

## FIFTH BUSINESS MEETING

*Sixty-First General Conference Session, June 7, 2022, 2:00 p.m.*

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Good afternoon. Hope you had a nice lunch or a break time. And now we are starting our session this afternoon that will go to 5:30 p.m. I will ask Elder Gerson Santos to make the prayer to start our meeting. But first I want to read this wonderful passage from Hebrews Chapter 10 starting with verse 35. Hebrews Chapter 10:35. "So do not throw away your confidence. It will be richly rewarded. You will need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God you will receive what he has promised. For in just a little while he who is coming will come and will not delay." And that is the theme for our 61st GC Session. Jesus is coming! Get involved! And the Lord will take care of each one of us and our dear members worldwide. Let's stand for prayer, Pastor Gerson.

[Prayer by Gerson P Santos]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you, Elder Gerson. We have the agenda item 119 and all the team of treasurers are ready to come to the stage for the Treasurer's Report with Elder Paul Douglas. So, we will ask at this point in time that all the team of treasurers come and we will receive their report as we received in the morning the Secretariat Report. So, thank you so much. Thank you, Elder Paul Douglas for the Treasurer's Report to the General Conference Session.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Thank you, Brother Chairman. It is my privilege to present the Treasurer's Report to the delegates of the 61st General Conference Session. And seated behind me are several persons that I'd like to take a moment to introduce. These represent the global leadership of Treasury around the world. First, I'd like to introduce Randolph Robinson, who is a Treasurer of the North American Division and also General Conference Associate Treasurer. Beside him is Jerome Habimana. He is the Treasurer for the East-Central Africa Division. To his right is Vladimir Tkachuk who is the Treasurer of the Euro-Asia Division. To his right, Norbert Zens who is the Treasurer of the Inter-

European Division. To his right is Filiberto Verduzco who is the Treasurer of the Inter-American Division. Then there's Joel Tompkins, who's the Treasurer of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division. And then Marlon Lopez who is Treasurer of the South American Division. Then there is Hopkins Ngomba who is the Treasurer of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division. Then there's Francois Keat who is Treasurer of the South Pacific Division. And, interestingly enough, today is a special day for Francois. Today is his birthday. Then we have Max Langi, who is Treasurer of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division then Selvin Moorthy who is Treasurer of the Southern Asia Division. Leonard Neporunavic from the Trans-European Division, Emanuel Manu who is Treasurer of the West-Central African Division. And Julio Mendez, the Treasurer of the Israel Field. Michael Wixwat who is the Treasurer of the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission. And I go to the front row. Robin Kajiura who is Executive Director of the General Conference Auditing Service. Tim Aka, who is Associate Treasurer from the General Conference. And George Egwakhe, Associate Treasurer of the General Conference, and George has a distinction as being the one that plans all of what we have here; so, George is very important to all of us. German Lust, to his right. Then Daisy Jane F Orion, to German's right. Sherri Clemmer, who works along with George Egwakhe. She is Assistant to the GC Session Manager. Silvia Sicalo who is our Meeting Planner. Eugene Korff who is our Comptroller, Raul Nestares, who is an Assistant Treasurer. And online I pay acknowledgment to the Undertreasurer of the General Conference, Jay Raymond Wahlen II.

I'd also like to acknowledge the presence of Robert E Lemon, a past Treasurer of the General Conference from the years 2002 to 2015. And then specially would like to acknowledge the presence of Elder Juan or Dr. Juan Prestol-Puesan who served as Treasurer in the quinquennium from 2015 to 2021. And later on, yes, certainly it would be appropriate to give him a round of applause. And later on he will introduce the auditor for us. Continuing to the report, Brother Chair, for today I would like to lay out the order of the presentation and the associated actions to be taken that will address agenda items number 120 and number 119.

First, I will open the report and highlight some key information for consideration. And then second, Elder Juan Prestol-Puesan will introduce the representative from the independent accounting firm of Maner Costerisan, PC so that the auditing report can be provided. At the conclusion Elder Puesan will make a motion to accept the independent auditor's report, which is agenda item number 120. And third, I will return to provide some concluding remarks as part of the Treasurer's Report and make a motion for its acceptance, which is agenda item number 119.

So, Brother Chairman, this afternoon I will use as the title for the Treasurer's Report "Partnering with God: Our Mission, His Money." The full report has been made available in digital form to all the delegates. It's on the website and will also be on the app as well. However, selected information from the report will be shown on the screen.

God raised up the Seventh-day Adventist Church with a special end time message to tell the world. Through the faithfulness of approximately 22 million members God provides the resources necessary for us to go about the sacred mission to which we have been called. What a privilege is ours to be partners with the Divine. By being obedient and returning God's money we enable our mission to move forward by the power of His Spirit. It is God who as the Apostle Paul notes in II Corinthians 5 and verse 18, "reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." Ellen White further urges, "Let us remember we are laborers together with God. We're not wise enough to work by ourselves. God has made us His stewards to prove us and to try us even as He proved ancient Israel."

In 1863 when the General Conference was organized, the records tell us that there were 125 churches reporting a total tithe of \$8,000. Nearly 160 years later with more than 90,000 churches, the data show approximately \$2.7 billion in tithe, \$1 billion in local church offerings, and \$81 million in world mission offerings. This, my friends, is God's money, to be used for the mission he entrusted to us. Ellen White further penned these words. Every dollar of our means should be considered as the Lord's,

not ours, as a precious trust from God to us, not to be wasted for needless indulgences but carefully used in the cause of God, in the work of saving men and women from ruin. During the quinquennium and through to 2021 we have been about our mission and have been stewards of God's money. The mission before us is great. But as our will cooperates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings. Let us look now at the global trends in giving.

