

## **NAD Counsel Regarding Coronavirus United States Government Aid April 8, 2020**

The North American Division has been repeatedly requested to give guidance on a developing funding issue in the United States. After consultation with the union presidents, though we issue no mandate, the North American Division (NAD) offers this document as a recommendation:

In order to provide economic relief to Americans amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Congress recently passed two significant pieces of legislation: the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) and the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA).

Provisions in these laws make government funds available to employers, including churches, to assist with payroll expenses during this time of financial instability. Among the financial assistance made available to employers are forgivable loans guaranteed by the Small Business Administration and payroll tax credits.

Given the unknown economic consequences of this public health crisis on the church, there has been interest by some denominational entities in accessing these funds. Many church leaders and members have concerns regarding both restrictions and conditions surrounding the acceptance of this government aid. In addition, there have been questions regarding how receiving this money fits into the Seventh-day Adventist Church's longstanding and historic commitment to the separation of church and state.

It is the North American Division Administration's recommendation to abstain from participation in both of these federal financial assistance programs. While the risk associated with this money is uncertain, NAD leadership's primary concern is remaining faithful to the counsel we've been given regarding church-state relations.

We acknowledge that the April 3, 2020 guidance regarding this issue stated that at that time Office of General Counsel saw no "strings" that would be objectionable to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We now have a much clearer picture of the programs' terms and conditions, however that is not the primary motivating factor of this more specific guidance. Rather, upon further reflection, in light of the teachings of Revelation 13, NAD leadership believes that regardless of the legal implications of these programs not participating is most consistent with our long-standing beliefs and practices.

We ask leaders across the division to prayerfully consider both Bible prophecy and principles and the church's longstanding warnings on the intermingling of church and state prior to obtaining government assistance.

While the issue of government aid to the church is of concern in a variety of contexts, this guidance is limited to the federal financial assistance contained in CARES and FFCRA. Additionally, this guidance should not discourage individual members from receiving government assistance in their personal or professional lives.

During this difficult moment in time, let's remember the faithfulness of our God in the past and look forward to His sustaining hand in the future. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history." *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9:10.