function:

(1) The spokesperson usually not to be a member of administration.

(2) The spokesperson to have access to administration.

(3) The spokesperson to be fully conversant

with the issue being addressed.

(4) The spokesperson to work strictly in tandem with the coordinating taskforce.

b) Resource groups to be developed to establish databases useful to the church in developing media releases which deal with areas of interest to the church and its audiences.

4) To set up a communications system for the General Conference that will enable the General Conference President, the vice president assigned to communication and the Communication Director to be part of the consultation process in determining content, timing, and manner of release of information determined by them to be of international or local significance, whether within or outside the Church.

## 2. Departmental Functions

Recommended:

a. To request the General Conference to study further how the functions of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, which relate closely to those of the Communication Department, can be coordinated.

b. To request the General Conference to establish a structure so that the publications of the Church may also be coordinated within its communication strategy.

## 3. Bible Correspondence Schools and Courses

Recommended: To assign responsibility for Bible correspondence schools and courses to the Personal Ministries Department.

## 4. Strategy Resources

Recommended:

a) To develop a list of Seventh-day Adventist professionals

with particular training and expertise in the area of facilitating corporate change. To secure the services of one or more of these individuals to work with the Communication Strategy Council to evaluate the strategy and create the necessary structure to bring about the desired corporate buy-in and change needed to accomplish the strategic goals.

b) To set up resource groups to establish databases useful to the Church in developing media releases which deal with areas of interest to the Church and its audiences.

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*\*This report was accepted by the 1995 General Conference session in Utrecht, the Netherlands.*

## **Conserving Membership Gains - an Appeal**

FINAL DRAFT

**RECOMMENDED** To approve the following appeal to the world Church regarding membership retention and the reclaiming of former members; and further

To encourage widespread circulation of this appeal to church leaders and local congregations.

### Conserving Membership Gains—An Appeal

Seventh-day Adventists around the world rejoice in the rapid membership growth of recent years. The Church views this as evidence of Holy Spirit-led movements and a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. (Matthew 24:14, Revelation 14:6, 7) Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church baptized over 5 million people from 2000 - 2005, membership losses during that time equaled nearly 1.4 million. Current indications are that annual membership losses, for reasons other than death, equal approximately 28% of membership accessions. Some membership loss occurs among recent converts, however, this tragic outcome is not limited to new members.

Members leave the Seventh-day Adventist fellowship for a variety of reasons. It is unrealistic to expect that the Church will reach a point where the membership retention rate is 100%. This, however, should not excuse the Church from consciously creating and maintaining a nurturing environment for all members. Research on why members leave Seventh-day Adventist Church fellowship suggests that social and relational factors are much more significant than disagreement with denominational teachings. In fact, many who leave denominational fellowship remain supportive of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and even maintain church practices for some time following their departure.

The reasons most frequently cited by persons who leave local church fellowship are found in the realm of relationships, the absence of a sense of belonging, and the lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and its mission. Therefore, the loss of members for these reasons should be preventable.

Seventh-day Adventists understand that last-day events will be accompanied by multiplied thousands turning to God, seeking spiritual foundations for life, and identifying with a community of believers that holds fast to biblical teaching. Church members and leaders around the world continue to place a great emphasis on evangelism and church growth believing that even greater and more rapid membership growth lies just ahead.

To prepare the Church for this large influx of new members, to reclaim members who have left, and to prevent current membership losses, the General Conference Executive Committee voices an appeal for members and leaders everywhere to give renewed emphasis to the matter of membership retention and reclamation. This involves understanding the reasons for membership loss in each local church and focusing on how to develop the capacity of the church to attract, reclaim, retain, and engage its members in the mission of the church.

While the specific response to this appeal will vary from place to place and reflect cultural diversity that is so evident in the global Church family, certain specifics are universal. For example, an individual's spiritual life must be fed through Bible study and prayer. We also know that to retain new members, the following factors are essential. If one of these factors is missing, the member is weakened, but may survive. If two factors are absent, they almost certainly will leave the fellowship of Church members.

1. They must be able to articulate their beliefs.
2. They must have friends within the congregation.
3. They must engage in a personally-meaningful ministry.

Every member, whether or not recently baptized, should be able to experience an atmosphere in which to grow spiritually, to know a sense of belonging and identity, and to use their spiritual gifts in the advancement of mission. Creating such an environment requires more than a program. It necessitates the creation of a loving atmosphere with each member taking a personal interest in others.

Persons who join the Seventh-day Adventist Church come from widely varied backgrounds and experiences. All members are not at the same point of spiritual development. But all should find within church fellowship a place to continue their growth. Peter urges, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. Offer

hospitality to one another, without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." 1 Peter 4:8-10 (NIV)

The following actions will help to bring this into reality.

1. Along with their annual planning and budgeting for evangelism, executive committees and local church boards should assess the membership retention capacity in their territory. This will require careful review of membership care measures along with accession and loss patterns. Analysis of the situation should be followed by deliberate steps to address the circumstances that lie within the church's ability to change.
2. Repeated instructions of basic Bible teaching should be provided for all newly-baptized members in an intentionally-designed follow-up for a period of months after their baptism.
3. Ensuring that the outreach methods used by the Church take into consideration how new members will become integrated into the life of the church family and advance in the pathway of discipleship. Such planning should include the formation of friendships, fellowship in small groups, active participation in witnessing, and recruitment into specific roles and responsibilities as a member of the local congregation.
4. Designing ministry that addresses the developmental and spiritual needs of children, youth, and young adults, affirming their value to the Church by training them for, and entrusting them with, responsibility.
5. Making certain that the provision of adequate places of worship is an integral part of the evangelistic initiative which brings people into church fellowship. No programs should be permitted that do not honor this essential requirement.
6. Training members in how to re-connect with those who have discontinued church fellowship. In many cases, the return to fellowship of former members is more challenging to the congregation than the acceptance of new converts. Careful attention is needed to facilitate the healing of relationships

and the realization, between persons, of the reconciliation that flows from the forgiveness and acceptance received through Jesus Christ.

The General Conference Executive Committee praises God for the rapid growth that is taking place in many areas. Evangelism is the mission of the Church. Leaders and members are commended for making this the priority in planning and budgeting. This we must continue and, while so doing, demonstrate the loving concern of the Good Shepherd for His sheep who may have strayed.

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*This Appeal was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Spring Meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland, April 10, 2007.*

## **Seventh-day Adventists and the Ecumenical Movement**

The General Conference Executive Committee has never voted an official statement regarding the Seventh-day Adventist relationship to the ecumenical movement as such. A book has been written dealing at length with the subject (B. B. Beach, *Ecumenism—Boon or Bane?* [*Review and Herald*, 1974]) and a number of articles have appeared over the years in Adventist publications, including the *Adventist Review*. Thus, while there is not exactly an official position, there are plenty of clear indications regarding the Seventh-day Adventist viewpoint.

Generally, it can be said that while the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not completely condemn the ecumenical movement and its main organizational manifestation, the World Council of Churches, she has been critical of various aspects and activities. Few would wish to deny that ecumenism has had laudable aims and some positive influences. Its great goal is visible Christian unity. No Adventist can be opposed to the unity Christ Himself prayed for. The ecumenical movement has promoted kinder interchurch relations with more dialogue and less diatribe and helped remove unfounded prejudices.

Through its various organizations and activities, the ecumenical movement has provided more accurate and updated information on churches, spoken for religious liberty and human rights, combated against the evils of racism, and drawn attention to socioeconomic implications of the gospel. In all this the intentions have been good and some of the fruit palatable. However, in the total picture, the banes tend to outweigh the boons. We shall examine some of these.

### ***Adventism a Prophetic Movement***

The Seventh-day Adventist Church stepped upon the stage of history—so Adventists firmly believe—in response to God’s call. Adventists believe, it is hoped without pride or arrogance, that the Advent Movement represents the divinely appointed instrument for the organized proclamation of the “eternal gospel,” God’s last message, discerned from the prophetic vantage point of Revelation 14 and 18. In the focalized light of its prophetic understanding, the Seventh-day Adventist Church sees herself as the eschatologically oriented “ecumenical” movement of the Apocalypse. She begins by “calling out”

God’s children from “fallen” ecclesial bodies that will increasingly form organized religious opposition to the purposes of God. Together with the “calling out” there is a positive “calling in” to a united, worldwide—that is, ecumenical-movement characterized by “faith of Jesus” and keeping “the commandments of God” (Revelation 14:12). In the World Council of Churches the emphasis is first of all on “coming in” to a fellowship of churches and then hopefully and gradually “coming out” of corporate disunity. In the Advent Movement the accent is first on “coming out” of Babylonian disunity and confusion and then immediately “coming in” to a fellowship of unity, truth, and love within the globe-encircling Advent family.

In understanding the Adventist attitude toward ecumenism and other mainline churches, it is helpful to remember that the early-Advent movement (characterized by the Millerites) had ecumenical aspects: it arose in many churches. Thus, Adventists came from many denominations. However, the churches generally rejected the Advent message. Adventists were not infrequently disfellowshipped. Sometimes Adventists took with them portions of congregations. Relations became embittered. False stories were circulated, some of which unfortunately still persist today. The pioneers had strong views, and their opponents were no less dogmatic. They tended to look more for what separates than what unites. That was an understandable development. Today, of course, the interchurch climate tends to be more irenic and benign.

What are some of the problems Adventists have with ecumenism? Before we endeavor to give a summary answer to this question, it needs to be pointed out that the ecumenical movement is not monolithic in its thinking, and one can find all kinds of views represented in its ranks (that in itself, of course, is a problem!). We will try to make reference to what can be considered mainstream thinking within the World Council of Churches (WCC), an organization now representing more than three hundred different churches and denominations.

### ***Ecumenical Understanding of Unity***

The New Testament presents a qualified church unity in truth, characterized by holiness, joy, faithfulness, and obedience (see John 17:6, 13, 17, 19, 23, 26). “Ecumenthusiasts” (to coin a word) seem to take for granted the eventual organic unity and communion of the great majority of the churches. They emphasize the “scandal of division,” as

if this were really the unpardonable sin. Heresy and apostasy are largely ignored. However, the New Testament shows the threat of anti-Christian penetration within “the temple of God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4). The eschatological picture of God’s church prior to the Second Coming is not one of a megachurch gathering all humankind together, but of a “remnant” of Christendom, those keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus (see Revelation 12:17).

There is clearly a point at which unorthodoxy and un-Christian lifestyle justify separation. The WCC misses this point. Separation and division in order to protect and uphold that purity and integrity of the church and her message are more desirable than unity in worldliness and error.

Furthermore, Adventists are uncomfortable with the fact that the WCC leaders seem to give little emphasis to personal sanctification and revival. There are indications that some may view such emphasis as a quaint pietistic hangover, not a vital ingredient of a dynamic Christian life. They prefer to soft-pedal personal piety in favor of social morality. However, in Adventist understanding, personal holiness of life is such stuff as the morality of society is made (with apologies to Shakespeare). Without genuinely converted Christians, any formal organizational unity is really of a plastic nature and of little relevance.

### ***Ecumenical Understanding of Belief***

In many church circles broad-mindedness is seen as an ecumenical virtue. The ideal ecumenist, it is suggested, is not dogmatic in belief and is somewhat fluid in doctrinal views. He greatly respects the beliefs of others, but is less than rigid about his own belief. He appears humble and not assertive about doctrinal beliefs—except those regarding ecumenical unity. He has a sense of partial knowing. To show religious doctrinal arrogance is, ecumenically, especially sinful.

All this has a laudable side. Humility and meekness are Christian virtues. Indeed, Peter tells us to always be ready to answer and give a reason for our faith, but this must be done with humility, respect, and a good conscience (1 Peter 3:15, 16). However, there is in ecumenical ranks an almost in-built danger of softness and relativization of belief. The whole concept of heresy is questioned. Lately, questions are even raised regarding the idea of “paganism.”

Typical of some ecumenical presuppositions is the idea that all denominational formulations of truth are time-conditioned and relative, and therefore partial and inadequate. Some ecumenists would even go so far as to advocate the need of doctrinal synthesis, bringing together various Christian beliefs in a kind of cocktail approach. We are told that each church is imbalanced and it is the task of ecumenism to restore balance and harmony. Within the reconciled diversity of the ecumenical movement, presumably everyone, in the words of Frederick the Great, “will be saved in his own way.”

Adventists believe that without strong convictions, a church has little spiritual power. There is the danger that ecumenical quicksands of doctrinal softness will suck churches into denominational death. Of course, this is precisely what ecumenical enthusiasts hope for. However, Adventists feel that such doctrinal irresolutions must be vigorously resisted, otherwise spiritual self-disarmament will be the result and a truly post-Christian age would be upon us.

### ***Ecumenical Understanding of Scripture***

Adventists see the Bible as the infallible revelation of God’s will, the authoritative revealer of doctrinal truth, and the trustworthy record of the mighty acts of God in salvation history (see *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists: 1. The Holy Scriptures*). Adventists see the Bible as a unity. For many WCC leaders the Bible is not normative and authoritative in itself. The emphasis is on Biblical diversity, including at times demythologization of the Gospels. For a large number of ecumenists, as is the case for liberal Christianity in general, inspiration lies not in the Biblical text but in the experience of the reader. Propositional revelation is out; experience is in.

Apocalyptic prophecy is given practically no time-of-the-end role. Pro forma references to the Parousia are made, but have no implications for urgency and make little measurable impact on the ecumenical concept of evangelistic mission. There is here the danger of eschatological blindness.

Seventh-day Adventists see the Biblical picture of sin and redemption within the framework of the “great controversy” between good and evil, between Christ and Satan, between God’s Word and the lies of the impostor, between the faithful remnant and Babylon, between the “seal of God” and the “mark of the beast.”

Adventists are, first and foremost, people of the Word. While believing in the unconditional authority of the Scriptures, Adventists recognize that the Bible was “written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, it not represented. ... The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 21). Many ecumenists would say that the Biblical text is not the word of God but contains this word as men respond and accept it. In contrast, Adventists would say that the utterances of the Bible writers “are the word of God” (*ibid.*). God is not on trial; neither is His Word, form criticism notwithstanding. It is man vis-à-vis the Bible who is on trial.

### ***Ecumenical Understanding of Mission and Evangelism***

The traditional understanding of mission highlights evangelism, that is, the verbal proclamation of the gospel. The ecumenical approach sees mission as involving the establishment of shalom, a kind of social peace and harmony. Adventists have problems with any tendency to downplay the primary importance of announcing the good news of redemption from the stranglehold of sin. In fact, the traditional, including Adventist, view of salvation has always been the saving of individuals from sin and for eternity. Ecumenical evangelism sees salvation as primarily saving society from oppressive regimes, from the ravages of hunger, from the curse of racism, and from the exploitation of injustice.

The Adventist understanding of conversion means for a person to experience radical changes through spiritual rebirth. The majority emphasis in WCC circles appears to be on changing—converting—the unjust structures of society.

As we see it, in the area of evangelism and foreign missionary work the fruits (or maybe we should say lack of fruits) of ecumenism have often been less evangelism (as we understand it—from Paul to Billy Graham), less growth and more membership decline, fewer missionaries sent out, proportionally less financial support coming in. In fact, the missionary outreach has shifted away from mainline “ecumenical” churches to conservative evangelicals. It is sad to see such a large evangelistic potential lost to the missionary movement, especially at a time of increasingly active and militant Islamic outreach and the awakening of Eastern and indigenous religions.

The recent and successful Seventh-day Adventist One Thousand Days of Reaping campaign ran counter to the ecumenical low-key “joint

mission” approach. The latter may sound good in an ecumenical study paper, but soul-winning results are really not there. The paraphrase of an old saying has some relevance here: “The proof of the ecumenical pudding lies in the evangelistic eating.”

### ***Ecumenical Understanding of Sociopolitical Responsibility***

Admittedly, the whole question of Christian social and political responsibility is a complicated one. The WCC and other councils of churches (such as the National Council of Churches in the United States) are heavily involved in what are usually seen as political questions. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is very much more circumspect in this area (in comparison to evangelism, where the tables are turned!).