The quinquennium saw a modest increase in the terms of total world tithe and offerings for the period. For world tithe, a total of \$12 billion was faithfully returned by church members, representing a 6 percent increase from the previous quinquennium ending in 2014. By way of comparison, the previous quinquennial total world tithe had increased by 32 percent. For world mission offerings, a total of \$429 million was provided by church members who understand our worldwide mission and supported it by their giving.

The total world mission offerings represented an increase of three percent from the previous quinquennium ending in 2014. However, by comparison, the previous quinquennium had an increase in total world mission offerings of 37 percent. Giving for world mission has been on a steady decline over the years. Today for every dollar in tithe returned by church members, an average of 3.5 cents is provided for world mission offerings. In the 1930s, the peak of giving for world missions, the average was 60 cents. Certainly, my friends, there needs to be a revival in giving towards world mission and a renewal of commitment towards being part of supporting our mission to take the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to both places far and near. There is work for us to do beyond the borders of our local vineyard. And here we are guided by the counsel of God's inspired messenger. "To show a liberal self-denying spirit for the success of foreign missions is a sure way to advance home missionary work. For the prosperity of the home work depends largely under God, upon the reflex influence of the work done in countries afar off." This counsel clearly indicates to us that the more we support the mission outside of

our local area, the more prosperous our mission will be inside our local area. World tithe and mission offerings are accounted for by each division and attached field. It has been the practice to compare giving in the North American Division with the composite of other divisions and attached fields. Throughout the quinquennium and into the plus period through 2021, the average tithe from the North American Division represented 44 percent of the total, while for the composite of other divisions and attached fields, it represented 56 percent. For mission offerings, those percentages were 25 percent and 75 percent respectively.

Now, let's look at the financial position and performance of the General Conference from the period 2015 through 2019. The financing model for mission adopted by our Church involves sharing resources between the various levels such as the local church, the mission and conference, the union, and the General Conference. From the resources shared with the General Conference, mission is supported throughout the world field. At the end of the quinquennium the balance of cash and investments was \$344 million representing a 7.9 percent increase from the start of the period in 2015. Total assets increased by 5.6 percent to \$513 million. Total liabilities decreased by 7.1 percent to \$51 million. And the total net assets increased by 7.2 percent to \$462 million for the same period. At the end of the quinquennium 67.1 percent and 74.4 percent of total assets and net assets respectively were held in the form of cash and investments. The total revenues and gains for the quinquennium was an annual average of \$243 million, of which 40.2 percent was from tithe. 31.7 percent was from offerings, and 4.7 percent from investment return. 4.7 percent from engagement fees charged by GCAS, 5.2 percent from the gifts and bequests made by the church members, and 9.1 percent from resources released for use because a restricted purpose for which it was given would be satisfied. And 4.4 percent from other sources. The total expenses for the quinquennium was an average of \$240 million, of which 32.2 percent was for appropriations to world divisions, General Conference institutions, separate units operated by a board, and the 10/40 Window as well. Other program expenses represented 35.2 percent of the total

expenses while support expenses accounted for 13.5 percent. IPRS and GCAS together accounted for the remaining 19.1 percent. At the close of the quinquennium, the General Conference reported 90.7 percent of the recommended amount by policy for working capital and 104.6 percent in liquid assets as compared to commitments.

Well, now let's look at the impact of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic was both destructive and disruptive. Left in its wake are millions who have died. Businesses that are shuttered and life as we know it never to be the same. The effect of the pandemic has not been limited to the threat to human life or economic wellbeing. COVID-19 has also been a threat to sustaining the fellowship of our Church in that many buildings remain closed more than two years later. We do thank God for the blessing of technology that can keep us digitally connected. But a digital connection is not an optimal human connection. There is only so much that Zoom can do. The financial situation of the General Conference was not immune to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on its operations. The lockdowns caused by the pandemic closed most churches around the world, and the flow of tithes and offerings was significantly impacted. Nevertheless, many faithful members found ways to send their tithes and their offerings or waited until the situation improved to remit their funds. In response to the operational challenges precipitated by the pandemic, church leaders sought the Lord for wisdom on what urgent and critical decisions would need to be made in response to the reality of a significant financial downturn. The three statements that captured or resolved during this difficult period were to remain financially viable, survive the crisis without affecting core mission, and adapt our operations to accomplish these goals. These three survival statements were expanded into multiple strategies that included suspending all travel, authorizing personnel to work from home, holding all meetings online via Zoom, reviewing and adjusting the operating budget, suspending financial allocations to IPRS and GCAS, postponing salary increases and reducing certain benefits, discontinuing functions such as the cafeteria,

reducing personnel and postponing indefinitely the placement of retiring personnel. And abandoning the business as usual approach to program funding.

We praise God that the core mission was not negatively affected in 2020 because the General Conference had preserved an adequate level of working capital and liquidity that allowed it to withstand the financial downturn. As part of withstanding the financial downturn, appropriations to divisions, attached unions, and institutions were not delayed or reduced. The operations of the General Conference continued without interruption, and personnel were paid their salaries and allowances on time, even while funding dwindled. Again, we praise God and give Him all the credit for giving us the guidance to have made it all possible. He, and He alone supplied our need.

