

This is an adapted electronic version of the original letter from church board members of the Adventist Church in Göttingen to all Adventist churches in Germany. It is at your free disposal. A further distribution of this initiative abroad (or on the Internet) with correspondingly adapted text is expressly desired.

Göttingen, August 26, 2018

Dear church leaders,

As you may have already heard, at the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee in mid-October there will be a vote on the Unity Oversight Committee's (UOC) proposal that could have dramatic consequences for the worldwide Adventist Church, and thus should matter to all of us. The details of this proposal can be found in the attached letter for your church members.

As a reaction to this proposal, some members of the church board of the Adventist Church in Göttingen (Germany) have decided to start an unusual initiative. This initiative aims to support our union presidents at the General Conference in October by informing them that many church members are very concerned about this UOC proposal and consider it misguided. To protect the Union presidents, we would like to state clearly that our initiative does not stem from the unions themselves but from individual church members.

We have sent this letter to all Adventist churches in Germany and would be grateful if you would forward this to your church members to inform them of this initiative by e.g. providing all church members with a copy of this letter or by posting it publically and referring to it in your announcements, encouraging members to sign the petition.

It is very important that you send your petition lists to your respective union before the Annual Council, **at the latest by the end of September.**

With kind regards from the Adventist Church in Göttingen

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized name, possibly 'M. L. H. H.', written in a cursive style.

Göttingen, August 26, 2018

Dear fellow church members,

We would like to approach you about an issue that - without exaggeration - may have historical consequences for the Adventist church, and which therefore should matter to all of us. With this letter, some members of the church board of the Adventist Church in Göttingen have decided to start an unusual initiative to reach all Adventist Churches in Germany. So what is it about?

As you may already know, at the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee in mid-October, all union and division presidents from all over the world will vote on a proposal submitted by the "Unity Oversight Committee" (UOC). The proposal aims to establish a sequence of sanctions that would threaten union presidents if they do not comply with resolutions passed by the General Conference.<sup>1</sup>

The general wording of the proposal obscures the fact that it was primarily conceptualized to create a means to sanction unions that decide to ordinate women as pastors, despite the resolution passed by the General Conference in San Antonio. If the UOC proposal passes, union presidents may face three stages of sanctions:

1. Warning
2. Public reprimand
3. Exclusion from the executive committee of the General Conference or even suspension.

The proposal clearly mentions the possibility of using paragraph B95 of the Working Policy of the General Conference, or in cases of advanced "rebellion", even the dissolution of entire conferences or unions.

It is to be expected that impacted conferences and unions will not be moved by these sanctions to revise their decisions of conscience, the latter being based on their conviction that the Bible can be read as stating that there must be no discrimination towards women. Whatever one's opinion on the issue of ordaining women is, we believe that this question, which is also controversial among our theologians, is not an issue that should jeopardize the Adventist Church as it exists today.

It must be noted that the entire controversy about this issue could have been avoided if the General Conference, before the San Antonio vote, had accepted the results of the 106-member committee of Adventist theologians (TOSC) which the GC itself had initiated and had given the task of studying the Bible as to the question of women's ordination. The committee covered the entire spectrum of opinions on this topic, and 2 delegates per division were dispatched to it. After three years of Bible study, two-thirds (!) of these theologians declared that each division should be allowed to decide for itself whether it ordains women or not. If the main goal of the General Conference in San Antonio had been to unify the church, then they could have voiced a clear recommendation from the GC to the delegates before the vote in San Antonio that would have reflected the results of the TOSC, but this did not happen. If it had, the result of the vote would most likely have been different, and the present problems in the church would have been avoided.

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<sup>1</sup> You may find the proposal at: <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2018-07-17/administrative-committee-takes-step-forward-in-unity-process/>

However, there is another reason why the proposal is very problematic. It is not only about the issue of women's ordination. If, for example, there is some (!) alleged violation of a rule or GC resolution within a conference, then in accordance with the present proposal the violation must be reported to the next higher level of administration, up to the GC itself. If the conference does not report, then it is the responsibility of the union to do so. The proposal thus establishes a surveillance system that concentrates in the GC the information on violations of rules as well as the authority to impose sanctions. We find it worrisome that the GC is increasingly developing the same kind of centralistic power structures that we vehemently reject in other contexts (for example in the Catholic church).