Much ecumenical thinking in the area of political responsibility includes or involves:

1. A secularization of salvation;
2. A postmillennial view advocating the gradual political improvement and social betterment of humankind and the establishment through human effort, as divine agents, of God’s kingdom on earth;
3. Adaptation of Christianity to the modern world;
4. Evolutionary utopian faith in progress; and
5. Socialistic collectivism, favoring some form of egalitarianism and the welfare state, but not Communist materialism.

Presumably, ecumenical social activists consider Adventism as a utopian vision of pie in the apocalyptic sky by and by; this is wrong. Faced with the many problems of society, Adventists cannot be, and generally are not, apathetic or indifferent. Witness this: extensive hospital-clinic-health institutions serving millions of people every year; a large educational system circling the globe with nearly 5,000 schools; Adventist Development and Relief Agency—a rapidly expanding worldwide service of the church in areas of acute and chronic need. Several other service activities could be referred to.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes it is necessary to distinguish between sociopolitical activity of individual Christians as citizens and involvement on the corporate church level. It is the church’s task to deal with moral principles and to point in a Biblical direction, not to advocate political directives. The WCC has at times been involved in political power plays. While Adventism will sow seeds that will inevitably influence society and politics, it does not wish to be entangled in political controversies. The church’s Lord did state: “My kingdom

is not of this world” (John 18:36), and like her Lord the church wishes to go “about doing good” (Acts 10:38). She does not wish to run the government, either directly or indirectly.

### ***Ecumenical Understanding of Religious Liberty***

In the early years of the WCC, beginning with its first assembly at Amsterdam in 1948, religious liberty was placed on the ecumenical agenda. Religious liberty was seen as a vital prerequisite for ecumenical unity. In 1968, a religious liberty secretariat was set up at WCC headquarters. However, in more recent years, the WCC religious liberty stance has been somewhat ambiguous. In 1978, the secretariat was closed down, mainly for what was seen as a lack of funds. This, of course, in itself speaks regarding the priority given to religious liberty in the organized ecumenical movement.

Today the ecumenical tendency is to view religious liberty as simply one of the human rights instead of the fundamental right that undergirds all other human rights. This is, of course, the approach used by the secular mind. Secularists or humanists refuse to recognize religious belief as something apart or above other human activities. There is here the danger that religious liberty will lose its unique character that makes it the guardian of all true freedoms.

It must not be forgotten that historically it has been the balance of power and denominationalism that have neutralized religious intolerance and worked for religious liberty. Formal religious unity has existed only with force. There is thus in society an inbuilt tension between unity and religious liberty. In fact, the eschatological picture of the final events is a dramatic tableau of religious persecution, as the massive forces of apocalyptic Babylon try to squeeze the church of the remnant into the mold of united apostasy.

Finally, the religious liberty outlook becomes increasingly clouded when it is realized that certain ecumenical activists accept fairly easily religious liberty restrictions affecting believers of a different religious-political stamp, who are exerting what is perceived to be a negative social stance. Furthermore, some ecumenical leaders are quite willing, in revolutionary situations, to see religious liberty interfered with and “temporarily shut down,” in order to promote unity, nation building, and the “good” of society as a whole.

### ***The Influence of Prophetic Understanding***

What we have written so far highlights some of the reservations Adventists have regarding involvement in the organized ecumenical movement. The general attitude of the Seventh-day Adventist Church toward other churches and the ecumenical movement is decisively influenced by the above considerations and determined by prophetic understanding. Looking back, Adventists see centuries of persecution and anti-Christian manifestations of the papal power. They see discrimination and much intolerance by state or established churches. Looking forward, they see the danger of Catholicism and Protestantism linking hands and exerting religio-political power in a domineering and potentially persecuting way. They see the faithful church of God not as a jumbo church, but as a remnant. They see themselves as the nucleus of that remnant and as not willing to be linked with the expanding Christian apostasy of the last days.

Looking to the present, Adventists see their task as preaching the everlasting gospel to all men, calling for worship of the Creator, obedient adherence to the faith of Jesus, and proclaiming that the hour of God's judgment has come. Some aspects of this message are not popular. How can Adventists best succeed in fulfilling the prophetic mandate? It is our view that the Seventh-day Adventist Church can best accomplish her divine mandate by keeping her own identity, her own motivation, her own feeling of urgency, her own working methods.

### ***Ecumenical Cooperation?***

Should Adventists cooperate ecumenically? Adventists should cooperate insofar as the authentic gospel is proclaimed and crying human needs are being met. The Seventh-day Adventist Church wants no entangling memberships and refuses any compromising relationships that might tend to water down her distinct witness. However, Adventists wish to be "conscientious cooperators." The ecumenical movement as an agency of cooperation has acceptable aspects; as an agency for organic unity of churches, it is much more suspect.

### ***Relationships With Other Religious Bodies***

Back in 1926, long before ecumenism was in vogue, the General Conference Executive Committee adopted an important statement that is now a part of the *General Conference Working Policy* (O 75). This declaration has significant ecumenical implications. The concern of

the statement was for the mission field and relationships with other “missionary societies.” However, the statement has now been broadened to deal with other “religious organizations” in general. It affirms that Seventh-day Adventists “recognize every agency that lifts up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for the evangelization of the world, and ... hold in high esteem the Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.” In the church’s dealings with other churches, “Christian courtesy, friendliness, and fairness” are to prevail. Some practical suggestions are made in order to avoid misunderstandings and occasion for friction. The statement makes it very clear, however, that the “Seventh-day Adventist people” have received the special “burden” to emphasize the Second Coming as an event “even at the door,” preparing “the way of the Lord as revealed in Holy Scripture.” This divine “commission” makes it, therefore, impossible for Adventists to restrict their witness “to any limited area” and impels them to call the gospel “to the attention of all peoples everywhere.”

In 1980, the General Conference set up a Council on Interchurch Relations in order to give overall guidance and supervision to the church’s relations with other religious bodies. This council has from time to time authorized conversations with other religious organizations where it was felt this could prove helpful.

Adventist leaders should be known as bridge builders. This is not an easy task. It is much simpler to blow up ecclesiastical bridges and serve as irresponsible “Christian commandos.” Ellen G. White has said: “It requires much wisdom to reach ministers and men of influence (*Evangelism*, p. 562). Adventists have not been called to live in a walled-in ghetto, talking only to themselves, publishing mainly for themselves, showing a sectarian spirit of isolationism. It is, of course, more comfortable and secure to live in a Seventh-day Adventist fortress, with the communication drawbridges all drawn up. In this setting one ventures from time to time into the neighborhood for a quick evangelistic campaign, capturing as many “prisoners” as possible, and then disappearing with them back into the fortress. Ellen G. White did not believe in the isolationist mentality: “Our ministers should seek to come near to the ministers of other denominations. Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ’s messengers we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 78).

### ***Usefulness of Observer Relationships***

Experience has taught that the best relationship to the various councils of churches (national, regional, world) is that of observer-consultant status. This helps the church to keep informed and to understand trends and developments. It helps to know Christian thinkers and leaders. Adventists are provided the opportunity to exert a presence and make the church's viewpoint known. Membership is not advisable. Those ecumenical organizations are usually not "neutral." They often have quite specific goals and policies and play sociopolitical advocacy roles. There would be little point in being halfhearted members (at best) or pro forma members (as many member churches are) or often in opposition (as inevitably would be the case).

On local levels, dealing with more practical and less theological issues, one could envision some forms of Seventh-day Adventist membership, with caution, however. We are thinking of such organized relationships as ministerial associations/fraternals, local church organizations, Bible study groups, specific groups or networks to study community needs and help solve local problems. Adventists must not be perceived as simply opting out of any Christian responsibility for the local community.

In recent years, Adventist leaders and theologians have had opportunities for dialogue with other church representatives. These experiences have been beneficial. Mutual respect has been engendered. Worn-out stereotypes and inaccurate and untrue doctrinal perceptions have been removed. Prejudices have been unceremoniously laid to rest. Theological tools and understandings have been sharpened. New dimensions have been recognized and new vistas of outreach opened up. First of all, however, their faith in the Advent message has been enhanced. There is no reason for Adventists to have an inferiority complex. It is a wonderful privilege to be a Seventh-day Adventist and to know that the theological and organizational foundation of the church are sure and secure.

### ***Heralds of the True Oikoumene***

Adventists are heralds of the only true and lasting oikoumene. In Hebrews reference is made to "the world [Greek: oikoumene] to come" (Hebrews 2:5, NEB), the coming universal kingdom of God. In the final analysis, it is this "ecumenism" Adventists are working for. Every other

ecumenical movement is ephemeral. In the meantime, it is a Christian duty to “concentrate on being completely devoted to Christ” in one’s heart. “Be ready at any time to give a quiet and reverent answer to any man who wants a reason for the hope that you have within you. Make sure that your conscience is perfectly clear” (1 Peter 3:15, 16, Phillips).

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*This study document, intended for internal church use, first appeared in Pattern for Progress, The Role and Function of Church Organization by Walter Raymond Beach and Bert Beverly Beach, was authored by Bert B. Beach, and was released in connection with the General Conference Session New Orleans, Louisiana, June 1985. It is available from the office of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty of the General Conference.*

## **Statement of Ethical Foundations for the General Conference and Its Employees**

### ***Our Mission***

The Seventh-day Adventist Church mission is to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel, in the context of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as their personal Savior, and encouraging them to unite with His church and prepare for His soon return. Within the scope of this mission, the General Conference office exists to lead the church in being a worldwide witness for God's kingdom and in making disciples of Jesus Christ.

### ***Our Responsibilities***

General Conference employees believe:

1. We are responsible first to God, our Creator. Individual and collective action must reflect His character and exhibit His love.
2. We are responsible to the communities in which we work and live and also to the world community. We accept the challenge to be exemplary individuals and corporate citizens. We support good works and charities. We encourage civic improvements, a better quality of life, security, health, and education for all.
3. We are responsible to our fellow church members. We accept accountability for sound leadership decisions and appropriate stewardship.
4. We are responsible to each other within the office complex. Every individual deserves to be treated with dignity and respect; to have his or her role and contribution valued and affirmed; to function in a safe working environment; to experience an atmosphere of challenge, open communication, and contentment.

### ***Our Values***

1. We value the *Bible* as the primary reference for life's direction and qualities.
2. We value *excellence* in all that we do.
3. We value *ethical* and *moral conduct* at all times and in all relationships.
4. We value *creativity* and *innovation* in the completion of our mission.

5. We value *honesty, integrity, and courage* as the foundation of all our actions.

6. We value the *trust* placed in us by colleagues and by the world church membership.

7. We value *people* as children of God and therefore brothers and sisters of one family.

### ***Ethical Responsibilities as Employer and Corporate Citizen***

In pursuit of its mission, and while maintaining its responsibilities and adhering to its values, the General Conference operates under the following ethical guidelines:

1. *Equal opportunity employment.* Within the purview of laws permitting church membership as a condition of employment, and subject to denominational policies on positions requiring ministerial ordination, the General Conference will follow procedures to ensure equal opportunity of employment, remuneration, and advancement on the basis of job qualifications and performance.

2. *Equity, fairness, and non-discrimination.* The General Conference will treat all individuals and groups with loving justice. It will not practice or condone discrimination with regard to race, national origin, gender, age, marital status, veteran status, or disability that does not prohibit performance of essential job functions.

3. *Compliance with laws of the land.* The General Conference will carry on its activities in compliance with the laws of the land provided these are not in contradiction to God's expressed will.

4. *Loyalty and fulfillment of contractual obligations.* The General Conference will fulfill the commitments it has entered into through authorized channels. Where misunderstandings arise regarding such commitments, the General Conference shall participate, with the parties concerned, in conflict resolution procedures within the organizations before seeking the help of the wider community.

5. *Atmosphere of safety and happiness.* The General Conference is committed to providing a work environment that offers physical safety and security. It also strives to encourage and promote genuine happiness through the realization that every employee is valuable and every task, no matter how routine or unnoticed, is a service to God. The General Conference will continue to integrate worship, work, and celebration in a manner that acknowledges wholeness in life and relationships.

6. *Respect for human dignity and individuality.* The General Conference affirms and respects the uniqueness of every employee. It recognizes that a person's value surpasses the worth of his or her contribution to the organization. It believes that communal harmony and corporate objectives are enhanced rather than compromised by the broad mosaic of personalities, talents, skills, and viewpoints dedicated to the honor of Jesus Christ. The General Conference shall strive for communication that is timely, truthful, open, candid, and kind.

### ***Ethical Responsibilities as Employees***

We recognize that employment in the Seventh-day Adventist Church implies commitment to the organization's mission and concurrence with its responsibilities and values. We affirm that the employer-employee relationship grows within a reciprocity of mutual regard. Our reasonable service as employees includes the following ethical responsibilities:

1. *Life consistent with church message and mission.* While in the employ of the General Conference we will live in a manner consistent with the beliefs and values of the church. We will uphold, in word and conduct, the teachings and principles held and advanced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

2. *Respect for church-owned assets.* We will respect the property of our organization, including any intellectual property that is developed in the course of our employment. We will use the property, facilities, and resources solely for the benefit of our organization, unless otherwise permitted or when financial compensation for such use has been arranged.

3. *Respect for colleagues.* We will respect and uplift our fellow employees. We will refrain from intentionally placing another in a position of embarrassment, disrespect, or harassment. We will avoid all behavior that may be construed as sexually inappropriate. We will honor the privacy and guard the safety of others.

4. *Efficiency and attention on the job.* The hours of our employment shall be devoted to the work assignments entrusted to us. We will not use the employer's time for personal business or the advancement of personal interests unrelated to the work assigned by our supervisors. We will not deprive our employer by entering into other employment or activities which impair our performance for the General Conference while on the job. We will aspire to greater efficiency and the reduction of waste in

time, effort, and resources.

5. *Personal integrity in financial matters.* We will not engage in theft or embezzlement of any kind including the misuse of expense accounts, falsification of time reports, or the misapplication of resources for which we are responsible.

6. *Avoiding inappropriate influence.* We acknowledge that the giving or receiving of business gifts can easily inject ulterior considerations in our work and employment relationships. Therefore the use of gifts, payments, or honoraria as incentives or rewards for a particular course of action is unacceptable. We will not offer gifts, favors, payments, or other forms of reward directly or indirectly in exchange for a specific gain or action.

7. *Maintaining an ethical environment in the workplace.* We accept the obligation of maintaining ethical standards in personal life and in the workplace. We believe it is our personal responsibility to report, through established confidential channels, any behavior that is inappropriate or which undermines the ethical environment in the office complex. We are prepared to be held accountable by our supervisors and peers for professional conduct representing the moral and ethical values of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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*This document was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland, September 29, 1999. The document was prefaced by a recommendation that world divisions adapt the Statement for use in the territories under their jurisdiction.*

## **Seventh-day Adventist Statement on Consensus Concerning Female Genital Mutilation**

### ***Introduction***

As part of their mission to the entire world, Seventh-day Adventists have a firm commitment to provide health care that preserves and restores human wholeness. By wholeness we mean the harmonious development of the physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual dimensions of a person's life, unified through a loving relationship with God and expressed in generous service to others. Because Adventists believe that each human being is created in God's image as a unified person, rather than as a duality of body and soul, we believe in a ministry of grace that affects all aspects of human life, including physical and emotional well-being.

Ministry to the entire person leads Seventh-day Adventists to be concerned about the widespread practice of female genital mutilation.<sup>1</sup> Often referred to as "female circumcision" or, more recently, "female genital cutting," such practices currently affect scores of millions of living women and girls, with additional millions of girls disfigured annually. These estimates do not account for the young girls who die as a result of the more radical forms of genital mutilation. These practices range from excision of the clitoral prepuce to complete removal of the vulva with closure of the vaginal opening. Our central concern, expressed in this statement of principles, is for all forms of female genital injury that lead to physical dysfunction or emotional trauma. Moreover, such procedures are often done with unclean instruments, without anesthesia, on forcibly held young girls between the ages of four and twelve. Hemorrhage, shock, infection, incontinence, damage to surrounding organs, and massive scarring are frequent results. In addition to this physical devastation, genital mutilation is also emotionally traumatic.