Now let's look at the financial position for 2021. We're now two years into the new quinquennium and are praising God for the rebound in our financial situation after experiencing a financial downturn in 2020. This rebound is not for us to return to business as usual but to allow us the breathing room to engage in more strategic thinking and action on how best to make use of God's resources for mission.

By comparing the results of 2021 and 2019, the last year of the quinquennium, a picture of God's blessings comes into view and inspires us to continue being faithful stewards of the resources he provides for our mission. At the end of 2021 the balance of cash and investments was \$414 million, which represented a 20.3 percent increase from 2019. Total assets increased by 15.9 percent to \$594 million. Total liabilities increased by 23.1 percent to \$62 million. And total assets increased by 15.1 percent to \$532 million for the same period. At the end of 2021, 69.6 percent and 77.8 percent of total assets and net assets respectively were held in the form of cash and investments. The total revenues and gains for 2021 was \$270 million of which 33.6 percent was from tithe, 26.8 percent from offerings, 3.2 percent from investment return, 4.4 percent from engagement fees charged by GCAS, 14.5 percent from gifts and bequests made by church members, 9 percent from resources released for use because a

restricted purpose for which it was given would be satisfied. And 8.5 percent from other sources. The total expenses for 2021 were \$215 million, of which 32.4 percent was for appropriations to world divisions, General Conference institutions, separate units operated by a board, and the 10/40 Window. Other program expenses represented 34.5, 34.8 percent, rather, of total expenses, while support expenses accounted for 13.3 percent. IPRS and GCAS together accounted for the remaining 19.5 percent. And these percentages are consistent with the average of the quinquennium. At the close of 2021, the General Conference reported 97.6 percent of the recommended amount of working capital and 112.6 percent in liquid assets as compared to commitments. And both measures were higher than 2019. For 2021 we had a large positive gain of just over \$29 million in the main operating fund that captures the routine activities of the General Conference. For this we praise God.

The key drivers of this gain in 2021 were a large distribution from the life estate of a member, savings accruing to us by containing office operating costs, and positive increases in tithes and offerings. Regarding the large distribution from the life estate of a member, this distribution, and others like it, signifies that church members were intentional to include in their last will and testament amounts to be used for mission. As we contemplated this windfall, even with an operating budget that is still challenged by the effects of the pandemic, we were convinced that God did not bless us with these gifts to simply balance the budget. Instead, we believe that God was testing our resolve and testing our readiness to be bold about finding innovative and impactful ways to engage in mission. From this conviction was born the Mission Impact Fund, the purpose for which is to allocate financial resources to be used in supporting "I Will Go" initiatives administered by local churches. By providing support to local churches whose project submissions are approved, it expresses the intent of the General Conference to inspire local churches to be engaged in reaching their communities, invest in the frontline mission of local churches and impact the world for Christ one community at a time. General Conference Treasury



will be working together with the Planned Giving and Trust Services Department to administer this fund. And during Annual Council 2022, the first round of approved local church projects will be unveiled.

Let's look now at the currencies and the financial markets. The global financial environment created some challenges for the operation of the Church. In various countries the exchange rates for currencies and the free movement of funds were negatively affected. The US dollar grew in strength through the quinquennium and even through to 2021, which meant that funds received by the General Conference from other countries were somewhat less than in prior years. Behaviors of currencies versus the United States dollar are of great interest because approximately 80 percent of non-United States dollar-based tithes and offerings received by the General Conference are affected by the behaviors of six major currencies. The six major currencies are the Brazilian real, the Mexican peso, the euro, the Korean won, the Australian dollar, and the Philippine peso. Numerous economic factors combine to impact exchange rates for these foreign currencies. So, funds coming to the General Conference were diminished, which in turn decreased our ability to provide more support for the world Church. There were some countries with restrictions on their currencies which disallowed tithes and offerings collected from being transferred outside of those countries. These blocked currencies made it difficult for the Church to manage finances because the free movement of funds was not available. The Church implemented some alternative ways to use the tithes and offerings to manage these situations, including paying for certain expenses directly from those territories.

During the quinquennium the financial markets were generally positive and helped to provide additional support to the Church's financial operations. Pension plans and project funds. The investments of the General Conference, though managed very conservatively and with the appropriate social screening, provided meaningful amounts of return. At the beginning of the new quinquennium in 2020 the pandemic was an unknown reality, causing a major upheaval in economies and financial markets around the world. As governments tried to interdict and mitigate the effects of the virus,

massive stimulus programs were implemented to help sustain people through the ordeal. Governments around the world injected \$14 trillion in stimulus during 2020 and 2021. For many people this was a needed lifeline while for others it was extra income which was used to purchase items for the new stay-at-home economy. This created strong demand for many goods, thereby straining supply chains worldwide. This was the start of an inflation cycle that is currently raging today. Demand for goods shifted to demand for commodities and energy, which drove input costs higher. Gasoline, fertilizer, and food costs began to rise, with energy, food, housing, and durable goods prices rising rapidly, inflation is no longer transitory but rather well entrenched in world economies. Heading into 2022, this new inflationary backdrop is changing the financial landscape. Labor costs, maintenance costs, operating expenses and materials of all grown were expensive for the church as well as its members. The Ukraine crisis has also placed increased stress on costs, causing food and energy shortages in some parts of the globe. The world seems to be careening from one crisis to another, which surely, my friends, is a sign of the nearness of time. We are warned by the Spirit of Prophecy that greater sacrifices will be required by all church members as we seek to fulfill our mission to spread the gospel to all the earth. But by God's grace, we will find a way through. We will not fail because He who has promised is faithful.

