

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
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USA

Attention: GC Administrative Committee

Appeal concerning the action of the 2019 General Conference Annual Council

On the recommendation of the GC Administrative Committee (GC ADCOM), the 2019 General Conference Annual Council (GCAC) voted a warning to six unions, including the Norwegian Union Conference (NORUC), for having **“taken actions that are not in harmony with Working Policy and practices on credentials”**.

The NORUC Executive Committee has voted to appeal this warning, in spite of the fact that it is hard to envision that an appeal to the same body that recommended the warning, can be treated in an objective and fair manner.

Why NORUC is appealing

The Seventh-day Adventist church in Norway is appealing the voted warning out of a concern for and commitment to the mission our Lord has entrusted to his remnant church. Female pastors and leaders are essential to the mission of the church in Norway for the following reasons:

- The credibility of the church is at stake. Discrimination on the basis of gender is unacceptable in our cultural context, creating a barrier of trust in the minds of Norwegian people, especially younger generations. Evangelism is made more difficult.
- Our pastoral needs depend on female pastors. Without our female pastors we would not have the staff to cover the basic pastoral and evangelistic needs of our union.
- Finishing the work. The warning hinders NORUC in the recruitment of the pastors that are needed. Young women are put off from training as pastors, thus taking potential soul winners from frontline evangelism.
- Reaching out to ALL people. In the cultural context of Norway, women pastors are able to reach people that male pastors do not have the opportunities to be in contact with.
- Women pastors and leaders are able to bring alternative perspectives to our evangelistic work, strengthening our mission effectiveness and church growth.

Appeal

NORUC appeals the giving of this warning on five grounds:

1. Working Policy is given priority to the biblical principle of not showing partiality/non-discrimination.
2. The action is disregarding the biblical fact that the gifts of the Holy Spirit will be given to both males and females.



3. Two Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs (FB) and a basic principle of GC Working Policy (GCWP) is disregarded.
4. The word *ordination* is given an elevated importance that there is no biblical support for.
5. The warning comes as part of a flawed process that disregards general biblical principles, and procedural elements from the [document voted](#) by the 2018 GCAC.

The appeal process

NORUC expects a fair and authentic process and thereby requests:

- that all the members of the GC Administrative Committee (GC ADCOM) read this appeal in its entirety.
- that the appeal be heard, in accordance with the 2018 GCAC document, by the majority of the GC ADCOM.
- that there will be a secret ballot as the GC ADCOM votes on the question of annulling the warning, and that the result of the ballot will be published.
- that a written reply, commenting on all the major aspects of the appeal, be made available.
- that any further actions taken with regards to the position of the NORUC on ordination practice, will elicit a fair opportunity for NORUC to present the case for the GCAC.

Elaboration on the Grounds for Appeal

1. Working Policy Priority to the Biblical Principle of Non-Discrimination

Female pastors in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The church cannot overlook these facts:

- Multiple Spirit-gifted female pastors have for decades been employed by the church in some areas of the world, including Norway.
- The employment of female pastors has been in harmony with voted regulations of GCAC.
- Female pastors have been important partakers in the mission of the church.
- The basic biblical principle of not showing partiality must be given priority to policy in dealing with male and female pastors:
 - “For God shows no partiality” (Rom 2:11 - ESV)
 - “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” (James 2:8-9 – ESV)

2. Biblical Fact: The Gifts of The Holy Spirit Given to Both Males & Females

Acts 15 (NIV) Peter:

8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them [the Gentiles] by **giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.** 9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

Joel 2:28, 29 (NIV) The prophet Joel writes concerning the gifts of The Holy Spirit in the last days:

“...I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your **sons and daughters** will prophesy... Even on my servants, **both men and women**, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (See also Peter quoting Joel in Acts 2:16-18).



The following Pauline texts dovetail with this:

1 Corinthians 12 (NIV)

4 **There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them....** 7 *...to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.* 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit... 11 *All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and **he distributes them to each one, just as he determines....*** 18 *...God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, **just as he wanted them to be....*** 27 *...you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* 28 And **God has placed in the church** first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.

Romans 12 (NIV)

5 *...in Christ we... form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.* 6 **We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.** If your gift is *prophesying*, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7... if it is *teaching*, then teach; 8... if it is *to lead*, do it diligently...