Women who have been subjected to genital mutilation are also often afflicted with a variety of long-term gynecological health problems, including fistulas, chronic infections, and problems with menstruation. Upon entering marriage, intercourse is usually a painful, traumatic event, often necessitating reopening of the scarified vaginal opening. Childbirth may also be impeded due to rigid scarring of the tissues. At times, maternal and fetal deaths also result.

In the cultures where female genital mutilation is prevalent, the practice is considered justified for a variety of reasons. It is believed,

for example, that such mutilation will preserve virginity in unmarried women, assist in controlling their sexual drive, strengthen sexual faithfulness for married women, and increase sexual pleasure for their husbands. It is also believed that removal of all or part of female genitalia improves cleanliness, is cosmetically desirable, and makes childbirth safer for the infant. Because of these beliefs, women who have not undergone such procedures may be considered unsuited for marriage. Despite evidence against such reasons, and despite the efforts of numerous human-rights organizations, the practice of female genital mutilation continues in a variety of cultures, with a prevalence exceeding 90 percent in some countries.

In some cultures, female genital mutilation is defended as a form of religious practice. While Seventh-day Adventists strongly advocate protection of religious liberty, Adventists believe that the right to practice one's religion does not vindicate harming another person. Thus, appeals to religious liberty do not justify female genital mutilation.

### ***Biblical principles***

The Adventist Church's opposition to female genital mutilation is based on the following biblical principles:

1. *Preservation of life and health.* The Bible presents the goodness of God's creation, including the creation of human beings (Genesis 1:31; Psalms 139:13, 14). God is the Source and Sustainer of human life (Job 33:4; Psalms 36:9; John 1:3, 4; Acts 17:25, 28). God calls for the preservation of human life and holds humanity accountable for its destruction (Genesis 9:5, 6; Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 24:16; Jeremiah 7:3-34). The human body is "the temple of the Holy Spirit," and followers of God are urged to care for and preserve their bodies, including the Creator's gift of sexuality, as a spiritual responsibility (1 Corinthians 6:15-19). Because female genital mutilation is harmful to health, threatening to life, and injurious to sexual function, it is incompatible with the will of God.

2. *Blessing of marital intimacy.* Scripture celebrates the divinely ordained gift of sexual intimacy within marriage (Ecclesiastes 9:9; Proverbs 5:18, 19; Song of Solomon 4:16-5:1; Hebrews 13:4). The practice of female genital mutilation should be renounced because it threatens the Creator's design for the experience of joyful sexuality by married couples.

3. *Healthful procreation.* For married couples, the gift of sexual union may be further blessed by the birth of children (Psalms 113:9; 127:3-5; 128:3; Proverbs 31:28). The fact that successful childbirth is threatened by female genital mutilation is additional grounds for opposition to this practice.

4. *Protection of vulnerable persons.* Scripture prescribes that special efforts be made to care for those who are most vulnerable (Deuteronomy 10:17-19; Psalms 82:3, 4; Psalms 24:11, 12; Isaiah 1:16, 17; Luke 1:52-54). Jesus taught that children should be loved and protected (Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 18:4-6). The genital mutilation of young girls violates the biblical mandate to safeguard children and protect them from harm and abuse.

5. *Compassionate care.* Love for the neighbor prompts Christians to provide compassionate care to those who have been injured (Luke 10:25-37; Isaiah 61:1). Christians are called to care with compassion for those who have experienced physical and emotional trauma caused by female genital mutilation.

6. *Sharing truth.* Christians are called to overcome error by expressing the truth in a loving manner (Psalms 15:2, 3; Ephesians 4:25). The fundamental truth of the gospel is intended to liberate people from all types of bondage to falsehood (John 8:31-36). Thus, Christians should join in sharing accurate information about the harm of female genital mutilation and the beliefs that underlie this practice.

7. *Respect for cultures.* Christians should be sensitive to and respectful of cultural differences (1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Romans 12:1, 2). At the same time, we believe that God's principles transcend cultural traditions (Daniel 1:8, 9; 3:17, 18; Matthew 15:3; Acts 5:27-29). The fundamental principles of Scripture provide a basis for the transformation of cultural practices. While we acknowledge that female genital mutilation is firmly entrenched in many cultures, we find this practice to be incompatible with divinely revealed principles.

## ***Conclusion***

Because female genital mutilation threatens physical, emotional, and relational health, Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to this practice. The church calls on its health care professionals, educational, and medical institutions, and all members along with people of good will to cooperate in efforts to eliminate the practice of female genital

mutilation. Through education and loving presentation of the gospel, it is our hope and our intention that those threatened by this practice will find protection and wholeness and that those who have been subjected to this practice will find solace and compassionate care.

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<sup>1</sup> “Currently, the different types of female genital mutilation known to be practised are classified as follows:

Type I—Excision of the prepuce, with or without excision of part or all of the clitoris.

Type II—Excision of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora.

Type III—Excision of part or all of the external genitalia and stitching/narrowing of vaginal opening (infibulation).

Type IV—Unclassified: includes pricking, piercing or incising of the clitoris and/or labia; cauterization by burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissue; scraping of tissues surrounding the vaginal orifice [angurya cuts] or cutting of the vagina [gishiri cuts]; introduction of corrosive substances or herbs into the vagina to cause bleeding or for the purposes of tightening or narrowing it; and any other procedure that falls under the definition of female genital mutilation given above.”

This classification is taken from *Female Genital Mutilation: A Joint WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA Statement*. Published by World Health Organization, Geneva, 1997.

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*This document was adopted by the General Conference Christian View of Human Life Committee in April, 2000, and was referred to those church departments and institutions which will find the material useful.*

## **A Seventh-day Adventist Statement Concerning Human Gene Therapy**

### ***Introduction***

Recent advances in medicine and genetic technology make it possible to treat human disease by altering the genes in cells of the sufferer. Though the methods of the emerging field of genetic medicine are still under development, the pace of clinical trials and recent advances suggests that gene therapy will become a common and versatile medical option. This prospect highlights the need for Christians to identify the moral principles of their faith that apply to the practice of human gene therapy.

### ***General Description***

Gene therapy employs DNA or RNA, the chemicals that make up genes, to cure or ameliorate inherited defects or acquired diseases. The therapeutic genetic material may be designed to replace defective genes in the patient's cells or to provide supplementary genetic information to regulate the function of normal genes. The DNA may come from almost any source—animals, plants, microbes, viruses—or it may be synthetic with no counterpart in nature. The effect of the introduced material may be intentionally temporary or it may be permanent. Often the results achieved by gene therapy cannot be obtained by any other means. The diseases that were first considered for gene therapy were relatively uncommon inherited conditions. Subsequently the focus moved to genetic treatments for common ailments—cancer, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, etc.

Discovering efficient ways to introduce genes into a large number of the particular cells that would most benefit from them has been the technical challenge limiting the usefulness of gene therapy. In most clinical tests, viruses are used as “vectors” or “vehicles” to carry the new DNA because viruses are incredibly efficient at infecting cells with their own genes. A virus vector is typically constructed by removing genes that the virus would use to replicate or to damage its host cells, and replacing them with therapeutic genes. Adenoviruses (cold viruses), retroviruses (relatives of HIV), adeno-associated virus (a small virus not known to cause disease), herpes virus, and several others have been used in various cases. All virus vectors have characteristics that limit their usefulness and there is often a medical risk involved in their use. Other

means for inserting genes into cells that do not involve viruses may also be developed, but non-viral methods are generally less effective.

### ***Somatic Gene Therapy***

Categories of gene therapy are defined by the heritability of the changes they cause. *Somatic gene therapy* alters genes in cells that may be located anywhere in the body, except the reproductive cells. Many different organs have been proposed as targets—bone marrow, liver, muscle, skin, lungs, blood vessels, heart, brain. However, somatic therapy conscientiously avoids making genetic change that may be transmitted to the offspring of the patient. Consequently, this form of gene therapy has the same goal as conventional medicine—to save the life or relieve the suffering of the treated individual.

Somatic gene therapy is divided into two classes depending upon how new genes are introduced. In many situations cells are first removed from the patient and then treated in the laboratory, a procedure often called *ex vivo* gene therapy. After the genetic modification has been accomplished, the cells are returned to the patient in the hope that they will take up residence in the target tissue in sufficient numbers to achieve the desired effect. Because *ex vivo* protocols must be individually designed for each person, they are labor-intensive and costly. A current objective is to accomplish genetic modification *in vivo*, by introducing therapeutic genes directly into the patient. At present, none of the available vehicles can seek out intended target cells effectively and inject their cargo of genes with sufficient efficiency to achieve the desired effect.

Though there have been many clinical trials of somatic therapy, few have been unambiguously successful. The techniques for introducing therapeutic genes into body cells are still primitive, inefficient, and potentially hazardous. The death of one young patient in a clinical trial in late 1999 demonstrated that an adequate level of safety had not been achieved.

### ***Germline Gene Therapy***

In contrast to somatic gene therapy, *germline therapy* purposely makes genetic changes that extend to the reproductive cells. As a result, the change may be inherited by the offspring of the original patient. Thus, germline therapy deliberately attempts to improve not only the

condition of the patient, but also his or her descendants for generations to come. In this respect it represents a fundamentally new objective for medical intervention. It offers the potential advantage of eliminating the cause of a debilitating condition, as opposed to separately treating affected individuals in each successive generation.

The technique involves the precise manual introduction of DNA into individual fertilized eggs or into the cells of embryos at a very early stage of development. At present, germline modifications have been accomplished only in animals. In addition to the health hazards it shares with advanced reproductive technologies,<sup>1</sup> germline therapy is associated with a high risk of embryonic and fetal death, stillbirth and infant death, physical abnormalities and genetic defects. Beyond the fundamental issue of safety, germline therapy raises serious ethical concerns. These include the problem of informed consent from individuals not yet born, assessing the long-term consequences of genetic alterations, the possible reduction of human diversity by systematic elimination of specific traits, genetic determinism imposed by the choices of the original patient and genetic therapists, the prospect that germline therapy may be used in eugenics programs, and the problematic issue of using it to engineer cosmetic enhancements. Because of the unresolved safety and ethical issues, germline therapy is widely discouraged or prohibited.

### ***Biblical Principles***

While gene therapy is still in its infancy, it is our moral responsibility as thoughtful Christians to become aware of its potential to meet human needs, to understand the biological and genetic risks that it entails, and to avoid its misuse. Decisions in this complex and evolving area should be in harmony with the following biblical principles:

1. *Alleviating suffering and preserving life.* The Bible portrays God as endlessly concerned with the health, well-being, and restoration of his creatures (Proverbs 3:1-8; Psalms 103:2, 3; Matthew 10:29-31, 11:4, 5; Acts 10:38; John 10:10). He explicitly commands us to continue His healing ministry (Matthew 10:1; Luke 9:2). To the extent that gene therapy can prevent genetic disease and restore health, it should be welcomed as a means for cooperating with the divine initiative to relieve avoidable suffering.

2. *Safety, protection from harm.* The Scriptures charge us to defend the vulnerable in society (Deuteronomy 10:17-19; Psalms 9:9; Isaiah

1:16-17; Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 4:18, 19). Where disease or genetic disorder is not life-threatening, genetic intervention may be considered only when a high level of safety has been achieved and life is protected at all stages of development. Even in situations where life is at stake, the risks involved in genetic intervention must be amply balanced by the prospects for healing.

3. *Honoring God's image.* Human beings, created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27), are distinct in kind and degree from all other earthly creatures, with God-given abilities to reason, appreciate spiritual values, and make moral decisions (1 Kings 3:9; Daniel 2:20-23; Philippians 4:8, 9; Psalms 8:3-8; Ecclesiastes 3:10, 11, modern version). Great caution must attend any action that would permanently change the human genome in ways that affect these capacities.

4. *Protecting human autonomy.* God places a high value on human freedom (Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Genesis 4:7). Genetic alterations that would limit an individual's abilities, restrict participation in society, reduce autonomy, or undermine personal freedom must be rejected.

5. *Understanding God's creation.* Since God endowed human beings with intelligence and creativity, He intends for them to take responsibility over His creation (Genesis 1:28) and to grow in their understanding of the principles of life, including the function of their bodies (Matthew 6:26-29; 1 Corinthians 14:20; Psalms 8:3-9; 139:1-6; 13-16). Ethical research and examination can only increase our appreciation of God's wisdom and goodness.

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<sup>1</sup>Refer to CVHLC statement "Considerations on Assisted Human Reproduction," July 26, 1994.

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*This document was adopted by the General Conference Christian View of Human Life Committee in April, 2000, and was referred to those church departments and institutions which will find the material useful.*

## **Methods of Bible Study**

### **Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods**

#### ***Preamble***

This statement is addressed to all members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the purpose of providing guidelines on how to study the Bible, both the trained biblical scholar and others.

Seventh-day Adventists recognize and appreciate the contributions of those biblical scholars throughout history who have developed useful and reliable methods of Bible study consistent with the claims and teachings of Scripture. Adventists are committed to the acceptance of biblical truth and are willing to follow it, using all methods of interpretation consistent with what Scripture says of itself. These are outlined in the presuppositions detailed below.

In recent decades the most prominent method in biblical studies has been known as the historical-critical method. Scholars who use this method, as classically formulated, operate on the basis of presuppositions which, prior to studying the biblical text, reject the reliability of accounts of miracles and other supernatural events narrated in the Bible. Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists.

The historical-critical method minimizes the need for faith in God and obedience to His commandments. In addition, because such a method de-emphasizes the divine element in the Bible as an inspired book (including its resultant unity) and depreciates or misunderstands apocalyptic prophecy and the eschatological portions of the Bible, we urge Adventist Bible students to avoid relying on the use of the presuppositions and the resultant deductions associated with the historical-critical method.

In contrast with the historical-critical method and presuppositions, we believe it to be helpful to set forth the principles of Bible study that are consistent with the teachings of the Scriptures themselves, that preserve their unity, and are based upon the premise that the Bible is the Word of God. Such an approach will lead us into a satisfying and rewarding experience with God.

### ***Presuppositions Arising From the Claims of Scripture***

#### ***1. Origin***

a. The Bible is the Word of God and is the primary and authoritative means by which He reveals Himself to human beings.

b. The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers with thoughts, ideas, and objective information; in turn they expressed these in their own words. Therefore the Scriptures are an indivisible union of human and divine elements, neither of which should be emphasized to the neglect of the other (2 Peter 1:21; cf *The Great Controversy*, v, vi).

c. All Scripture is inspired by God and came through the work of the Holy Spirit. However, it did not come in a continuous chain of unbroken revelations. As the Holy Spirit communicated truth to the Bible writer, each wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the aspect of the truth which he was led to stress. For this reason the student of the Bible will gain a rounded comprehension on any subject by recognizing that the Bible is its own best interpreter and when studied as a whole it depicts a consistent, harmonious truth (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:1, 2; cf *Selected Messages*, Book 1, 19, 20; *The Great Controversy*, v, vi).

d. Although it was given to those who lived in an ancient Near Eastern/Mediterranean context, the Bible transcends its cultural backgrounds to serve as God's Word for all cultural, racial, and situational contexts in all ages.