Let's look at the funding from the General Conference to the General Conference institutions and the divisions. Each year the General Conference provides regular and special appropriations to support the work of its divisions and attached fields in their respective territories, its institutions, and for activities taking place in the 10/40 Window. The amount provided in appropriations has remained relatively stable throughout the quinquennium. The distributions of appropriations made in 2021 are consistent with those made throughout each year of the quinquennium. Of the \$67.6 million provided in appropriations for 2021, 55 percent went to divisions and attached fields. 40.9 percent was for General Conference institutions, and 4.1 percent supported activities taking place in the 10/40 Window.

Let's look at the Global Mission program. The Global Mission program administered by the Office of Adventist Mission is our official initiative to engage all Church entities in starting new groups of believers in unentered geographical areas and among unreached people groups. Mission offerings and restricted donations are the key sources of funding for this program. For the quinquennium, 5,647 projects were funded with a total of \$50.7 million. Utilizing an average of 1,600 pioneers each year who accepted the challenge to enter new territories and reach new groups of people. The funding was a participation between the General Conference at 41 percent, divisions at 17.6 percent, unions at 15 percent, local fields at 20.1 percent, and other sources of 6.3 percent.

And we look at the funding of our IPRS program. And earlier today in the Secretary's Report you heard a lot about IPRS, which is a commonly or conjointly managed institution of the General Conference. General Conference IPRS is the human resources department for missionaries around the world. And from the time they are appointed until the time they return to their home country it acts as a liaison between the world Church headquarters and the divisions in employing International Service Employees, otherwise known as ISEs. As of December 31, 2021, 367 ISE families coming from 66 countries were serving in 82 countries. The three divisions as you heard earlier today sending the greatest number of ISEs are the North American Division, the South American Division, and the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. The largest allocation of the General Conference budget at 16.5 percent is given to support the mission program administered by IPRS. For the quinquennium the average allocation amounted to \$27.2 million with 83 percent for attending ISEs, 5 percent for the Institute of World Mission program, and 12 percent for coordinating the activities of IPRS. As faithful stewards of the Lord's resources we need to ask and answer questions that help us to maximize the resources used for mission. To use ISE budgets according to mission priorities the General Conference Mission Board recently voted a proposal to refocus mission resources called Mission Reset. And this initiative will use

six criteria to allocate ISE budgets funded by the GC IPRS so that in five years 35 percent of the budgets would meet these criteria with a goal for this to be 70 percent in ten years.

And here are the six criteria that will guide future funding of ISE budgets.

Number 1. Direct-contact mission with the goal of creating new worship groups.

Number 2, 10/40 Window countries and people groups of non-Christian religions.

Number 3. Urban areas with populations in excess of one million people.

Number 4, Postmodern, post-Christian countries and regions.

Number 5, Low Adventist population ratio in countries, regions, and people groups.

Number 6, High impact equipping of direct contact mission.

Let's look now at the funding of our GCAS program. General Conference Auditing Service, GCAS, serves as the Seventh-day Adventist Church's preferred provider of assurance and related services. The client base includes all denominational organizations such as the General Conference institutions, world divisions, and their institutions, unions, unions of churches, and their institutions, local conferences, missions, regions, fields, stations, and their educational institutions at the secondary level or higher. And the Adventist Development and Relief Agency country offices and projects not audited by external firms. The second largest allocation of the General Conference budget at 6.7 percent is given to support the global audit program administered by GCAS. Complimented with engagement fees that are charged for audits performed as part of a cost-sharing arrangement between the General Conference and divisions, the total funding for GCAS is approximately \$22.6 million per year and is used to cover expenses of salaries and benefits at 68 percent, travel at 23 percent, administrative and general at 5 percent, professional resources at 2 percent, and professional development at 2 percent. As of December 31, 2021, approximately 300 professionals located in 45 country offices around the world engage in providing the audit services that form an integral part of the financial oversight system for the Church.

Now, Brother Chairman, I will pause here, and I'm going to invite Elder Prestol-Puesan who will introduce the auditor who will make his remarks.

JUAN PRESTOL-PUESAN: It is my pleasure to introduce to you the engagement auditor, Maner Costerisan, who is the independent firm of auditors in the United States responsible to issue an opinion on the financial statements for the years that have been presented verbally. He will present the statements that are in the material that is in your hands, and he will present also the opinions. His name is Geoffrey Strauss. Mr. Strauss, the time is yours.

GEOFFREY STRAUSS: Thank you, Elder Prestol. We have been working on the audit for the General Conference for a number of years, and I'm not sure there's a more unique year or period of years than what we're looking at during this quinquennium with the additional two years. So, as you know we would typically be presenting on just the five-year periods. But with this COVID pandemic that we have all been dealing with, we don't want to just present two years ago that are now out of date, so we were now also presenting to you the financial information for the 2020 and 2021 audits. As you heard from Elder Douglas during his Treasurer's Report, we had a period of time during the quinquennium where it was largely business as usual. We had our ups and downs during the five year period from 2015 through 2019, but in the end, we were in a positive situation from where we started, both from an overall cash and investment standpoint, an increase in overall net assets, and a very comfortable and consistent revenue source when it comes from tithe and offering. Then we hit the pandemic, and what we saw in the initial year under the COVID-19 pandemic largely because we weren't seeing each other, we weren't in person, at worships, and contributing at the same level, we saw a decrease in tithe and offering to a pretty large extent.