Ephesians 4 (NIV)

11 *...Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, **the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,*** 12 ***to equip his people for works of service,*** so that the body of Christ may be built up 16 ***From him [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament,*** grows and builds itself up in love, ***as each part does its work.*** (Emphasis added in texts above)

3. Two Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs and a Basic Principle of GC Working Policy Disregarded

Fundamental Beliefs (FB) 14 and 17 must be recognized as principles with priority to policy in the church. The voted warning does not harmonize with these beliefs:

- FB #14 “...differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us.”
- FB #17 “God bestows upon all members... spiritual gifts... the Holy Spirit... apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church... Some members are called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, and teaching ministries...” (We find no mention of gender here!)

A Basic Principle in GCWP is set aside in voting this warning:

GCWP BA 60 05: “The Church rejects any system or philosophy which discriminates against anyone on the basis of race, color, or gender...”

4. Ordination – Non-Biblical Word

The fact that the word *ordination* is not part of the setting apart ceremony of pastors in the four unions that do not *ordain* neither male nor female pastors, appears to be crucial in the decision in recommending a warning.

The words *ordination* and *ordain* have neither Greek nor Hebrew origin, but come from Latin. The concept was used in a secular context within the Roman Empire.ⁱ The late Latin word: *ordināre* comes from the word *ordo* which means 'order'ⁱⁱ. Gradually this term came to be used in a Christian context and “became integrated as a sacrament in the Roman-Catholic Church...”ⁱⁱⁱ. The word *ordain* was first used in English in the 13th century.^{iv}



King James Version

The *King James Version* of the New Testament (the Bible that Ellen G. White used) uses the word *ordain* 20 times to translate 13 different Greek words. The *New King James Version* (NKJV) does not use the word *ordain* in the relevant texts, but generally uses the word *appoint*.

Based on the instructions given to the translators in 1604, it is not surprising that the word *ordain* is used in the KJV:

“James gave the translators instructions intended to ensure that the new version would conform to the ecclesiology and **reflect the episcopal structure of the Church of England** and its belief in an ordained clergy.”^v (Emphasis added)

Ellen White and ordination

Ellen White uses different forms of the verb *ordain* “close to a thousand times” in her published writings.^{vi} She uses the word in a variety of different ways. The chapter “He Ordained Twelve” in *Desire of Ages* (DA) opens by quoting Mark 3:13-14 (KJV) where the expression “And he **ordained** twelve” is found. The NKJV renders it “Then He **appointed** twelve” (emphasis added in both references).

The fact that Ellen White uses the word *ordain* found in the KJV text she is quoting, does not in any way prove that she made it mandatory to use the word *ordination* in describing the action of appointing pastors.

In this same chapter in DA (297.1) Ellen White uses expressions such as *partnership*, *apprenticeship*, *come under the divine instruction*, *uniting with Christ*, as alternative expressions on being set aside for cooperation with the Lord.

In *Acts of the Apostles* (AA) pages 161 – 162 Ellen White comments on the appointment of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13) as they were sent out from Antioch on their missionary journey. In her comments she uses expressions such as “**Separate** .. Barnabas and Saul”, “these apostles were **solemnly dedicated**”, “to **set them apart** publicly to the work of the ministry”, “their **divine appointment**”. Notice her comment in describing what took place:

“Both Paul and Barnabas had already received their **commission** from God Himself, and the ceremony of the laying on of hands added no new grace or virtual qualification.

It was an **acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office** ... by that action, [they] asked God to bestow His blessing upon the chosen apostles in their devotion to the specific work to which they had been appointed...”

“At a later date **the rite of ordination** by the laying on of hands was greatly abused; **unwarrantable importance was attached to the act...**” (AA 161 - 162) (emphasis added)

Ellen White does not use the expression *ordination* in a way that supports an elevation of the word to the level of sacrament. On the contrary. She warns against elevating the practice to “unwarrantable importance”.

There is no biblical support for claiming that in appointing pastors, the word *ordination* makes the occasion different to what takes place in a commissioning service of pastors.



5. Flawed Process: General Biblical Principles & 2018 GCAC Process Set Aside

Article by Elder Ted Wilson in the *Executive Committee Newsletter*

Just prior to the 2019 GCAC, an article by elder Ted Wilson appeared in the October 2019 issue of the *GC Executive Committee Newsletter*. In the article titled "A Theology of Leadership" elder Wilson wrote: "We build our theology of leadership and practice firmly upon the Bible." He refers to two highly relevant texts: Exodus 18 and Acts 15.

In these texts, the following principles of practice stand out:

- a) **Decisions were based upon God's expressed will** (Ex 18:16; Acts 15:7-9, 14-18)
- b) **The cases were dealt with locally at first** (Ex 18:13, 15; Acts 15:1-2)
- c) **The involved parties were given opportunity to be heard** (Ex 18:16; Acts 15:1-2, 4-5, 12)
- d) **The processes were transparent, open processes**

As the GC administration dealt with the matter of warning six unions in 2019, **none** of these four mentioned biblical principles were applied.

