

Seventh-day Adventist Church
North-German Union Conference
South-German Union Conference
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Position on Agenda Item 120 of General Conference Annual Council 2017

Procedures for Reconciliation and Adherence in Church Governance Phase II

The Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee took place from 4 to 11 October 2017. This is the highest decision making body of the world church between the General Conference Sessions which take place every 5 years. The Executive Committee is made up of General Conference leaders, Division officers, all Union Conference Presidents and representatives of church pastors and lay people, based on a specific formula. In total there are about 340 members who have voice and vote. The General Conference leadership placed the following document to the Executive Committee for a vote

116-17G PROCEDURES FOR RECONCILIATION AND ADHERENCE IN CHURCH
GOVERNANCE: PHASE II ([Link to document](#))

The essence of the document was an administrative process for the world church leadership to ensure that Union Conferences operate in conformity with the world church leadership. That required that Union Conference presidents sign a document to commit themselves to work against any activities or initiatives in their territory that could negatively affect the unity of the church.

The “offences” or actions which could be considered as non-compliance were put into three categories. These would be non-compliance with respect to

1. The 28 Fundamental Beliefs.
2. Voted actions of the General Conference in session. Voted policies and actions of the General Conference Executive Committee that are designed for global implementation through divisions, unions, conferences, and missions, which, if not implemented, would adversely impact Church unity.

3. Policies, initiatives, and practices that are local in nature, and not in violation of actions voted in General Conference Session or voted by the General Conference Executive Committee and would not impact Church unity.

Presidents who refuse (either not willing or not in a position) to sign this document would lose their right to speak and vote in the General Conference Executive Committee as well as the possibility of participating in the Executive Committee subcommittees.

The Executive Committee voted with a large majority that this document be sent back to the “Unity in Mission Oversight Committee” so that the critical issues and concerns be further dealt with and the document be brought back to the General Conference Executive Committee in 2018

Comments from NGU and SGU

Our position to this document was already expressed in the open discussions of the General Conference Executive Committee. The following presents the essence of this position

Questions on Process

1. The document is controversial because it seeks to legitimise a significant restriction of the duties and rights of Union Conference Presidents (Ex Officio members of the Executive Committee). It is unacceptable that such an important document of 14 pages in the English language is simply placed in-front of the Executive Committee during the meeting and read out loud from the podium. There was therefore no opportunity for an adequate and proper preparation, engagement and discussion.
2. Although the members of the “Unity in Mission Oversight Committee” are known, it has not been clarified who the real authors of this document are. This question was raised during the Executive Committee meeting, but the General Conference President Ted Wilson could not give a definite answer.

We consider this to be a non-transparent process which does not contribute to an atmosphere of trust.

Questions on Content

1. Every organisation requires rules and policies to operate and the compliance with these rules ensures organisational unity. Our church has Working Policy (WP B95) that defines how we engage with critical actions and initiatives. The initiatives for such actions should come from the next higher organisation and in the case of Union Conferences, this would be the Division Executive Committee. It would be appropriate that this be done first before the matter is brought to the General Conference Executive Committee
2. Of greater importance is the fact that the church thrives on the spirit of mutual trust and partnership. Where there are differences in opinions, punitive administrative procedures should be applied as last resort. We however are observing a tendency at the General Conference to resolve conflicts using punitive demands and procedures.
3. In order to create a narrow and ill-defined understanding of unity, there is a restriction on diversity and as well as on the freedom of conscience. We are opposed to such a process.
4. The document does not provide clear criteria to prove how church unity is threatened. We see the danger of arbitrariness since the criteria for assessing the dangers to unity are subjective and unclear.
5. As Presidents of Union Conferences, we are Ex officio members of the General Conference Executive Committee. We have serious concerns about any possible removal of our right to speak and vote and we will request our legal advisors to look into this matter.

In general, we view this document as an attempt to centralize the role of leadership in the world church and it makes no meaningful contribution towards a relationship of cooperation with the General Conference that is defined through mutual trust

We believe there is need for a more open atmosphere in order to have free dialogue on these issues.