Then in 2021, we saw the generosity spill over from all of the congregation and the individuals within the Church who were ready to give to God's will in a financial standpoint. So, what I am going to

present to you is two separate slides coming up here, and it is the independent auditor's report for both periods, covering the quinquennium and then the additional two sub periods for 2020 and 2021.

As an independent external auditor, I am the lead partner in charge, and I am tasked with signing the opinion letter for this engagement. It is our responsibility to audit the combined financial statements of the General Conference, in this case which covers the period of December 31st, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, and 2015. It is also our responsibility to then issue an opinion on those financial statements. Consistent with previous years, we have issued what we would refer to as a qualified opinion. And that opinion reads as follows. "In our opinion, except for the effects of the matters discussed in the basis for the qualified opinion paragraph, the combined financial statements present fairly in all material respects the financial position of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists as of December 31st, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, and 2015, and the changes in their net assets and their cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America."

And you may be wondering what the qualification in the opinion relates to. This is consistent with what we have seen in the past. The financial statements that are presented and that we audit are the financial statements of the General Conference. But they are not intended to be the full financial picture of the worldwide General Conference. It includes many of the world divisions and other accounts that would be under the umbrella of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. So, this is the cleanest opinion that the General Conference can receive with the stipulation of this qualification.

Continuing on into the 2020 and 2021 audits, as I had mentioned earlier, typically we would just be issuing our opinion at this quinquennium for the five-year period that we've covered. But due to the COVID pandemic, we want to provide you with the financial information that is the most up to date and current for the use of the delegates. And in addition, within this we issued an opinion that is very consistent to the opinion that I just read for the quinquennium period. Again, it was our responsibility to

audit the combined financial statements of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists which comprise the combined statements of financial position as of December 31st, 2021, and, 2020, and the related combined statements of activities, functional expenses, and cash flows for the year then ended and include the notes to those combined financial statements.

Again, we issue what we would call a qualified opinion. So, in our opinion, except for the effects of the matters discussed and the basis for the qualified opinion, the combined financial statements referred to in the above paragraph present fairly in all material respects the financial position of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists as of December 31st, 2021, and 2020, and the changes in their net assets and their cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States.

The one other item before I close this part of my discussion is, I do want to let you know that we are engaged to audit and look at the underlying supporting documentation of the financial information that you are looking at within your financial statements. But in addition to just the quantitative number aspect of the financial statements, we are required to consider risk and internal controls. And nothing was elevated from a control issue for either the quinquennium period or the additional sub period of 2020 and 2021. I highlight this year more than any year because we were all dealing with the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic caused.

And in an environment where we were often working remotely from our homes, GC Treasury stepped up to the plate and really did an exemplary job in completing the financial information as you expect it to be completed. So, I'd like to highlight that especially during this very sensitive time when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you.

JUAN PRESTOL-PUESAN: Now Mr. Chairman and fellow delegates, it is my privilege to make a motion. I move to accept the independent auditor's reports on the combined financial statements of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists as of December 31st of the years 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016,

2015, and of the December 31st of the years 2021 and 2020 so rendered by the accounting firm of Maner Costerisan, PC.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. We have a second.

Thank you, Mr. Jeffrey Strauss, for your professional work and your firm helping us and all the delegates to understand this very good report from this independent auditing company. The motion carries with 1,489 votes for “yes,” 99.1 percent and 13 votes for “no,” which represents .9 percent. And let's continue, Elder Paul Douglas, with the Treasurer’s Report.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Thank you, Brother Chair. I will just offer a few concluding remarks. The road ahead, the COVID-19 pandemic is just a signal of what is yet to come. Opportunities to explore new ways of thinking and employ new ways of doing business are available to those who take the time to prayerfully look for them. The next crisis is already in the making. And without a prepared response, there may not be sufficient resilience to survive. Church organizations need to build the resilience necessary to face adverse economic conditions that can threaten resources needed for mission. This resilience is based on a faithful trust in God and benefits from forward thinking with God.

When trust is matched with strategic thinking, Church organizations should be inspired to make the appropriate plans in the fat years to avoid or minimize any mission disruption in the lean years.

However, many Church organizations seem more likely to excel at trusting and less likely to engage in thinking. The result of this imbalanced method of management is an increased risk that Church organizations would not have the resilience needed to carry out their mission in times of crisis.

Preparing for a crisis involves determining how Church organizations should prepare for economic downturns and emergencies to ensure resources are in place to prevent or minimize disruptions to mission. To aid in this determination, the General Conference Executive Committee voted on a new policy for calculating the financial measures of working capital and liquid assets that became effective on January 1, 2022. And these financial measures used to indicate preparedness for an



emergency are required to be presented in components of time and title. The new policy recommends a minimum of six months for working capital and a minimum of three months that should be in liquid assets. For the General Conference, we believe our minimum should be set at 12 months and nine months respectively because of its unique role in providing a steady source of appropriations to the world field and to maintain adequate liquidity for the Church's financial system.