#### ***2. Authority***

a. The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are the clear, infallible revelation of God's will and His salvation. The Bible is the Word of God, and it alone is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested (2 Timothy 3:15, 17; Psalms 119:105; Proverbs 30:5, 6; Isaiah 8:20; John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; Hebrews 4:12).

b. Scripture is an authentic, reliable record of history and God's acts in history. It provides the normative theological interpretation of those acts. The supernatural acts revealed in Scripture are historically

true. For example, chapters 1-11 of Genesis are a factual account of historical events.

c. The Bible is not like other books. It is an indivisible blend of the divine and the human. Its record of many details of secular history is integral to its overall purpose to convey salvation history. While at times there may be parallel procedures employed by Bible students to determine historical data, the usual techniques of historical research, based as they are on human presuppositions and focused on the human element, are inadequate for interpreting the Scriptures, which are a blend of the divine and human. Only a method that fully recognizes the indivisible nature of the Scriptures can avoid a distortion of its message.

d. Human reason is subject to the Bible, not equal to or above it. Presuppositions regarding the Scriptures must be in harmony with the claims of the Scriptures and subject to correction by them (1 Corinthians 2:1-6). God intends that human reason be used to its fullest extent, but within the context and under the authority of His Word rather than independent of it.

e. The revelation of God in all nature, when properly understood, is in harmony with the written Word, and is to be interpreted in the light of Scripture.

### ***Principles for Approaching the Interpretation of Scripture***

The Spirit enables the believer to accept, understand, and apply the Bible to one's own life as he seeks divine power to render obedience to all scriptural requirements and to appropriate personally all Bible promises. Only those following the light already received can hope to receive further illumination of the Spirit (John 16:13, 14; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14).

Scripture cannot be correctly interpreted without the aid of the Holy Spirit, for it is the Spirit who enables the believer to understand and apply Scripture. Therefore, any study of the Word should commence with a request for the Spirit's guidance and illumination.

Those who come to the study of the Word must do so with faith, in the humble spirit of a learner who seeks to hear what the Bible is saying. They must be willing to submit all presuppositions, opinions, and the conclusions of reason to the judgment and correction of the Word itself. With this attitude the Bible student may come directly to the Word, and with careful study may come to an understanding of the essentials of

salvation apart from any human explanations, however helpful. The biblical message becomes meaningful to such a person.

The investigation of Scripture must be characterized by a sincere desire to discover and obey God's will and word rather than to seek support or evidence for preconceived ideas.

### ***Methods of Bible Study***

Select a Bible version for study that is faithful to the meaning contained in languages in which the Bible originally was written, giving preference to translations done by a broad group of scholars and published by a general publisher above translations sponsored by a particular denomination or narrowly focused group.

Exercise care not to build major doctrinal points on one Bible translation or version. Trained biblical scholars will use the Greek and Hebrew texts, enabling them to examine variant readings of ancient Bible manuscripts as well.

Choose a definite plan of study, avoiding haphazard and aimless approaches. Study plans such as the following are suggested:

1. Book-by-book analysis of the message;
2. Verse-by-verse method;
3. Study that seeks a biblical solution to a specific life problem, biblical satisfaction for a specific need, or a biblical answer to a specific question;
4. Topical study (faith, love, second coming, and others);
5. Word study; and
6. Biographical study.

Seek to grasp the simple, most obvious meaning of the biblical passage being studied.

Seek to discover the underlying major themes of Scripture as found in individual texts, passages, and books. Two basic, related themes run throughout Scripture:

1. The person and work of Jesus Christ; and
2. The great controversy perspective involving the authority of God's Word, the fall of man, the first and second advents of Christ, the exonerated of God and His law, and the restoration of the divine plan for the universe. These themes are to be drawn from the totality of Scripture and not imposed on it.

Recognize that the Bible is its own interpreter and that the meaning of words, texts, and passages is best determined by diligently comparing

scripture with scripture.

Study the context of the passage under consideration by relating it to the sentences and paragraphs immediately preceding and following it. Try to relate the ideas of the passage to the line of thought of the entire Bible book.

As far as possible ascertain the historical circumstances in which the passage was written by the biblical writers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Determine the literary type the author is using. Some biblical material is composed of parables, proverbs, allegories, psalms, and apocalyptic prophecies. Since many biblical writers presented much of their material as poetry, it is helpful to use a version of the Bible that presents this material in poetic style, for passages employing imagery are not to be interpreted in the same manner as prose.

Recognize that a given biblical text may not conform in every detail to present-day literary categories. Be cautious not to force these categories in interpreting the meaning of the biblical text. It is a human tendency to find what one is looking for, even when the author did not intend such.

Take note of grammar and sentence construction in order to discover the author's meaning. Study the key words of the passage by comparing their use in other parts of the Bible by means of a concordance and with the help of biblical lexicons and dictionaries.

In connection with the study of the biblical text, explore the historical and cultural factors. Archaeology, anthropology, and history may contribute to understanding the meaning of the text.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God inspired Ellen G. White. Therefore, her expositions on any given Bible passage offer an inspired guide to the meaning of texts without exhausting their meaning or preempting the task of exegesis (for example, see *Evangelism*, p. 256; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 193, 595; *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, pp. 665, 682, 707-708; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp. 33-35).

After studying as outlined above, turn to various commentaries and secondary helps such as scholarly works to see how others have dealt with the passage. Then carefully evaluate the different viewpoints expressed from the standpoint of Scripture as a whole.

In interpreting prophecy keep in mind that:

1. The Bible claims God's power to predict the future (Isaiah 46:10).

2. Prophecy has a moral purpose. It was not written merely to satisfy curiosity about the future. Some of the purposes of prophecy are to strengthen faith (John 14:29) and to promote holy living and readiness for the Advent (Matthew 24:44; Revelation 22:7, 10, 11).

3. The focus of much prophecy is on Christ (both His first and second advents), the church, and the end-time.

4. The norms for interpreting prophecy are found within the Bible itself: The Bible notes time prophecies and their historical fulfillments; the New Testament cites specific fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah; and the Old Testament itself presents individuals and events as types of the Messiah.

5. In the New Testament application of Old Testament prophecies, some literal names become spiritual: for example, Israel represents the church, Babylon apostate religion, etc.

6. There are two general types of prophetic writings: nonapocalyptic prophecy as found in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and apocalyptic prophecy as found in Daniel and the Revelation. These differing types have different characteristics:

a. Nonapocalyptic prophecy addresses God's people; apocalyptic is more universal in scope.

b. Nonapocalyptic prophecy often is conditional in nature, setting forth to God's people the alternatives of blessing for obedience and curses for disobedience; apocalyptic emphasizes the sovereignty of God and His control over history.

c. Nonapocalyptic prophecy often leaps from the local crisis to the end-time day of the Lord; apocalyptic prophecy presents the course of history from the time of the prophet to the end of the world.

d. Time prophecies in nonapocalyptic prophecy generally are long, for example, 400 years of Israel's servitude (Genesis 15:13) and 70 years of Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 25:12). Time prophecies in apocalyptic prophecy generally are phrased in short terms, for example, 10 days (Revelation 2:10) or 42 months (Revelation 13:5). Apocalyptic time periods stand symbolically for longer periods of actual time.

7. Apocalyptic prophecy is highly symbolic and should be interpreted accordingly. In interpreting symbols, the following methods may be used:

a. Look for interpretations (explicit or implicit) within the passage itself (for example, Daniel 8:20, 21; Revelation 1:20).

b. Look for interpretations elsewhere in the book or in other

writings by the same author.

c. Using a concordance, study the use of symbols in other parts of Scripture.

d. A study of ancient Near Eastern documents may throw light on the meaning of symbols, although scriptural use may alter those meanings.

8. The literary structure of a book often is an aid to interpreting it. The parallel nature of Daniel's prophecies is an example. Parallel accounts in Scripture sometimes present differences in detail and emphasis (for example, cf Matthew 21:33, 34; Mark 12:1-11; and Luke 20:9-18; or 2 Kings 18-20 with 2 Chronicles 32). When studying such passages, first examine them carefully to be sure that the parallels actually are referring to the same historical event. For example, many of Jesus' parables may have been given on different occasions to different audiences and with different wording.

In cases where there appear to be differences in parallel accounts, one should recognize that the total message of the Bible is the synthesis of all of its parts. Each book or writer communicates that which the Spirit has led him to write. Each makes his own special contribution to the richness, diversity, and variety of Scripture (*The Great Controversy*, v, vi). The reader must allow each Bible writer to emerge and be heard while at the same time recognizing the basic unity of the divine self-disclosure.

When parallel passages seem to indicate discrepancy or contradiction, look for the underlying harmony. Keep in mind that dissimilarities may be due to minor errors of copyists (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 16), or may be the result of differing emphases and choice of materials of various authors who wrote under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit for different audiences under different circumstances (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 21, 22; *The Great Controversy*, vi).

It may prove impossible to reconcile minor dissimilarities in detail which may be irrelevant to the main and clear message of the passage. In some cases judgment may have to be suspended until more information and better evidence are available to resolve a seeming discrepancy.

The Scriptures were written for the practical purpose of revealing the will of God to the human family. However, in order not to misconstrue certain kinds of statements, it is important to recognize that they were

addressed to peoples of Eastern cultures and expressed in their thought patterns.

Expressions such as “the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh” (Exodus 9:12) or “an evil spirit from God...” (1 Samuel 16:15), the imprecatory psalms, or the “three days and three nights” of Jonah as compared with Christ’s death (Matthew 12:40), commonly are misunderstood because they are interpreted today from a different viewpoint.

A background knowledge of Near Eastern culture is indispensable for understanding such expressions. For example, Hebrew culture attributed responsibility to an individual for acts he did not commit but that he allowed to happen. Therefore the inspired writers of the Scriptures commonly credit God with doing actively that which in Western thought we would say He permits or does not prevent from happening, for example, the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.

Another aspect of Scripture that troubles the modern mind is the divine command to Israel to engage in war and execute entire nations. Israel originally was organized as a theocracy, a civil government through which God ruled directly (Genesis 18:25). Such a theocratic state was unique. It no longer exists and cannot be regarded as a direct model for Christian practice.

The Scriptures record that God accepted persons whose experiences and statements were not in harmony with the spiritual principles of the Bible as a whole. For example, we may cite incidents relating to the use of alcohol, polygamy, divorce, and slavery. Although condemnation of such deeply ingrained social customs is not explicit, God did not necessarily endorse or approve all that He permitted and bore with in the lives of the patriarchs and in Israel. Jesus made this clear in His statement with regard to divorce (Matthew 19:4-6, 8).

The spirit of the Scriptures is one of restoration. God works patiently to elevate fallen humanity from the depths of sin to the divine ideal. Consequently, we must not accept as models the actions of sinful men as recorded in the Bible.

The Scriptures represent the unfolding of God’s revelation to man. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, for example, enlarges and expands certain Old Testament concepts. Christ Himself is the ultimate revelation of God’s character to humanity (Hebrews 1:1-3).

While there is an overarching unity in the Bible from Genesis to

Revelation, and while all Scripture is equally inspired, God chose to reveal Himself to and through human individuals and to meet them where they were in terms of spiritual and intellectual endowments. God Himself does not change, but He progressively unfolded His revelation to men as they were able to grasp it (John 16:12; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol .7, p. 945; *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 21). Every experience or statement of Scripture is a divinely inspired record, but not every statement or experience is necessarily normative for Christian behavior today. Both the spirit and the letter of Scripture must be understood (1 Corinthians 10:6-13; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 150; *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, pp. 10-12).

As the final goal, make application of the text. Ask such questions as, “What is the message and purpose God intends to convey through Scripture?” “What meaning does this text have for me?” “How does it apply to my situation and circumstances today?” In doing so, recognize that although many biblical passages had local significance, nonetheless they contain timeless principles applicable to every age and culture.

### ***Conclusion***

In the “Introduction” to *The Great Controversy* (p. vi), Ellen G. White wrote:

“The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

As it is impossible for those who do not accept Christ’s divinity to understand the purpose of His incarnation, it is also impossible for those who see the Bible merely as a human book to understand its message, however careful and rigorous their methods.

Even Christian scholars who accept the divine-human nature of Scripture, but whose methodological approaches cause them to dwell largely on its human aspects, risk emptying the biblical message of its power by relegating it to the background while concentrating on the medium. They forget that medium and message are inseparable and that the medium without the message is as an empty shell that cannot address the vital spiritual needs of humankind.

A committed Christian will use only those methods that are able to do full justice to the dual, inseparable nature of Scripture, enhance his

ability to understand and apply its message, and strengthen faith.

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*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 12, 1986.*

## **Relationships with Other Christian Churches and Religious Organizations**

To avoid creating misunderstanding or friction in our relationships with other Christian churches and religious organizations, the following guidelines have been set forth:

1. We recognize those agencies that lift up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.

2. When interdivision work brings us in contact with other Christian societies and religious bodies, the spirit of Christian courtesy, frankness, and fairness shall prevail at all times.

3. We recognize that true religion is based on conscience and conviction. It is therefore to be our constant purpose that no selfish interest or temporal advantage shall draw any person to our communion and that no tie shall hold any member save the belief and conviction that in this way the true connection with Christ is found. If a change of conviction leads a member of our church to feel no longer in harmony with Seventh-day Adventist faith and practice, we recognize not only the right but also the responsibility of that member to change, without opprobrium, religious affiliation in accord with belief. We expect other religious bodies to respond in the same spirit of religious liberty.

4. Before admitting to church membership members of other religious organizations, care shall be exercised to ascertain that the candidates are moved to change their religious affiliation by religious conviction and out of regard to their personal relationship with God.

5. A person under censure of another religious organization for clearly established fault in Christian morals or character shall not be considered eligible for membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church until there is evidence of repentance and reformation.

6. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is unable to confine its mission to restricted geographical areas because of its understanding of the gospel commission's mandate. In the providence of God and the historical development of His work for men, denominational bodies and religious movements have arisen from time to time to give special emphasis to different phases of gospel truth. In the origin and rise of the Seventh-day Adventist people, the burden was laid upon us to emphasize

the gospel of Christ's second coming as an imminent event, calling for the proclamation of Biblical truths in the setting of the special message of preparation as described in Bible prophecy, particularly in Revelation 14:6-14. This message commissions the preaching of the "everlasting gospel to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" bringing it to the attention of all peoples everywhere. Any restriction which limits witness to specified geographical areas therefore becomes an abridgment of the gospel commission. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also acknowledges the rights of other religious persuasions to operate without geographic restrictions.

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*This is text of policy No. O 110 in the General Conference Working Policy.*

## **Roadmap for Mission -- New Policy A 20**

A 20 05 Rationale--God's mission for this world motivates and informs our mission. For this reason, mission is the lifeblood of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Mission is woven into our identity; mission defines who we are and why we exist. Early in our movement, we took the Great Commission (Matt 28: 18-20) as our divine mandate motivated by the vision of the everlasting gospel reaching every nation, tribe, language, and people (Rev 14: 6-12). The genuine quest for God in world religions provides a pathway for the proclamation of the gospel.

Under the blessing of the Lord, our Church has grown, reaching to Earth's farthest bounds. When we began, our mission placed us among people who had traditions of Christianity. Today, however, mission takes us to populations that are rooted in other world religions. Furthermore, in some areas of the world, conversion to Christianity is frowned upon or even runs the risk of threatening one's person and life. The history of Christianity indicates that this has practically always been the case.

At the same time, the spirit of the age encourages acceptance of all world religions as valid expressions of the human spirit and discourages efforts to persuade people to turn from one religion to another. Some Christian theologians even argue that the task of missions is to affirm people in their own religion--to make Hindus better Hindus, Muslims better Muslims, Buddhists better Buddhists, and so on.

Among Seventh-day Adventists, one finds a variety of initiatives and methodologies toward people of different religions and cultures. While the concern for mission is commendable, the proliferation of approaches makes it all the more imperative for the organized Church to articulate simply and clearly the nature of our mission--what it is and how we go about it--firmly grounded in the authority of the Scriptures.

We must find our roadmap for mission in the specific instructions and acts of Jesus and the apostles as recorded in the Scriptures. In His sovereignty, the Lord takes initiatives to reveal Himself to men and women through a variety of means. For instance, in the Old Testament, we read of people outside the circle of the chosen people who were followers of God--Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20), Jethro (Exod 18:1-27), Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1). Likewise, the New Testament tells of the Magi (Matt 2:1-12), of Gentiles who were "God-fearers" (Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17), and of others who obeyed God's law through following their conscience (Rom 2:14-16). Such examples, however, do not provide

a template for Seventh-day Adventist mission; they simply provide laudable examples of the Lord's working.