The document voted by the **2018 GCAC** gives a detailed instruction of how administrators should deal with "any matter of perceived non-compliance". Several of these **guidelines were set aside** as the GC administration took over this issue in 2019.

On October 15, 2019 as the GCAC dealt with the issue of warning the mentioned unions, elder Lowell Cooper in his comment pointed out that **due process was not applied**.

A study of the 2018 document and due process, and the biblical references mentioned, reveals a number of evidences of a flawed process. Below you will find a partial list of evidences concerning the process as the GC administration took over this issue in 2019:

- 1) The GC administration took this case out of the hands of the Divisions, in spite of the **biblical principle of dealing with issues locally at first** (Exodus 18 and Acts 15).
- 2) The Unions involved were **not given any opportunity to defend** themselves before the GC ADCOM where the recommendation was voted. The Unions involved were **not given any opportunity to present their case, in any meaningful way, to the GC executive committee**, where the verdict was voted, in spite of principles from the **Bible**, the **2018 GC document**, and **Due Process**.
- 3) The process in **GC ADCOM** was a **closed process**, in spite of principles from the **Bible** and **Due Process**.
- 4) The GC administration did not invite the unions for any **dialogue** in 2019, in spite of principles from the **Bible**, the **2018 GC document**, and **Due Process**, and the fact that they had taken the process out of the hands of the Divisions.
- 5) No **clearly written statement** defining the perceived non-compliance was given to either the GC executive committee or the entities directly affected, in spite of principles from the **2018 GC document**.
- 6) No proper notice was given of the proposed vote at the 2019 GCAC, in spite of principles of **Due Process**.
- 7) GC ADCOM is definitely not an **independent and impartial tribunal**, contrary to principles of **Due Process**.
- 8) There was no possibility for an **appeal to a superior body** or to a *special appeal body*, in spite of principles of **Due Process**.
- 9) The basis of the warnings of the German and the Scandinavian unions are **based upon policy**, in spite of the fact that **policy contains provisions for alternative solutions**.



10) Fundamental Beliefs # 14 and 17 and the basic principle of GC WP BA 60 05 are not taken into account.

Conclusion

Vital Principles More Basic than Policy

Principles are:

“Fundamental norms, rules, or values that represent what is desirable and positive for a person, group, organization, or community, and help it in determining the rightfulness or wrongfulness of its actions. **Principles are more basic than policy and objectives, and are meant to govern both.**” (emphasis added) (The online Business Dictionary, [principles](#))

Ellen White’s statement in *Acts of the Apostles* p. 68:

“...In matters of conscience the majority has no power’... **This principle** we in our day are firmly to maintain.... **God’s word must be recognized as above all human legislation.** A ‘Thus saith the Lord’ is not to be set aside for a ‘Thus saith the church.’” (Emphasis added)

NORUC has a legitimate biblically based conviction on the role of women in mission in our cultural context. That position is in full compliance with the Bible, the writings of Ellen White, the Fundamental Beliefs of the church and the resulting basic principles of GCWP.

It is because we all agree that human legislation is subservient to the principles and processes found in the Word of God, that we believe that the warning given to NORUC at 2019 GCAC should be annulled at the next possible opportunity.

The executive officers of NORUC wish to reiterate that NORUC remains flexible and open to viable solutions to the present conundrum, and that present practice in NORUC is temporary until a solution is found by the world church. We believe such a solution is available through existing policy, if there were a willingness to use these policy solutions.

Victor Marley
President

Finn F. Eckhoff
Secretary

Jóhann E. Jóhannsson
Treasurer

Endnotes:

ⁱ - Trans European Bible Committee, *The Mission of God through the Ministry of the Church: A Biblical Theology of Ordination - With Particular Attention to the Ordination of Women*, 2013 p 111 (TED BTO)

ⁱⁱ - *Collins English Dictionary*, <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/ordain> (5 June 2016) (Collins)

ⁱⁱⁱ - TED BTO p 111

^{iv} - Collins

^v - Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_James_Version – based on: Daniell, David (2003). *The Bible in English: its history and influence*. (New Haven, Conn: [Yale University Press](#). ISBN 0-300-09930-4.) (26 May 2016)

^{vi} - *Toward a Theology Of Ordination*, Silver Spring, MD, January 2013, p 26.