As of December 31, 2021, the General Conference reported 15.2 months of available working capital and 12 months of available liquid assets for responding to an emergency. The Church is not immune to the prevailing economic realities and the turbulence created by these realities as we engage in the Great Commission. From a financial perspective there are five challenges that we are facing and will continue to face as a Church. Balancing growth and stability, ensuring sufficient working capital and liquidity, moving towards higher levels of support, dealing with uncertainties due to geopolitical conflicts and currency volatility and changes in regulatory environments, and understanding paradigm shifts brought on by crisis events, new technologies, and changes in generational thinking. Regardless of the challenges enumerated and others that will emerge, we are assured that God is with us. Turbulent economic times should not disturb our minds, for we are partnering with the Divine whose purposes know no haste and know no delay. In this, our holy endeavor, there is no such thing as failure. Listen to Ellen White in *Gospel Workers* page 19. She says, "Workers for Christ are never to think, much less to speak, of failure in their work. The Lord Jesus is our efficiency in all things; His Spirit is to be our inspiration; as we place ourselves in his hands to be channels of light, our means for doing good will never be exhausted. We may draw upon his fullness and receive of that grace which has no limits."

Delegates to the 61st General Conference Session, both present and online, members of God's remnant Church, the mission before us is clear. We are to preach the gospel of the kingdom in all of the world as a witness to all nations so that the end can come. All of who we are and all of what we do must be aligned with this high and holy calling. As we partner with God, we have our mission. As we partner

with God, we have His money. Our faithful duty, therefore, is to be both stewards of the mission and stewards of the money. As we partner with God, we have nothing to fear, not even failure itself. Jesus is coming, my friends. Let us get involved and finish this work, not by our might nor by our power, but by the Spirit, says the Lord. Brother Chairman, it is my privilege and pleasure to move the acceptance of the Treasurer's Report.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. We have Elder Paul move it and it is seconded. Beautiful report. To be partners with God, to put God first in our life. If we are partners with God, it means that we have a covenant with the Lord. What a great privilege.

We will also approve this report through voting, but before we go to the vote, does anyone have questions or comments? We have some comments in microphone number 3, Musa Nzumbi, North-East Tanzania Conference of ECD.

MUSA NZUMBI: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I would like to give my sincere appreciation to the GC Treasurer, Elder Paul. I have been moved much. Professionally, I am a pastor but I'm not a financial expert, but he has given us some confidence that God is with us. I have a few areas that I want to emphasize. Regardless of the challenge that we faced, the pandemic, the COVID-19, still the tithe and offerings increased. I can even testify from my territory that though we had a very hard time, people of God were still being blessed and they were returning tithes and offerings. So, I join hands with the Treasury Department of the General Conference to appreciate that God is still with this church, and I just give one recommendation if it is possible. In most cases we have this CFMS. This is the Church Finance Management System. And most of our areas, especially in Tanzania we have tried to give through mobile giving. We have seen it is working, and I appreciate the ECD leadership, emphasizing the church members to give through their mobile phones. So, I would like to recommend this to every president so that every church member may be in the position of giving.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments. Let's go to the next speaker, Dennis Matekenya, Malawi Union Conference, please.

DENNIS MATEKENYA: Thank you, learning from what happened in the morning I'll limit my observations to only three. Number one is we have seen a drop in giving from 47 percent to 32 percent down to 6 percent in terms of growth. What strategies are we putting to arrest this decline in growth and to ensure that we increase the momentum and ensure that the growth rate continues to grow? Number 2, we have looked at the partnership of church members in terms of giving tithes and offerings. My question is, do we know who these givers are? Can we predict who they are? So that we can strategize to ensure that we continue to minister to them so that they can continue to be partners with the church? Finally, I have observed that the appropriation to institutions, especially to institutions of learning, Adventist University of Africa, is receiving 4.2 percent of appropriation. Whenever long-established entities with a long history of operating are receiving more appropriations, I would have thought Adventist University of Africa should have been given a lot more because they are still in the developing stage. Is there an explanation for this kind of giving, appropriation pattern? Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you, Brother Dennis. Paul?

PAUL H DOUGLAS: I've made a note of your interest in the matter of the decline in giving in terms of tithes and offerings. And I know one of the investments of the General Conference has made through the resource of Extraordinary Tithe that we received some years ago is to invest in having fulltime stewardship directors in every single division. And we expect the divisions themselves to similarly match that and have full-time stewardship directors within their unions and unions to do so as well at their conferences. And we believe as we invest in stewardship training, education, and building relationships between the member and their God, that giving would change. As it relates to predicting giving, that's in my opinion, probably dangerous to do because you're essentially trying to say that we have predictors of faithfulness. We can study that, but I don't have a specific response to give here. As it

relates to appropriations to AUA and how that corresponds or compares with other institutions, in the next year or so we will be doing a restudy of the appropriations of the General Conference, both the divisions as well as the institutions and we will consider that matter.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. I remind all the speakers that if you hear that your comments already are mentioned by a previous speaker, then please do not use the two minutes because we have 16 speakers in the line. Thank you. We go to microphone number four, Philip Maiyo, West Kenya Union Conference.