A 20 10 The Mission--Seventh-day Adventist mission is centered in God's loving gift of His Son to be the Saviour of the world. We are to share this good news with all people, telling them that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), and that "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

At its core, mission is bearing witness through word and life and in the power of the Holy Spirit. As the Lord commanded Israel of old, "You are my witnesses, . . . and my servant whom I have chosen" (Isa 43:10), so the Risen Lord commands us, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Seventh-day Adventist mission is comprehensive in its scope. It involves proclaiming the good news to the whole world (Matt 24:14), making disciples of all nations by going, baptizing, and teaching them (Matt 28:18-20), and inviting them into the ecclesia--the end-time community of believers in Jesus who worship God the Creator and Redeemer (Rev 12:17; 14:6-7).

This community, the Church, is the body of Christ (1 Cor 12, Eph 1:21, 22; 4:4-6). In this fellowship where Jesus is confessed as Savior and Lord, and where the Scriptures provide the foundation for instruction, members experience the transforming power of the new life in Christ. They love one another (John 13:31, 32); they are united, despite differences of race, culture, gender, or social standing (Eph 2:12-14; Gal 3:28); and they grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18). They, in turn, go out to make disciples of other people, and they carry forward Jesus' ministry of compassion, help, and healing to the world (Matt 10:7, 8).

Although other Christians also preach the gospel, Seventh-day Adventists understand our special calling as proclaiming the good news of salvation and obedience to God's commandments. This proclamation takes place during the time of God's judgment and in the expectation of the soon return of Jesus, bringing to an end the cosmic conflict (Rev 14:6, 7; 20:9-10).

Seventh-day Adventist mission, therefore, involves a process of proclamation that builds up a community of believers "who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12). They live lives of service to others and eagerly await the second coming of the Lord.

A 20 15 Fulfilling the Mission--Our mission remains unchanged wherever we find ourselves in the world. How we fulfill it--how we go about it--however, takes a variety of forms depending on differences in culture and conditions in society. Fulfilling the mission where non-Christian religions prevail often entails significant modifications in approaching the task. We encounter cultural differences, other writings that are deemed sacred, and sometimes restrictions in religious freedom.

1. The Example of the Apostles--The conditions Seventh-day Adventists face in sharing the message of Jesus to people of other religions largely parallel those that the apostles encountered. How they went about the mission is instructive for us today. The first Christians faced a world of many deities. It was also a dangerous world, as the Caesars in Rome increasingly demanded not only respect, but worship as divine. Yet they risked everything they had, even their lives, and many lost it, in an unbreakable commitment to their Savior.

In this environment, the apostles always uplifted Jesus Christ as mankind's only hope. They did not shrink from proclaiming who He was and what He had done. They announced forgiveness and new life through Him alone, and they called people everywhere to repentance in view of judgment to come and the return of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:4; 1 Cor 2: 2). And they proclaimed that only one person could rightly be adored as Lord--Jesus Christ: "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but one God, the Father . . . and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ . . ." (1 Cor 8:5, 6).

Although they modified their approach in keeping with the audience, they never deviated from proclaiming the uniqueness of Jesus as the hope of the world. They never suggested that they had come to help their hearers find a deeper spiritual experience within their own religions; on the contrary, they challenged them to turn to the salvation provided in Christ. Thus, the Apostle Paul in Athens began his discourse on Mars Hill by referring to the gods the people were worshipping, but led them to the message of Jesus and His resurrection (Acts 17:22-31).

2. Writings of Other Religions--Paul made references to non-biblical

writings in his speech in Athens and his letters (Acts 17:38; 1 Cor 15:33; Titus 1:12), but he gave priority to the Scriptures (the Old Testament) in his proclamation and instruction to the new Christian communities (Acts 13:13-47; 2 Tim 3: 16, 17; 4:2).

3. In Seventh-day Adventist witness, the writings of other religions can be useful in building bridges by pointing to elements of truth that find their fullest and richest significance in the Bible. These writings should be used in a deliberate attempt to introduce people to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and to help them transfer their allegiance to the Scriptures as the source of faith and practice. However, the nurture and spiritual growth of new believers must be accomplished on the basis of the Bible and its exclusive authority (see “Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission”).

Contextualization--Jesus, as our model, was the perfect example of love in His relationships with others. As we imitate Him in our mission, we should open our hearts in honest and loving fellowship. The Apostle Paul described how he adapted his approach to his audience: “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:19-22). The apostles did not make it difficult for people to accept the gospel and join the fellowship of the Christian community, but they did not shrink from declaring the full purpose of God for them (cf. Acts 15:19; 20:20-24).

From Paul’s example arises contextualization--the intentional and discriminating attempt to communicate the gospel in a culturally meaningful way. For Seventh-day Adventist mission, contextualization must be faithful to the Scriptures, guided by the Spirit, and relevant to the host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged by the gospel.

As the Church seeks to adapt its approach to mission in a very diverse world, the danger of syncretism--the blending of religious

truth and error--is a constant challenge. Contextualization should be done within a specific cultural location, close to where the people live; it is a process that should involve church leaders, theologians, missiologists, local people, and ministers.

4. Openness and Identity--Paul sought to be open and honest in his presentation of the gospel: “We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor 4:2). Likewise, we are to carry out our mission, and identify ourselves as Seventh-day Adventists, in a manner that avoids creating formidable barriers.

In seeking to find connections with people from other religions, the theme of cosmic conflict, which is found in various expressions, may be a useful starting point. Other areas that can prove helpful are prophecy, modesty and simplicity, and healthful living.

5. Transitional Groups--In some situations, Seventh-day Adventist mission may include the formation of transitional groups (usually termed Special Affinity Groups) that lead the people from a non-Christian religion into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In forming such groups, a clear plan that emphasizes the end result should be followed. These groups should be established and nurtured only with the endorsement and collaboration of church administration. Although some situations may require an extended period of time to complete the transition, leaders of these groups should make every effort to lead the people into membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church within a deliberate time plan (see also B 10 28 and B 10 30).

Any ministry or group that is formed with the intention of representing the Seventh-day Adventist Church in any part of the world will endeavor to promote both the theological and organizational unity of the Church. Although the theological dimension may be given the chief emphasis in the initial stages of the group, the leader of the group should intentionally lead its members to a sense of Seventh-day Adventist identity and an awareness of Church organization, with growing participation in the lifestyle, practices, and mission of the Church.

6. Baptism and Church Membership--Candidates for baptism shall confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Rom 10:9), accept the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as summarized in the Fundamental Beliefs, and understand that they are joining a worldwide fellowship that is loyal to God and awaits the second coming of Jesus.

7. Opportunities and Needs--Today, because of immigration and other factors, followers of world religions are found throughout the world. In this new context, leaders in all the world divisions should develop specific plans to bring the Seventh-day Adventist message to these peoples.

For the fulfillment of the mission globally, the Church needs to help people develop expertise in the writings of other religions, along with literature and programs to train clergy and lay members in reaching adherents of these religions. The Global Mission Study Centers should play a major, but not exclusive, role in these endeavors.

Worldwide, our pastors and members need to be educated to accept new believers from world religions. This will require the developing of competence among leaders, local elders, pastors, missionaries, and frontline workers.

In the allocation of human and financial resources, the needs of the mission to people of other world religions should be included as part of strategic planning.

8. Where Freedom is Restricted--Our mission takes us at times to societies where religious freedom is severely restricted. These areas of the world are not to be abandoned; rather, new methods of fulfilling the mission are to be attempted. These include the “tentmaker” approach, which is when individuals use their occupation to support themselves financially, usually in a challenging mission area for the purpose of Christian outreach. Another approach is to simply encourage those from such countries who have become Seventh-day Adventists in another society to return to their home countries as ambassadors for Christ. And even where a human presence is not possible, the witness through radio, television, or the Internet may, like the altars left behind by Abraham on his wanderings (Gen 12:7), be used by the Spirit to lead men and women to accept the Advent message.

A 20 20 Conclusion--The mission to reach followers of world religions poses substantial challenges. However, the mission itself remains unchanged because it is God's mission. Through whatever approach we follow, its end result is to lead men and women into membership with those who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, who embrace the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, demonstrating the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and looking forward to the soon coming of Christ. They shall identify themselves with the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church in doctrine, life values, hope, and mission.

God, the Lord of the mission, is free and sovereign. He can and does intervene to reveal Himself in various ways, drawing people to Himself and awakening them to His majesty and sovereignty. But to His Church He has entrusted His mission (2 Cor 5:18-21). It is a comprehensive mission, but it is a single mission. He has not established parallel or multiple tracks for us to follow, which is to say, we should all be committed to the same beliefs and be organized and work in harmony with the world Church.

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*This policy document was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland on October 13, 2009.*

## **Guidelines for Sabbath Observance**

### ***Purpose and Perspective***

The main objective of this document on Sabbath observance is to provide counsel or guidelines to church members desiring a richer, more meaningful experience in Sabbath keeping. It is hoped that this will provide an impetus toward a real reform in Sabbath keeping on a worldwide basis.

Conscious of the fact that the worldwide worshipping community encounters numerous problems in Sabbath observance arising from within a given cultural and ideological context, an attempt has been made to take these difficulties into consideration. It is not the intent of this document to address every question pertaining to Sabbath keeping, but rather to present Biblical principles and Spirit of Prophecy guidelines that will assist the church members as they endeavor to follow the leading of the Lord.

It is hoped that the counsel given in the document will be helpful. Ultimately, however, decisions made under critical circumstances must be motivated by one's personal faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### ***Sabbath—A Safeguard of Our Relationship With God***

The Sabbath encompasses our entire relationship with God. It is an indication of God's action on our behalf in the past, present, and future. The Sabbath protects man's friendship with God and provides the time essential for the development of that relationship. The Sabbath clarifies the relationship between God and the human family, for it points to God as Creator at a time when human beings would like to usurp God's position in the universe.

In this age of materialism, the Sabbath points men and women to the spiritual and to the personal. The consequences for forgetting the Sabbath day to keep it holy are serious. It will lead to the distortion and eventual destruction of a person's relationship with God.

When the Sabbath is kept, it is a witness to the rest that comes from trusting God alone as our sustainer, as the basis of our salvation, and as the ground of our hope in the future. As such, the Sabbath is a delight because we have entered God's rest and have accepted the invitation to fellowship with Him.

When God asks us to remember the Sabbath day He does so because He wants us to remember Him.

## ***Principles and Theology of Sabbath Observance***

1. *Nature and Purpose of the Sabbath.* The origin of the Sabbath lies in Creation when God rested from His work on the seventh day (Genesis 1-3). The Sabbath has significance as a perpetual sign of the everlasting covenant between God and His people in order that they might know who it is that created them (Exodus 31-17) and sanctifies them (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12), and that they might recognize Him as the Lord their God (Ezekiel 20:20).

2. *Uniqueness of the Sabbath.* The Sabbath is a special occasion for worshiping God as Creator and Redeemer and as the Lord of Life with whom the human family will be reunited at the second advent. The Sabbath commandment forms the center of the moral law as the seal of God's authority. Since it is a symbol of God's love relationship with His earthly children, human beings are obliged to respect this gift in the sense that they will do everything in their power to promote and engage in activities that will help establish and enhance a lasting relationship with God. Thus His people will engage only in those activities that are directed toward God and their fellowmen and not in those that lean toward self-gratification or self-interest.

3. *Universality of the Sabbath.* The universality of the Sabbath is rooted in Creation. Thus its privileges and obligations are binding in all nations, sectors, or classes. (See Exodus 20:11; 23:12; Deuteronomy 5:13; Isaiah 56:1-8.) Sabbath observance pertains to all members of the household including children and extends even "to the stranger that is within thy gates" (Exodus 20:10).

4. *Time Frame of the Sabbath. Biblical Data.* The Sabbath starts at the end of the sixth day of the week and lasts one day, from evening to evening (Genesis 1; Mark 1:32). This time coincides with the time of sunset. Wherever a clear delineation of the time of sunset is difficult to ascertain, the Sabbath keeper will begin the Sabbath at the end of the day as marked by the diminishing light.

5. *Principles Guiding Sabbath Observance.* Although the Bible does not deal directly with many of the specific questions we may have regarding Sabbath observance in our day, it does provide us with general principles that are applicable today. (See Exodus 16:29; 20:8-11; 34:21; Isaiah 58:13; Nehemiah 13:15-22.)

"The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit

is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 207).

This concept, however, is not supportive of total inactivity. Both the Old and New Testaments invite us to care for the needs and alleviate the sufferings of others, for the Sabbath is a good day for all, particularly the lowly and the oppressed (Exodus 23:12; Matthew 12:10-13; Mark 2:27; Luke 13:11-17; John 9:1-21).

Yet even good works on the Sabbath must not obscure the chief Biblical characteristic of Sabbath observance, namely, rest (Genesis 2:1-3). This includes both physical (Exodus 23:12) and spiritual rest in God (Matthew 11:28). The latter leads the Sabbath observer to seek the presence of, and communion with God in worship (Isaiah 48:13), both in quiet meditation (Matthew 12:1-8) and in public worship (Jeremiah 23:32, 2 Kings 4:23; 11:4-12; 1 Chronicles 23:30; Isaiah 56:1-8). Its object is to recognize God as Creator and Redeemer (Genesis 2:1-3; Deuteronomy 5:12-15), and it is to be shared by the individual family and the larger community (Isaiah 56:1-8).

6. *Sabbath and the Authority of God’s Word.* Ellen White points out that the Sabbath commandment is unique, for it contains the seal of God’s law. It alone “brings to view both the name and title of the Lawgiver. It declares Him to be the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and thus shows His claim to reverence and worship above all others. Aside from this precept, there is nothing in the Decalogue to show by whose authority the law is given” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 452). The Sabbath as a sign of the Creator points to His ownership and authority. Meaningful Sabbath observance, therefore, indicates the acceptance of God as Creator and Owner and acknowledges His authority over all creation, including oneself. Sabbath observance is based on the authority of God’s Word. There is no other logical reason for it. Human beings have the freedom to enter into a relationship with the Creator of the universe as with a personal friend.

Sabbath keepers may have to face resistance at times because of their commitment to God to keep the Sabbath holy. To those who do not recognize God as their Creator, it seems arbitrary or inexplicable for someone to cease from all work on the Sabbath day for merely religious reasons. Meaningful Sabbath observance testifies to the fact that we have

chosen to obey God's commandment. We thus recognize that our life is now lived in obedience to God's Word. The Sabbath will be a special test in the end time. The believer will have to make a choice either to give allegiance to God's Word or to human authority (Revelation 14:7, 12).

### ***Home and Family Life as Related to the Sabbath***

1. *Introduction.* Home life is the cornerstone of proper Sabbath observance. Only when individuals keep the Sabbath conscientiously in the home and assume their assigned responsibilities as members of the family will the church as a whole reveal to the world the joys and privileges of God's holy day.

2. *Different Kinds of Homes.* In the twentieth century there are various kinds of homes, for example, the home in which there is a husband, wife, and children; the home in which there is husband and wife and no children; the home in which there is a single parent and children (where because of death or divorce one parent must function in both maternal and paternal roles); the home in which a person has never married or where death or divorce has left one single, and no children are involved; or the home in which one parent only is a member of the church. In addressing the needs and problems of these categories, it should be understood that some of the principles and suggestions enunciated will apply to all groups and some will be more specialized.

3. *Two Sacred Institutions—The Home and the Sabbath.* “In the beginning” God placed a man and a woman in the Garden of Eden as their home. Also, “in the beginning” God gave to human beings the Sabbath. These two institutions, the home and the Sabbath, belong together. Both are gifts from God. Therefore both are sacred, the latter strengthening and enriching in its unique manner the bond of the former.

Close fellowship is an important element of the home. Close fellowship with other human beings also is an important element of the Sabbath. It binds families closer to God and binds the individual members closer to one another. Viewed from this perspective, the importance of the Sabbath to the home cannot be overestimated.