From the standpoint of the GC, this proposal is about a measure to restore unity in the church. However, to unify the church on controversial issues, more convincing and more differentiated approaches are needed than surveillance, control and the exercise of power.

In 1892, Ellen White wrote: "We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. (...) Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christ-like forbearance." (Manuscript 24, 1892).

If the UOC proposal passes and is implemented, then it has the potential to divide the Adventist church to a degree never seen before. It could cause entire conferences and unions to officially exit the Adventist church.

**We do not want to stand by passively and watch this dramatic development. If you share our concerns, we call upon you to support our union president in a joint action at the Annual Council of the GC, by signing the enclosed petition and sending it to the union president by the end of September.** Anyone who would like to do more can send a personal email to the union, the division and the General Conference and inform them of his or her rejection of the UOC proposal on the basis of the above reasons.

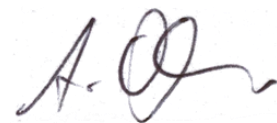
With kind regards from the Adventist Church in Göttingen



board member



board member



board member

## Appendix

### Extracts from the proposal of the „Unity Oversight Committee“:

*[...] Where regard for and practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee actions have not been followed, these principles shall apply:*

- 1. All perceived non-compliance shall officially be identified and reported by the Administrative Committee of a conference and/or union and/or division successively to the next higher organization, beginning with the administrative level of the Church closest to the matter. If any level of organization does not report an issue of non-compliance, it becomes the responsibility of the next higher organization.*
- 2. Planning for and implementing compliance shall initially be the responsibility entrusted to the administrative level of the Church closest to the matter. [...]*
- 5. If the matter continues to be unresolved, the next higher level of Church organization is tasked with the responsibility to resolve the matter or facilitate the initiation of a process leading to **consequences**. [...]*

[Note: The "consequences" include first a warning to the union and then a public reprimand of the union president.]

*In the event that entities that have been “warned” or “reprimanded” continue in non-compliance with voted actions of the General Conference Executive Committee and/or General Conference Session, the relevant General Conference Compliance Review Committee may recommend to the General Conference Administrative Committee to pursue **other actions** that may be available in the General Conference working policies and guidelines or the Constitution and Bylaws of the General Conference. If, after the organization closest to the matter has been unable to resolve a compliance issue and the General Conference Compliance Review Committee has recommended consequences, only the General Conference Executive Committee and/or the General Conference in session has authority to implement the recommendation.*

[Note: "**other actions**" include e.g. the expulsion of the union president from the Executive Committee of the General Conference, or the removal of the president or the expulsion of entire conferences or unions from the Adventist Church, in accordance with General Conference Working Policy B 95.]

The complete proposal can be found here:

<https://news.adventist.org/en/allnews/news/go/2018-07-17/administrative-committee-takes-step-forward-in-unity-process/>

Dear Brother ... (union president)

In regard to Proposal 113-18G (revised 07-17-18kb) of the “Unity Oversight Committee”, we would like to voice our concern that the General Conference is increasingly developing centralistic power and control structures that we vehemently oppose in other contexts (for example in the Catholic church). If this proposal passes and is implemented, it has the potential to divide the Adventist church to a degree never seen before. We are furthermore convinced that the issue of ordaining women cannot be solved in this manner. For these reasons, we reject this proposal.

We would like to ask you to present this petition to the Executive Committee of the General Conference and furthermore, do everything possible to ensure that the General Conference does not resolve controversial issues as the proposal aims to – solely through exercise of power - but rather by finding convincing and differentiated solutions, thus avoiding a possible division of our church.

**Data protection rule: We, the undersigned, agree to the forwarding of this list as an expression of our opinions to the Unions of the Adventist Church in ...(country) , to the .... (division) as well as to the General Conference. We forbid the use of the data on this list for any other kind of processing or any other purpose.**

The undersigned are members of the \_\_\_\_\_ Adventist Church.

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The list must be filled out and forwarded by **the end of September, at the latest** to the respective union presidents so that they can present them to the Executive Committee of the General Conference.