PHILIP MAIYO: Thank you very much, Chair. This is from the University of Eastern Africa, Barton University, and I want to thank the Treasury Department, especially for the wonderful presentation. My previous speaker surprised me; we are not here to complain. We are here to request, and I don't think that complaining is the right way, but what we need, Chair, is to request and to appreciate the work that you have done, especially the good management, especially the Treasury Department, the finances, and also, I was very impressed with the strategies that were given that were displayed, and especially during the COVID. And I want to appreciate also our division leaders and the union leaders in Kenya because they took very difficult decisions to ensure that we manage the COVID-19 problems that we faced at that time. Our division treasurer and division president made significant efforts and we want to appreciate. But our concern, Chair, is that during and even before the COVID-19, there was withdrawal of budgets, especially ISEs. We want to impress upon the Treasury Department as well as our division leaders to ensure that there are some institutions that will still need some of these budgets. We would like to request that you please give those budgets also to us. Consider the institutions because we are still developing. May God bless you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. God bless you. Yes. I think Treasury will take note as Elder Paul Douglas mentioned, all the things will be restudied. Thank you. Let's go to microphone number 5, Rambelani Maligudu, from Northern Conference, SID.

RAMBELANI MALIGUDU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I stand in regard to the slide I can remember on GCAS, the General Conference Auditing Services, that you have members of your staff in more than 45 countries. I think I can only remember that 68 percent of the resources allocated were spent on salaries. But sometimes the burden is too big, so they are not able to reach the entities for auditing their services. In the event they are not able to come and audit our conferences or entities, are we allowed to find independent auditors, or is the risk too high in that regard?

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Elder Paul?

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Brother Chairman, I'm not sure which hat I should put on, the previous GCAS hat or the current Treasurer hat, but nevertheless I'll attempt to answer his question. The concern that he's raised is not new in terms of the resources available to GCAS, but in the next few months or so, GCAS and the General Conference and the world divisions will be restudying the cost-sharing program with the intent of making sure there's a sustainable financial arrangement in place to have all the human resources necessary to get all the work that is their responsibility.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. We go to microphone number 1, Johannes Bochmann from Berlin-Central German Conference EUD. Thank you.

JOHANNES BOCHMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to come back to a comment that you made in your opening discussion. You said this is a beautiful report. And I very much agree. It is a beautiful report of 120 colorful pages and data and information and important overviews for the future, even. However, may I kindly suggest that this report was not compiled today, it was not compiled yesterday, and I believe it would be deeply helpful for us as delegates if we are to be informed. And we heard in the introductory remarks yesterday that it is your task to keep us informed, that we receive important reports such as these in advance. Just for comparison on conference and on the union conference level where I live, there is a requirement in the constitution and bylaws that documents such as these are presented to the delegates at least two weeks before the actual conference takes place.

And while I'm well aware that things might work differently at the General Conference, I believe it would be helpful, quite frankly, I believe it to be rather disrespectful of our task as delegates to introduce such important reports on such notice. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments. Great. Yes.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Brother Chair, the comment by the good member is well received, and we will work towards making sure we expand exposure time in future conventions or future Sessions.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. Let's go to microphone number 8, Nnamdi Onyenmuru, Ebonyi Conference, WAD.

NNAMDI ONYENMURU: I want to commend the Treasury Department, but most of all to thank the General Conference for choosing Paul Douglas. It's always very good to have someone coming from the auditing background that the General Conference can benefit from. And as mentioned in the previous presentation, we can see the Joseph method in Egypt of trying to plan a strategy to manage the times may be very hard. And I think that with this we have a better future for the Church in terms of fund management and resource management. And I want to say that every other question should be answered judging from the time he started, because most of this time he was not here. But from this time forward, he has a part in giving very steady financial source management that will benefit everyone of us. And I believe this will all be to the glory of God. May God bless his Church, in Jesus' name.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Amen. Thank you so much. Okay. Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 5, from Malawi Union Conference SID, Evison Dambula. Thank you.

EVISON DAMBULA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I totally agree with our treasurer that COVID-19 has been disruptive as well as destructive. One of the services that have been disrupted is the General Conference GCAS Auditing Services. Instead of auditing on site they were auditing remotely. May I ask Mr. Chairman, when are they returning back to auditing on-site rather than remotely? Thank you very much.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you, Paul.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Brother Chair, I don't have the answer to that particular question. That would be a question for my dear colleague, Robin Kajiura, but I'm sure they have plans in place to be back on site at the appropriate time. But I would also venture to say that there are a lot of things that have been learned through COVID. And there are different ways of doing business than we did before. So, let's not just assume that things will go back to what they were, but there may be more efficient and more effective paths forward.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. The next two speakers are also microphone number 5. We start with Ndabezinhle Masuku from Zimbabwe West Union Conference, SID. Please.

NDABEZINHLE MASUKU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to appreciate the report that is very clear and insightful. I have three questions relating to the released resources. If we can have just a bit more light on what those are. The second one relates to costs that are related to the way we run the Church at the moment in terms of our structure, to what extent many innovations and strategic insights have been initiated. The Church membership is concerned that as the world is changing, our structure may not necessarily always fit financially. And I speak as a church worker, it becomes difficult when, because of our conflict of interest, we may not necessarily be keen to change the status quo. What is in place for us to review the way we are currently doing business, going forward so that our structure can be fit for purpose? And the last one, Mr. Chairman, relates to our educational institutions. It's really more of a suggestion. Is there a way we could incentivize them to be more of social enterprises, to be more self-sufficient, to assign funding that is linked to their ability to generate their own income? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Paul, please.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Thank you, Elder Masuku. I'll take the last comment that you made as you mentioned a recommendation or suggestion for consideration. But as it relates to resources that are

released, I tried my best as part of the report to make an accounting term as easily understood as is possible. In terms of accounting, a donor will give to an organization X, number of dollars and place with that donation certain restrictions. In other words, I'll give you X number of dollars for you to spend on an item. Now, once you have those resources, they have to be separately accounted for until you have that expenditure related to that restriction. So once that expenditure is then available, the accounting now allows you to release those restricted funds to pay for that expenditure for which the purpose it was given.