4. *Responsibilities of Adults as Teachers.* In choosing Abraham as the father of the chosen people, God said, “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him” (Genesis 18:19). It seems clear, then, that an enormous responsibility has been given to adults in the home for the spiritual welfare of their children. By both precept and example, they must provide the kind of structure and

atmosphere that will make the Sabbath a delight and such a vital part of Christian living that, long after leaving the home, the children will continue the customs they were taught in childhood.

In harmony with the injunction, “Thou shalt teach them (God’s commandments) diligently unto thy children” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), the adult members of the family should teach their children to love God and keep His commandments. They should teach them to be loyal to God and to follow His directives.

From earliest infancy, children should be taught to participate in family worship so that worship in the house of God will become an extension of a family custom. Also from infancy, children should be taught the importance of church attendance, that true Sabbath observance involves going to God’s house for worship and Bible study. Adults in the family should set the example by attending services on Sabbath, providing a pattern that will be seen as important when their children make decisions on what is of value in life. Through discussions, as the children grow older and more mature, and through Bible study, the children should be taught the meaning of the Sabbath, its relationship to Christian living, and the enduring quality of the Sabbath.

5. *Preparation for the Sabbath.* If the Sabbath is to be observed properly, the entire week should be programmed in such a way that every member will be ready to welcome God’s holy day when it arrives. This means that the adult family members will plan so that all household tasks—the buying and preparing of food, the readying of clothes, and all the other necessities of everyday life—will be completed before sundown Friday. The day of rest should become the pivot around which the wheel of the entire week turns. When Friday night approaches and sundown is near, adults and children will be able to greet the Sabbath with tranquility of mind, with all preparation finished, and with the home in readiness to spend the next 24 hours with God and with one another. Children can help achieve this by carrying Sabbath preparation responsibilities commensurate with their maturity. The way the family approaches the beginning of the Sabbath at sundown on Friday night and the way Friday night is spent will set the stage for receiving the blessings that the Lord has in store for the entire day which follows.

6. *Proper Sabbath Dress.* Where there are children in the home, on Sabbath morning as the family dresses for church, adults may, by precept and example, teach children that one way to honor God is to appear in His house in clean, representative clothing appropriate to the culture in

which they live.

7. *Importance of Bible Study Hour.* Where children do not have the advantage of attending Adventist schools, the Sabbath School becomes the most important means of religious instruction outside the home. The value of this Bible study hour cannot be overestimated. Therefore, parents should attend Sabbath morning services and do everything possible to take their children with them.

8. *Family Activities on the Sabbath.* In most cultures the Sabbath noon meal, when the family gathers around the dinner table in the home, is a high point of the week. The spirit of sacred joy and fellowship, begun upon arising and continued through the worship services at church, is intensified. Free from the distractions of a secular atmosphere, the family can converse on themes of mutual interest and maintain the spiritual mood of the day.

When the sacred nature of the Sabbath is understood, and a loving relationship exists between parents and children, all will seek to prevent intrusions into the holy hours by secular music, radio, and video and television programs, and by newspapers, books, and magazines.

Sabbath afternoons, as far as possible, will be spent in family activities—exploring nature; making missionary visits to shut-ins, the sick, or others in need of encouragement; and attending meetings in the church. As the children grow older, activities will enlarge to encompass other members of their age group in the church, with the question always in mind, “Does this activity cause me to understand better the true nature and sacredness of the Sabbath?” Thus proper Sabbath observance in the home will have a lasting influence for time and eternity.

### ***Sabbath Observance and Recreational Activities***

1. *Introduction.* Sabbath observance includes both worship and fellowship. The invitation to enjoy both is open and generous. Sabbath worship directed toward God usually takes place in a community of believers. The same community provides fellowship. Both worship and fellowship offer unlimited potential to praise God and to enrich the lives of Christians. When either Sabbath worship or fellowship is distorted or abused, both praise to God and personal enrichment are threatened. As God’s gift of Himself to us, the Sabbath brings real joy in the Lord. It is an opportunity for believers to recognize and reach their God-given potential. Thus, to the believer the Sabbath is a delight.

2. *Alien Factors to Sabbath Observance.* The Sabbath can be

intruded upon easily by elements alien to its spirit. In the experience of worship and fellowship the believer must ever be alert to alien factors which are detrimental to one's realization of Sabbath sacredness. The sense of Sabbath holiness is threatened particularly by the wrong kinds of fellowship and activities. By contrast, the sacredness of the Sabbath is upheld when the Creator remains the center of that holy day.

3. *Culturally Conditioned Phenomena in Sabbath Observance.* It is important to understand that Christians render obedience to God and thus observe the Sabbath at the place in history and culture where they live. It is possible that both history and culture may falsely condition us and distort our values. By appealing to culture we may be guilty of giving ourselves license or excuse to indulge in sports and recreational activities that are incompatible with Sabbath holiness. For example, intensive physical exertion and various forms of tourism are out of harmony with true Sabbath observance.

Any attempt to regulate Sabbath observance beyond Biblical principles by developing lists of Sabbath prohibitions will be counterproductive to a sound spiritual experience. The Christian will test his Sabbath experience by principle. He knows that it is the main purpose of the Sabbath to strengthen the bond of union between himself and God. Thus one's activities guided by Biblical principles and contributing toward such a strengthening are acceptable.

Inasmuch as no one can evaluate rightly the personal motives of others, a Christian must be very careful not to criticize his brethren living in cultural contexts other than his own who engage in Sabbath recreational activities of which they approve.

While traveling, Adventist tourists should make every effort to observe the Sabbath with their fellow believers in any given area. Respecting the sacredness of the seventh day, it is recommended that Adventists avoid using the day for a holiday set aside for sightseeing and secular activity.

### ***Churches and Church Institutions***

In establishing specific guidelines and policies for the corporate Church and Church institutions, the church is setting an example of Sabbath keeping for the membership at large. It is the responsibility of the members to apply true Sabbath keeping principles in their own lives. The church can assist by providing Sabbath keeping principles as found in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, but it cannot be conscience for the members.

1. *Churches—Role of Church and Family in Sabbath Afternoon Activities.* The pastor and the local church leaders are entrusted with the responsibility of providing carefully planned Sabbath activities for children, youth, adults, and the elderly, and for families and singles, emphasizing the importance of making the Sabbath a day of joy, worship, and rest. Church activities should complement rather than replace family and home activities.

2. *Churches—Sabbath Music.* Music has a powerful impact on a person moods and emotions. Church leaders will select music and musicians that will enhance the worshipful atmosphere of the Sabbath rest and the person's relationship with God. Sabbath choir rehearsals should be avoided during regularly scheduled Sabbath meetings.

3. *Churches—Community Outreach.* Although Christians may participate in certain types of social work for students, youth, and the poor in inner cities or in suburbs, they still will exert an exemplary influence of consistent Sabbath keeping. When engaged in an extension school or special school for children and youth, they will select subjects and classes that are different from the ordinary secular subjects or classes for the week, including activities that contribute to spiritual culture. Nature or neighborhood walks may replace recesses; nature walks or field trips of minimal effort can replace secular subjects and classes.

4. *Churches—Ingathering.* The general practice of Seventh-day Adventist churches is to do Ingathering on days other than the Sabbath. Where there is a practice to do Ingathering on Sabbath, the plan should be implemented so as to bring spiritual benefits to all participants.

5. *Churches—Fundraising on the Sabbath.* The doctrine of Christian stewardship is found throughout the Scriptures. The act of giving has a definite place in the worship services. When appeals for funds are made, they should be conducted in such a manner as to uphold the sacredness of the service as well as of the Sabbath.

6. *Churches—Sabbath Weddings.* The marriage service is sacred and would not in itself be out of harmony with the spirit of Sabbath keeping. However, most weddings involve considerable work and almost inevitably a secular atmosphere develops in preparing for them and in holding receptions. In order that the spirit of the Sabbath not be lost, the holding of weddings on the Sabbath should be discouraged.

7. *Churches—Sabbath Funerals.* In general, Adventists should try to avoid Sabbath funerals. In some climates and under certain conditions, however, it may be necessary to conduct funerals without delay, the

Sabbath notwithstanding. In such cases arrangements should be made in advance with morticians and cemetery employees to perform their routine tasks for the deceased in advance of the Sabbath day, thus reducing the labor and commotion on the Sabbath. In some instances a memorial service could be held on the Sabbath, and interment take place later.

8. *Seventh-day Adventist Health Care Institutions*. Adventist health-care institutions provide the only contact many people have with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Adventist hospitals are to be more than merely health care delivery systems. They have a unique opportunity to bear a Christian witness 24-hours-a-day to the communities they serve. In addition, they have the privilege of presenting the Sabbath message by example every week. In healing the sick and loosing the bonds of the physically infirm, even on the Sabbath, Christ set an example that we look to as the basis for establishing and operating Adventist health-care institutions. Therefore, an institution offering medical care to the public must be prepared to minister to the needs of the sick and suffering without regard to hours or days.

This places a great responsibility on each institution to develop and implement policies that reflect the example of Christ and apply the principles of Sabbath observance as found in the Scriptures and taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Administrators have a special responsibility to see that all departments maintain the true spirit of Sabbath keeping by instituting appropriate Sabbath procedures and by guarding against laxity in its observance.

The following applications of Sabbath observance principles are recommended:

a. Provide emergency medical care willingly and cheerfully whenever needed with high levels of excellence. However, neither Adventist institutions nor physicians and dentists should provide the same office or clinic services on the Sabbath as they do on weekdays.

b. Discontinue all routine activities that could be postponed. Usually this means a complete closing of those facilities and departments not immediately related to patient care, and the maintenance of a minimum number of qualified people in other departments to handle emergencies.

c. Postpone elective diagnostic and therapeutic services. Decisions as to what is necessary or of an emergency nature should be made by the attending physician. If this privilege is abused, it should be dealt with by the hospital administration. Nonadministrative

institutional employees should not become involved in making these decisions nor should they be obliged to confront the attending physicians. Misunderstandings may be avoided by making it clear in medical staff bylaws that only surgical, diagnostic, or therapeutic procedures which are not postponable because of the condition of the patient, will be done. A clear understanding with all who are appointed to staff membership, at the time of appointment, will do much to avoid misunderstandings and abuses.

Convenience and elective surgery should be discouraged or limited on Fridays. Procedures thus scheduled allow the patient to be in the hospital over the weekend and hence lose fewer days at work. However, this places the first post-operative day, usually with the most intensive nursing care, on the Sabbath.

d. Close administrative and business offices to routine business. Although it may be necessary to admit or discharge patients on the Sabbath, it is recommended that the rendering of bills and the collection of money be avoided. Never should the keeping of the Sabbath be a source of irritation to those we seek to serve and to save, but rather a hallmark of “the children of light” (Ephesians 5:8; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 260).

e. Make the Sabbath a special day for patients, providing a memory of Christian witnessing never to be forgotten. Meaningful Sabbath-keeping is much easier to achieve in an institution that employs a predominantly Adventist staff. Presenting the Sabbath in a proper light can be accomplished by the believing workers employed in patient care, and may well be a convicting influence in the lives of those not of our faith.

f. The direct care of the sick is a seven-day-a-week activity. Illness knows no calendar. Nevertheless, when scheduling all personnel, health-care institutions should take into consideration the sincere religious beliefs, observances, and practices of each employee and prospective employee. The institution should make reasonable accommodation for such religious beliefs unless it is demonstrated that such accommodation would place an undue hardship on its operation. It is recognized that the consciences of individuals vary in regard to the propriety of Sabbath employment. Neither the church nor its institutions can act as the conscience for its employees. Rather, reasonable accommodation should be made for individual conscience.

g. Resist pressures for relaxing Seventh-day Adventist standards. Some institutions have been pressured by the communities,

the medical staffs, and/or employees (where a majority is comprised of non-Adventists), to abandon or weaken Sabbath keeping principles and practices so that the Sabbath would be treated as any other day. In some cases, pressure has been applied to maintain full services on the Sabbath and reduce them on Sunday instead. Such action should be vigorously resisted. Compliance would cause serious reexamination of the relationship of such an institution to the church.

h. Educate employees who are not Seventh-day Adventist concerning Sabbath keeping principles practiced by the institution. Every non-Adventist, at the time of employment at an Adventist health-care institution, should be made aware of Seventh-day Adventist principles, especially institutional policies regarding the observance of the Sabbath. Though non-Adventists may not believe as we do, they should know from the very beginning how they are expected to fit into the institutional program to help it reach its objectives.

i. Foster an attitude for continuing Christian witnessing by Adventist employees. The only contact that many non-Adventist workers ever may have with Seventh-day Adventists may be in the institution employing them. Every relationship should be friendly, kind, and expressive of the love that exemplified the life and work of the Great Physician. Compassion for the sick, unselfish regard for our fellowman, an eagerness to serve, and unstinted loyalty to God and the church may well prove to be a savor of life unto life. The keeping of the Sabbath is a privilege and an honor as well as a duty. It should never become burdensome or obnoxious to those who keep it or to those about us.

9. *Sabbath Work in Non-Adventist Hospitals.* While it is essential in medical institutions that a minimum of labor be performed at all times in order to maintain the welfare and comfort of the patients, Seventh-day Adventists employed in non-denominational institutions where Sabbath hours bring no relief from routine duties are under obligation to remember the principles that regulate all Sabbath activities. In order to avoid situations where our church members may be faced with problems of Sabbath keeping in non-Adventist institutions, it is recommended that:

a. When Seventh-day Adventists accept employment in non-Seventh-day Adventist hospitals, they make known their Sabbath keeping principles and request a work schedule that will exempt them from Sabbath duties.

b. Where work schedules or other factors make this impossible, Adventists should clearly identify the duties, if any, they can

conscientiously perform on the Sabbath and the frequency thereof.

c. Where the above accommodations cannot be arranged, members should make loyalty to God's requirements paramount and abstain from routine work.

10. *Seventh-day Adventist Educational Institutions*. Seventh-day Adventist secondary boarding schools leave a major role in shaping the Sabbath observance habits of future generations of members of the church, and Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities do much to mold the thinking of the church's clergy and professional class. It is important, therefore, that both the theory and practice of how to maximize the joyful blessings of the Sabbath be as close as possible to the ideal in these institutions.

Applications of this principle should include:

- a. Adequate preparation for the Sabbath.
- b. Demarcation of the beginning and ending of the Sabbath hours.
- c. Appropriate school-home activities: worships, prayer bands, witness, etc.
- d. Keeping necessary duties to a minimum, preferably entrusting them to people who volunteer their service rather than to those who do the same work for pay during the week.
- e. Inspiring worship services, preferably modeling what is expected to characterize such services in the churches of the school's constituency.
- f. Adequate and varied activities on Sabbath afternoon.
- g. Structuring of the weekly program so that the Sabbath will be a lingering joy and the climax of the week, rather than a prelude to contrasting activities on Saturday night.

1) *Cafeteria Sales*. School cafeterias are designed to serve students and their visiting parents and bona fide guests; they should not be open to the public on the Sabbath. To avoid unnecessary business transactions during sacred time, each institution should make provision for payment outside of the Sabbath hours.

2) *Attendance of Faculty at Professional Meetings*. In some countries, Seventh-day Adventists are privileged to attend professional meetings in order to keep abreast of current developments in their given field of specialization. It may be tempting to justify attendance at these meetings on the Sabbath. However, it is recommended that academic personnel join fellow members in worship rather than fellow

professionals at work.

3) *Radio Stations*. College radio stations can be a blessing to their communities. To maximize the blessings, programming during the Sabbath hours should reflect the philosophy of the church. If fund-raising appeals are made on the Sabbath, they should be conducted in such a way as to uphold the sacredness of that day.

4) *Promotional Trips*. In order to maintain the worshipful nature of the Sabbath, promotional tours should be planned in such a way as to minimize travel on the Sabbath and to provide maximum time for worship with fellow believers. The Sabbath hours should not be used for travel to provide a Saturday night program.

5) *Sabbath Observance in Education for the Ministry*. Pastors have a large responsibility for shaping the spiritual life of the church by their personal example. Therefore institutions training ministers and their spouses need to help their trainees form a sound philosophy of Sabbath observance. Proper guidance received at school can be instrumental in the experience of a genuine renewal of the Sabbath joys in their own life as well as in the life of their church.

6) *Sabbath Examinations*. Seventh-day Adventists who face required examinations given on the Sabbath in non-Adventist schools or for certification by professional governing boards face special problems. In dealing with such situations we recommend that they arrange for administration of the examinations on hours other than the Sabbath. The church should encourage its members in careful Sabbath observance and where possible intercede with the appropriate authorities to provide for both reverence for God's day and access to the examinations.

### ***Secular Employment and Trade as Related to the Sabbath***

1. *Statement of Principle*. The Biblical view of the Sabbath includes both a divine and a human dimension (Matthew 12:7). From the divine perspective the Sabbath invites the believer to renew his commitment to God by desisting from the daily work in order to worship God more freely and more fully (Exodus 20:8-10; 31:15,16; Isaiah 58:13,14). From the human perspective, the Sabbath summons the believer to celebrate God's creative and redemptive love by showing mercy and concern toward others (Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Matthew 12:12; Luke 13:12; John 5:17). Thus the Sabbath encompasses both cessation from secular work for the purpose of honoring God and performing deeds of love and kindness toward fellow beings.

2. *Essential and Emergency Work.* In order to uphold the sanctity of the Sabbath, Seventh-day Adventists must make wise choices in matters of employment, guided by a conscience enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Experience has shown that there are hazards in choosing vocations which will not allow them to worship their Creator on the Sabbath day free from involvement in secular labor. This means that they will avoid types of employment which, although essential for the function of a technologically advanced society, may offer problems in Sabbath observance.

The Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy are explicit about our duties as Christians to our fellowman, even on the Sabbath day. In the modern context, many employed in occupations involved with the saving of life and property are called upon to deal with emergencies. Arranging for regular weekend work requiring the use of the Sabbath hours for gainful emergency employment or accepting work only on weekends in emergency occupations to augment the family budget, is out of harmony with Sabbath keeping principles given by Christ. Responding to emergency situations where life and safety are at stake is quite different from earning one's livelihood by routinely engaging in such occupations on the Sabbath which are often accompanied by commercial, secular, or routine activities. (See Christ's comments on rescuing oxen or sheep from ditches and helping people in need. Matthew 12:11; Luke 13:16.) Absenting one's self from God's house and being denied fellowship with the believers on the Sabbath can have a chilling effect on one's spiritual life.

Many employers in so-called essential service areas willingly make accommodations for Sabbath keepers. Where such is not granted, members should review carefully Biblical principles of Sabbath keeping and in that light examine the type of activity, environment, requirements of the job, and personal motives before committing themselves to working on the Sabbath. They should ask of the Lord as did Paul on the Damascus road, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" When this attitude of faith prevails, we are persuaded that the Lord will lead the believer to discern His will and supply strength and wisdom to follow it.

3. *Moral Decision Regarding Sabbath Observance.* Sabbath privileges are sometimes curtailed or denied by military, educational, political, or other organizations. To prevent and/or alleviate these regrettable situations, the following suggestions should be considered:

A competent church official, preferably the Public Affairs and

Religious Liberty director, should be appointed to keep abreast of developments that could undermine freedom of worship on the Sabbath. When necessary, this official will approach responsible authorities to intercede when an adverse impact upon Seventh-day Adventists is present in any contemplated measure or legislation. This course of action may prevent enactment of laws that could curtail or deny Sabbath privileges.

Adventist members should be encouraged to stand by faith for the principle of Sabbath keeping regardless of circumstances, resting in the assurance that God will honor their commitment to Him. Church members should offer spiritual, moral, and, if needed temporal help to other members experiencing Sabbath problems. Such support will serve to strengthen the commitment to the Lord not only of the individual member facing Sabbath problems but also of the church as a whole.

*4. Purchase of Goods and Services on the Sabbath.*

a. The Sabbath is designed to provide spiritual freedom and joy for every person (Exodus 20:8-11). As Christians, we must be supportive of this basic human right granted to each individual by the Creator. As a general rule, the purchasing of goods, eating out in restaurants, and paying for services to be provided by others ought to be avoided because they are out of harmony with the principle and practice of Sabbath keeping.

b. Furthermore, the above-mentioned commercial activities will turn the mind away from the sacredness of the Sabbath. (See Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15 ff.) With proper planning adequate provisions can be made in advance for foreseeable Sabbath needs.

*5. Sabbath Travel.* While Sabbath travel may be necessary for engaging in Sabbath activities, one should not allow Sabbath travel to become a secular function; therefore, preparation should be made in advance. Automobile fuel and other needs should be cared for before the Sabbath begins. Travel on commercial carriers for personal or business reasons should be avoided.

*6. Treating a Specific Employment Problem.* When a member of the church finds it necessary to resign from a position, or loses his job because of Sabbath problems, and is reemployed by the denomination in similar work, and where the new job, because of its essential nature, requires the member to work on the Sabbath, the following suggestions are recommended:

a. A careful explanation of the essential nature of the work will

be given to the member.

b. All efforts should be made by the organization to as certain that only the essential aspects of the new job will be performed on the Sabbath. Administrators should also explain to the new employee the religious purposes and basic objectives of the employing organization.

c. A rotation schedule will be adopted in order that the member who can conscientiously accept such work on the Sabbath may frequently be able to enter into a fuller celebration of the Sabbath day.

7. *Shift work.* When a Seventh-day Adventist works for an employer where shift work is the rule, he may be requested to work on the Sabbath or a portion thereof. Under such circumstances the member involved is encouraged to consider the following:

a. The member should strive to be the best possible worker, a valuable employee whom the employer cannot afford to lose.

b. If a problem develops, the member should seek to resolve it by appealing to the employer personally for an accommodation based on goodwill and fairness.

c. The member should assist the employer by suggesting such accommodations as:

- 1) Working a flexible schedule;
- 2) Taking a less desirable shift;
- 3) Trading shifts with another employee; or
- 4) Working on holidays.

8. *Assistance.* If the employer resists an accommodation, the member should immediately seek assistance from the pastor and from the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department in countries where they are involved in such activities.

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*The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana, on July 9, 1990, voted to acknowledge receipt of the above document on Sabbath observance.*

## **Safeguarding Mission in Changing Social Environments**

Seventh-day Adventists are engaged in a mission to communicate to all peoples the everlasting gospel of God's love, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and Lord, to unite with His remnant church, and to prepare for His soon return. This mission is advanced through many and varied methods of preaching, teaching, and healing. A worldwide infrastructure links local churches as part of a global faith community. The Church has also established numerous educational, publishing, and healthcare institutions that perform a vital role in demonstrating and communicating the Church's focus on mission and witnessing to the gospel through service to others.

Seventh-day Adventist churches and institutions operate in diverse social, political, and religious environments. The development of national and local legislation in many parts of the world has been influenced by, or is compatible with, Christian worldview and morals. More recently, concern for social policy is becoming a dominant factor in the development of laws. This results in rather new, and at times challenging, environments for the practice and advocacy of historic Christian beliefs and values relating to morality. The actual situations vary widely around the world making it difficult to outline a single global response.

Legislation concerning employment practices represents one area in which Seventh-day Adventist values and beliefs may be subject to challenge. For example: societies may establish laws providing new definitions for marriage or protecting a range of expressions and behavior associated with gender identity. Seventh-day Adventists believe that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship<sup>1</sup> and that the Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> The Church does not accept the idea of same-sex marriages nor does it condone homosexual practices or advocacy. The application and practice of these beliefs in cultures that adopt other norms for such relationships is likely to be a focal point of dispute.

In many countries, the Church enjoys freedom of religious expression and the opportunity to exercise preferential hiring practices. However, numerous offices and institutions exist in areas where, except

for purely ecclesiastical roles, preferential hiring practices are not permitted. Wisdom and careful judgment is required in order that the witness of the Church is not muted by its actions nor is the opportunity to bear witness compromised by the needless arousal of opposition. The following principles are designed to assist Church leaders in addressing situations while continuing to uphold denominational beliefs in matters of church and employment life. It is

RECOMMENDED, To approve the following principles as a guide for denominational entities and institutions that, from time to time, must review and safeguard their ability to pursue mission in the midst of changing social circumstances. These principles should be weighed collectively in determining an appropriate course of action in those situations in which the Church or its institutions encounter tension with obligations imposed by the state.

1. *The ability to maintain mission and witness.* Christian mission, witness, and proclamation take place in a fallen world, amidst circumstances that are not always favorable or neutral. In such situations, the Christian response is not to retreat or abandon mission, but to find ways of bearing a witness in spite of circumstances. The ability to bear witness and to carry on mission should be an important consideration in determining how to respond in difficult situations.
2. *Demonstration of good citizenship.* Christians live simultaneously in two communities, the secular state and the kingdom of God, and have loyalties and obligations to both. Christians should be good citizens of both communities. In situations where tension arises between the two, a Christian will demonstrate allegiance to faith convictions informed by the Bible. In all other matters, the Christian is advised, by teachings of the Bible itself, to accept and discharge the obligations of earthly citizenship.
3. *Realization that boundaries exist and cannot be breached if mission is to be sustained.* Church members and church organizations live in the world but are not “of the world.” This constant reality explains why the Church cannot always accommodate itself to the prevailing customs of society. Faithfulness to its understanding of Bible teaching will require the determination of boundaries beyond which the Church cannot and will not go. To do so would render its efforts at mission contradictory and meaningless. The particular course of experience through which an

organization is brought to that point will vary from place to place. Each situation needs to be assessed in the light of its presenting circumstances.

4. *Adjusting practices to comply with legislation does not redefine denominational positions.* There is every likelihood that response patterns from various entities will differ somewhat before reaching the boundary—the point beyond which the Church would be in denial of its convictions and abandoning its mission and witness. The central concern in these situations is not one of questioning or redefining the Church’s position but of finding a way to translate that position into practices that safeguard the mission of the Church.

5. *Employment policies to be reviewed periodically in light of local contexts.* All employing organizations are expected to establish and periodically review employment and employee benefit policies as well as behavior standards that apply to the workplace.

6. *Institutional response determined by controlling boards or executive committees.* The Seventh-day Adventist Church will exercise its right to freedom of religion and preferential hiring practices to the extent permitted by law. When and if, in the judgment of an organization’s board of trustees or controlling committee, the application of laws or the removal of religious freedom interferes with the organization’s ability to pursue and accomplish its mission, the organization may choose to seek legal protection (either by initiating a lawsuit or defending itself against lawsuits asserted by another party) and, in the event of failure to obtain such, to reorganize or discontinue operation.

7. *Consultation rather than unilateral action.* A Seventh-day Adventist organization or institution will not act unilaterally in such matters. Its executive committee or board will seek counsel from the administration of supervisory organizations (conference, union, division), or from the General Conference administration in the case of General Conference institutions, before deciding the nature of its response to legislation that obligates the organization to practices deemed in conflict with its beliefs and values.

8. *Counsel before entering into litigation.* In situations where litigation is contemplated by a denominational entity, or where an entity must defend itself in a lawsuit regarding employee sexual orientation and expression, the administration of the entity shall also seek counsel, from the General Conference Office of General Counsel, before initiating or responding to litigation.

<sup>1</sup> See “An Affirmation of Marriage” approved by the General Conference Administrative Committee on April 23, 1996. The full text of these documents may be seen at <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements>.

<sup>2</sup> See “Position Statement on Homosexuality” approved by the General Conference Executive Committee, October 3, 1999, and “Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same-Sex Unions—A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage” voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee, March 9, 2004. The full text of these documents may be seen at <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements>.

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*This document was voted during the Annual Council session of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on October 15, 2007 in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

## Strategic Issues for the Seventh-day Adventist Church

VOTED, To approve and refer to each division and the attached union the document, Strategic Issues for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as follows:

### Strategic Issues for the Seventh-day Adventist Church

“The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.” (*GC Working Policy A 05*).

This Mission Statement is the foundation on which the following is established:

Christ’s ideal for His church was that it should reflect His workmanship, for it was He who said, “I will build my church.” Christ also affirmed that He intends to present it to His Father as a perfect church, having neither spot nor blemish. This ideal will be achieved as members respond to Christ’s love on the cross, humbly submit to Christ’s lordship as set forth in the Holy Scriptures, and depend fully on the indwelling power and leading of the Holy Spirit.

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, in response to the mission of Christ, is placing emphasis on three strategic issues: **Quality of Life, Unity, and Growth**. It is our deep desire that in the formation of a community of faith, each person will experience unconditional commitment to Christ. This commitment results in joyful and loving personal experience, active participation in the life of the church, and compassionate service to the wider community in the world.

General Conference leaders will design and carry out their services to the world field in such a way that the Lordship of Jesus Christ shall find expression in the Seventh-day Adventist Church through:

#### 1. Quality of personal and church life demonstrated by:

- a. Members whose lives demonstrate and illustrate the joy of salvation, restoration, and anticipation of the world to come.
- b. Weekly group Bible study for all ages with appropriate organizational curriculum.
- c. Weekly corporate Sabbath worship.
- d. Development of personal, family, and group prayer life.
- e. Regular training for discipleship, witnessing, and involvement in local church activity.
- f. Awareness of and participation in the worldwide work of the Church.
- g. Nurturing members of all ages according to their diverse needs and leading them to discover their spiritual gifts.
- h. Seventh-day Adventists who are and are perceived to be model citizens in the community and whose mental, physical, and spiritual life values are coupled with compassion and service.

## **2. Unity of the church demonstrated by:**

- a. Cohesiveness in doctrine: resulting from Spirit-guided world Church-approval of Bible-based, Christ-centered fundamental beliefs.
- b. Togetherness of believers: experienced by the creation and preservation of community that embraces cultural and ethnic diversity.
- c. Cohesiveness of organization: seen in distinct local and global church identity arising from the world Church-approved system of structure and organization.

## **3. Growth of the church demonstrated by:**

- a. Members who have a rich spiritual experience, who have discovered their spiritual gifts, and who have a commitment to active witness.

- b. Increasing accession and retention rates in local churches.
- c. A positive impact of the Seventh-day Adventist presence within a community.
- d. The number of churches established in unentered areas.
- e. The transmission of the Church=s legacy and mission to the succeeding generation.

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*\*Voted by the Executive Committee of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at its Spring Meeting, April 2002.*

## Total Commitment to God

### *A Declaration of Spiritual Accountability in the Family of Faith*

The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is filled with examples of individuals and institutions who have been, and are, vibrant witnesses to their faith. Because of their passionate commitment to their Lord and appreciation of His unbounded love, they all have the same goal: to share the Good News with others. One key Bible text has motivated them. It is a text that fires the souls of Seventh-day Adventists everywhere. It is what is called the Gospel Commission, the mandate from the Lord Himself, as recorded in Matthew 28:19,20, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” The New International Version says: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. ...”

This mandate, from the Lord Himself, is simple, beautiful, and binding. It is for every follower, whether member, pastor, or administrator—**Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples**. This principle ignites the mission of the church and sets the standard for any measuring, any assessment, of success. It touches all, whatever their responsibility, whether they are laypersons or church employees. It spans all the elements of church life, from the local church to the General Conference, in schools and colleges, publishing houses, health-care institutions, and health food organizations. The promise is encapsulated in the baptismal vows, in mission statements, in aims and objectives, in policies, and in constitutions and bylaws “to witness to His loving salvation,” “to facilitate the proclamation of the everlasting gospel,” “to supply the multitudes with the bread of life,” and “to nurture them in preparation for His soon return.” The four-fold command to **Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples** sounds wherever Seventh-day Adventists work or come together.

As the church has grown in size and complexity, more and more members, pastors, and administrators have asked serious questions about how the church relates to the Gospel Commission. Do the wheels and the gears of the church just turn out above average products and services that cannot be readily distinguished from their secular counterparts? Or does the church make sure its basic products and services reveal to the world the way to eternal life? Nothing should be excluded from these questions, whether it be church worship services or organizational or

institutional programs and products.

The time has come for the church as a whole to ask and answer the hard questions about how the church is relating to the guiding principle of the Gospel Commission. How can the guiding principle be actualized in the lives of members, pastors and congregations? How can they measure their progress in fulfilling the Gospel Commission? How can the church's universities, colleges and academies, health-food factories, high-tech health-care institutions, clinics, publishing houses, and media centers develop accountability based on the Gospel Commission?

This challenge calls for a frank and analytical approach in determining where the church is in relationship to the Lord's command. It is not enough to measure success by secular standards, not enough to give those standards priority. Total commitment to God involves, primarily, total acceptance of the principles of Christianity as outlined in the Bible and as supported by the Spirit of Prophecy. Congregations, institutions, individual church employees and church members can easily find satisfaction in goals reached, funds raised, buildings completed, budgets balanced, accreditation achieved or renewed, and yet fail to be accountable before God to the Gospel Commission. The first and continuing priority for the church must be this directive from the Lord: **Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples.**

While the Gospel Commission does not change, its fulfillment is demonstrated in different ways. A pastor works within a different context than that of a classroom teacher, a physician, or an institutional administrator. Whatever the personal or institutional role, each one is accountable to God's command. Among the great benefits resulting from an assessment of their effectiveness will be the increasing trust that develops as each member, each pastor, each administrator, and each church institution addresses this priority and gives it proper attention.

The family of God acknowledges that each person is individually accountable to God. At the same time, believers are admonished to examine themselves (see 2 Corinthians 13:5). A spiritual assessment process has its place in the personal life. Just as surely it has its place in organizational life

Spiritual assessment, while appropriate, is also a very delicate matter. For humankind sees only in part. The earthly frame of reference is always limited to that which is visible and to a brief span of time surrounding the present. Nevertheless, there is much to be gained from

careful and thoughtful evaluation of personal and organizational life.

It is possible to identify several principles which can guide such an assessment. While any attempt will be incomplete, the following areas of specific assessment will heighten awareness of and accountability to God and to the mission which is an integral part of the Christian's relationship and commitment to Him. The list is not comprehensive of those identified for attention, but the principles outlined here are applicable also to other individuals, organizations, and institutions.

***What “Total Commitment to God” involves for each church member***

Each Seventh-day Adventist, whether denominational employee or layperson, is promised the gift of the Holy Spirit which will enable spiritual growth in the grace of the Lord and which will empower the development and use of spiritual gifts in witness and service. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is demonstrated by:

1. Maintaining, where possible, a Christian home where the standards and principles of Christ are both taught and exemplified;
2. Experiencing a life that rejoices in the assurance of salvation, is moved by the Holy Spirit to effective personal witness to others, and which experiences in Christ a gracious character that is consistent with God's will as revealed in His Word;
3. Using the spiritual gifts God has promised each one;
4. Dedicating time, spiritual gifts, and resources, prayerfully and systematically, in Gospel proclamation and, individually as well as part of a church family, becoming the Lord's salt and light through sharing His love in family life and community service, always motivated by the sense of the soon return of the Lord and His command to preach His Gospel both at home and afar; and
5. Participating in a plan for systematic spiritual growth and assessment of one's personal walk with God by forming mutually accountable spiritual partnerships where the primary objective is to prayerfully mentor one another.

***What “Total Commitment to God” involves for a church pastor***

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor, called and empowered by the Holy Spirit, driven by love for souls, points sinners to Christ as Creator and Redeemer, and teaches them how to share their faith and become effective disciples. He or she regularly shares a balanced spiritual diet

fresh from communion with God and His Word. The pastor shows the saving grace and transforming power of the gospel by:

1. Striving to make his or her family a model of what the Lord expects in marriage and families;
2. Preaching Bible-based, Christ-centered sermons that nurture the members and support the world church, and teaching the fundamental beliefs with a sense of urgency rooted in the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of prophecy;
3. Appealing for all to submit to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit so that the Gospel may be validated in the compassionate life of the faith-directed believer;
4. Leading the local congregation in a strong evangelistic outreach that both increases membership and establishes new congregations, while maintaining strong support for the local and worldwide work of the church;
5. Evidencing effectiveness in ministry as the family of God increases numerically and grows in spiritual experience and worship, thus hastening the return of the Lord; and
6. Affirming the prioritization of personal spiritual growth and mission effectiveness by regularly participating in a spiritual outcome assessment process. The division will facilitate the development of an assessment model, to be implemented by each union/local conference, which includes a self-assessment module as well as elements addressing the pastor's responsibility to the congregation(s) and the world church organization.

### ***What “Total Commitment to God” involves for a congregation***

A Seventh-day Adventist congregation creatively and self-critically functions as a witnessing and nurturing community, facilitating Gospel proclamation, both locally, regionally, and globally. It lives in the world as “the body of Christ” showing the same concern and positive action for those which it touches as the Lord did in His earthly ministry by:

1. Demonstrating an abiding assurance in the saving grace of Christ and a commitment to the distinctive teachings of the Word;
2. Understanding and accepting its role as part of an end-time movement with a local, regional, and global responsibility for the spreading of the Gospel;
3. Developing strategic plans for sharing the Good News in its community, with the goal of ensuring that all persons understand how

Jesus can change their lives and preparing them for His soon coming, and by helping establish new congregations;

4. Nurturing the lives of members and their families so that they will grow spiritually and will continue confidently in the mission and truths expressed through God's last-day church;

5. Acknowledging the privileges of being a Seventh-day Adventist congregation and the concurrent accountability to the world family of Seventh-day Adventist congregations, as outlined in the *Church Manual*, by accepting and implementing broad plans that empower the spread of the Gospel in wider contexts, and by participating in the organizational, financial, and representative system designed to facilitate a global outreach; and

6. Participating in an assessment plan that leads the congregation to awareness of its strengths and weaknesses and the progress it has made in its mission to teach, baptize, and make disciples. The assessment plan will normally be a self-assessment program conducted annually by the entire congregation meeting as a group; but, periodically, it should include an assessment of the congregation's participation in, and responsibility to, the broader organization. Each division will facilitate the development of the assessment process, in association with the unions and local conferences/missions, that will be used within its territory.

### ***What “Total Commitment to God” involves for the elementary schools and academies***

A Seventh-day Adventist elementary school/academy creates a climate that nurtures the student spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially, and instills confidence in the relevance, role, message, and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The schools provide excellence in Adventist education by:

1. Developing, for the institution, a comprehensive spiritual master plan and curricula for all subjects that, in addition to academic excellence, support the Seventh-day Adventist world view and integrate faith with learning;

2. Employing fully committed, professionally competent Seventh-day Adventist teachers, who are actively involved in their local church, and who integrate faith and learning as they nurture their students in being good members and citizens of both church and society;

3. Working with parents and local congregations to ensure that each

student is presented with the claims of Christ and is given opportunity to decide for Him and be baptized;

4. Transmitting to students an understanding of the biblical role of the last-day people of God and how they can participate in fulfilling the mission of the church;

5. Involving staff and students in outreach initiatives in ways appropriate to student age and planning community opportunities for witness; and

6. Participating systematically in a division-developed, and a union- and conference-implemented, spiritual assessment process which provides annual reports to the school board and its various constituencies.

### ***What “Total Commitment to God” involves for the colleges and universities***

A Seventh-day Adventist college/university offers academically sound, tertiary and/or post-graduate education to Seventh-day Adventists and to students of nearby communities, who welcome the opportunity to study in an Adventist environment, by:

1. Developing a comprehensive spiritual master plan, proposed by the faculty and approved by the board, that identifies the spiritual truths and values, both cognitive and relational, which the institution is committed to share with its students and to comprehensively identify the opportunities through which those values will be communicated during a given period of time in campus life;

2. Maintaining a classroom and overall campus environment which ensures opportunities for both academic instruction and Gospel encounters that produce graduates who are recognized by both the church and society for their excellence in both the academic and spiritual aspects of their lives; men and women who are well-balanced spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially; men and women who love their Lord, who hold high His standards in their daily lives, who will help build strong, thriving local congregations, and who will be salt and light to their communities both as laypersons and as church employees;

3. Affirming unambiguously in classroom and campus life the beliefs, practices, and world view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, sharing the joy of the Gospel, demonstrating confidence in the divinely established role of the Advent movement and its continuing significance in God’s plan for these last days, facilitating activities for faculty, staff,

and students to engage in Gospel witness and Christian service, and encouraging the faculty and staff to a consistency of life-style which is manifested in nurturing, compassionate faculty/staff relationships with students;

4. Employing fully committed, professionally competent Seventh-day Adventist teachers, who are actively involved in their local church, and who integrate faith and learning in the context of nurturing their students to be productive members of both society and of the Lord's church, and who interact with parents and other constituents in order to understand and to fulfill their high academic and spiritual expectations for educational programs serving the youth;

5. Evaluating the achievement of the objectives outlined in the spiritual master plan by a faculty-developed, board-approved, comprehensive assessment program, designed with sufficient specificity to evaluate each element of campus life, to guide the college/university administration in taking affirming or corrective measures, and to serve as the basis for annual reports of the spiritual health of the institution to the governing board and various constituencies; and

6. Submitting the proposed spiritual master plan and assessment program to a General Conference-appointed, international panel of highly qualified educators who will provide the college/university board with a written evaluation of the spiritual master plan and the assessment program.

### ***What “Total Commitment to God” involves for hospitals and health care institutions***

A Seventh-day Adventist hospital/health-care institution provides the highest quality, whole-person, health care to the community it serves by developing a comprehensive spiritual assessment plan that includes:

1. Creating a well-planned, positive atmosphere that focuses on the healing presence of the Lord;

2. Developing a professionally competent, mission-oriented, and compassionate staff who sensitively minister to patients from the context of their Christian faith as well as distinctive Seventh-day Adventist beliefs;

3. Ensuring that all those within the institution's sphere of influence are aware that the health-care facility is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church by developing staff-orientation and community-witnessing programs that portray positively both the hospital and the

church to those it serves;

4. Sensitively stimulating spiritual inquiry and responding to it systematically;

5. Allocating such financial and personnel resources as may be possible to the local, regional, and global soul-winning, educational, and/or health-care mission of the church; and

6. Demonstrating accountability for fulfillment of mission through participation, at least triennially, in a comprehensive evaluation process developed, planned, and overseen by the respective division executive committee to assess progress toward achieving specific, measurable, mission outcomes.

***What “Total Commitment to God” involves for the institutions of mass communication: publishing houses, media centers, Adventist Book Centers, and radio stations***

A Seventh-day Adventist institution of mass communication provides quality productions that enhance the mission of the church and the commitment of its members to mission by:

1. Encouraging initiatives and the distribution only of that which contributes to Gospel proclamation and the nurturing of church members within the context of the last-day message;

2. Planning or supporting evangelistic activities which may lead to personal contact and involving the local congregation, wherever possible;

3. Using technology and media in a way that is sensitive to available funds, so that resources are maximized for the mission of the church;

4. Coordinating initiatives with other church entities to ensure interaction with and support of related programs and projects;

5. Providing such staff as may be possible or appropriate to assist pastors and congregations in the follow-up of those responding to outreach initiatives, and operating a feedback system for product development or modification; and

6. Establishing, under direction of governing bodies, systems for periodic review of materials and programs, both for members and for the general public, thus providing management and governing bodies with an analysis of effectiveness in meeting mission goals, ensuring concurrence with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and practices, and preparing reports for presentation to each regular meeting of the constituency and annually to the board.

***What “Total Commitment to God” involves for the food industries***

A Seventh-day Adventist food industry develops products that contribute positively to health, and provides a resource to assist the giving of the Gospel in these last days by:

1. Manufacturing and selling only those products which are consistent with the divine principles of diet and health;
2. Training personnel to inform the public on sound health practices and assisting the church in developing increasingly better health among the members;
3. Providing low cost vegetarian food to the world’s developing countries;
4. Implementing programs under which those influenced by the health message may receive further information about the church;
5. Budgeting financial assistance for the mission of the church on a basis established by the division executive committee; and
6. Periodically evaluating performance in terms of efficiency, return on investment, and contribution to the mission of the church, based on a system administered by the board and established by the division committee, in consultation with the International Health Food Association.

***What “Total Commitment to God” involves for a Conference/ Mission, or Union***

A Seventh-day Adventist conference/mission or union, with leadership that has a personal relationship with Jesus and is submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, motivates members, pastors, teachers, and all other denominational employees to present to their neighbors and communities the saving truth as it is in these last days, and oversees and prioritizes its plans, initiatives, and finances to give first place to continuous soul-winning and nurturing ministries by:

1. Identifying and promoting the spiritual objectives, both evangelistic and nurturing, of the conference/mission or union and, through a strategic planning and financing process, involving the collective participation of its membership and organizations;
2. Showing, through the personal example of leadership, that the church is continuing, without wavering, its divinely appointed role as a witness to this dying and needy world;

3. Nurturing and supporting pastors, members, and congregations so that they may grow as disciples and experience ways of fulfilling the Gospel Commission;

4. Exercising administrative leadership in institutions and entities under its direction to ensure that the mission of the church is kept clearly in focus, and developing and implementing initiatives to establish new congregations in communities and areas where needed;

5. Assuring that budgetary provisions for local, national, and global evangelistic endeavors are carefully balanced against the resources allocated to the nurture of the believers, and that both are demonstrated to be of the highest priority; and

6. Cooperating with the division in developing and implementing assessment processes, which may be evaluated by a committee designated by the General Conference, by which members, pastors, congregations, institutions, and the conference/mission or union itself may ascertain their commitment to and effectiveness in carrying out the Gospel Commission and reporting their findings to the respective constituencies.

### ***What “Total Commitment to God” involves for the General Conference/Divisions***

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and its divisions, with leadership that has a personal relationship with Jesus and is submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, provide overall global direction to the spiritual life and mission of the church, develop strategic plans and policies, generate initiatives and programs, and allocate financial and human resources in ways that demonstrate urgency in completing the mission of the church and subordination to the command to **Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples** by:

1. Giving priority at Annual Councils and Spring Meetings of the General Conference and division executive committees to the nurture of the spiritual life of a growing Church with a clear mission to carry the eternal gospel, in the time of the end setting of the three angels’ messages, to all the world;

2. Appointing small committees with international representation as may be necessary to evaluate and make recommendations to appropriate boards or executive committees concerning assessment programs being developed;

3. Ensuring that administrations and boards of institutions and

agencies under their direction establish spiritual accountability processes that give evidence of their commitment to the last-day mission of the church, and demonstrate their effectiveness in accomplishing it;

4. Requiring that initiatives and activities of limited focus, while having some merit of their own, are, in fact, subordinated to the broader, coordinated mission goals of the church, and governing the disbursement of budgets to promote the promulgation of the Gospel to all the world;

5. Ensuring the mission of the church is clearly understood and implemented through assessment processes that review progress in meeting mission objectives involving both nurture of members and evangelistic outreach; and

6. Developing a spiritual master plan and assessment program, to be monitored by a committee appointed at each level by the General Conference/Division Executive Committee, for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the General Conference/Division in terms of the mission of the church and assisting all levels of church organization and all institutions to assess the effectiveness of their spiritual master plans and assessment programs.

Truly, the spiritual mandate is simple. **Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples.** Responsible Seventh-day Adventist church members and all church employees must remember that each one will be held accountable before God for this principle. Someday, at the great judgment bar, the Lord will ask, “What have you done, relying on My grace, with the gifts, talents, and opportunities I gave you?”

As He did 2,000 years ago, the Lord commands His church today: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” **Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples.** Total commitment to God mandates the fulfillment of this commission, which is still the only and true measure of success.

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*This document was discussed and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in San Jose, Costa Rica, October 1-10, 1996.*





