On the matter of costs related to structure, I heard that as part of the Secretariat report today there's a common refrain of concern or interest in where our church goes from here. And I would suggest as the new administration gets a chance to get its legs and its feet under it, those are items that would have to be considered and discussed and then create the proper forums as a Church as how we move forward, and to be able to be more efficient and effective in the mission to which we have been called.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much, Paul. Let's continue, microphone number 5, Pumulo Muyunda from North Namibia Conference, SID. Please.

PUMULO MUYUNDA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I want to add my voice to congratulate you for the integration of mission and money. I wish all our reports at local conference level could take this particular format. The second thing that I want to find out is regarding the project GTTK. I think those who attended the last General Conference will remember that the former treasurer announced that GTTK gave them the keys, which was actually an exciting venture and project for our young people. I was listening keenly to the reports that were offered to know how impactful that project has been? And now we have another project which is announced and embedded in your report which is mission building fund. So, I would like to know how sustainable the GTTK was and how sustainable this new project is likely to be since we don't have information with regards to the first one. Thank you, Chair.



GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. Paul?

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Thank you, Brother Chair. I appreciate that question. I am not familiar with the GTTK project. It's something that I'll have to ensure that I get my head wrapped around it to understand it. And once I do that, certainly I can find some way to communicate the purpose of that fund, the progress of it, and the impact that was made. As it relates to the Mission Impact Fund, how sustainable is it? Well, many people over the years have in their last will and testament put aside monies unrestricted for the General Conference and other entities of the Church to use for missions. When the General Conference receives such a very large donation and in the past, that would have been absorbed as part of our budget. But we decided to set that aside to establish this mission impact fund to encourage and inspire local churches to be innovative and impactful in their communities. This will not be the only source of funds to be used for these impactful, innovative projects. The divisions would also be participating, the unions or the conferences could also be participating, and partner together with the local church to make an impact with groups of churches or a single church in the communities where they reside. How sustainable is it? The more we do this work, the more resources will come.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. We go to microphone number 2, Cottagiri Varghese Titus from Southwest India Union Section, SUD.

COTTAGIRI VARGHESE TITUS: Thank you very much. Thank you very much for your wonderful report, Treasurer Paul. I thought I was sitting in a senior economics class. Really appreciate your in-depth knowledge and wisdom that God gave you. But at the same time, it was so shameful to sit in here and look at the report, the chart, the contribution by Southern Asia Division .3 percent and .4 percent. And the work in Southern Asia was there for more than one hundred years. Still somehow or other the contribution is not increasing. There's a reason for it. Reason has to do with our goal booklet, KPI objective 10. "To enhance the transparency and accountability and credibility of the denominational organization, operation, and mission initiative." It is not there. That's the reason the offering and the

tithes are going down or not at the par. My solution is the GC has to have an eagle eye on the Southern Asia Division regarding this issue. Thank you very much.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Great. Let's go to the next speaker and microphone number 8, Beniah Ojum, Eastern Nigeria Union Conference, WAD. Please.

BENIAH OJUM: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to join my colleagues to appreciate the work done by Elder Douglas. My question has to do with the road ahead. He mentions clearly that the road ahead seems to be fraught with challenges, and five challenges have been identified in your report. I'm interested in the one dealing with uncertainties of currency volatilities, currency movements, and changes in regulatory environments. Here he mentioned funds actually collected but locked up due to some government regulations. My question is, do you have any plans to discuss with those governments to see how those funds can be released or do you want to or do you plan to continue spending the way you are currently doing? The second question has to do with the ISE forms by General Conference IPRS. I request you throw more light on this. Thank you and God bless you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Paul?

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Brother Chair, I didn't quite hear the last question on IPRS, but if he comes back to the mic to explain that one, I'd appreciate it. But, in the meantime, Brother Chair, I will look at the item he brought out in terms of the economic realities that we face and the challenges to be faced in the future, particularly as it relates to geopolitical conflicts and currency volatilities and changes in regulatory environments. The United States dollar is the unit of currency that the General Conference uses because it's based here in the United States. But this is a world Church, and we receive mission offerings and tithes and all of those things from different currencies around the world, but currencies as they behave against the United States dollar is of interest to us and the currency volatility happens, one year it's up, another year it's down. Those are things that are outside of our control, are not based on economic issues or economic realities that exist locally or even globally at times. As a matter of

regulatory environments more and more countries are putting in place laws that do not allow free movement of resources outside the borders of their country. Our church is based on a principle of sharing resources at all levels of the church. So that is something that we need to study very carefully. And right now, I do have a task force in place that is studying this very item because more and more this is going to become difficult for our Church to have the resources available to share across borders. So, we're not just standing idle. We're looking at this very critically and trying to identify ways as to how we can mitigate this risk.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Now we have a speaker from the Russian Zoom room, Vasilii Stefaniv from the West Siberian Mission, ESD. Please, and we need a translator to English. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Yes, Vasilii, wait a second for the translator in microphone number 6. So, you may make short sentences and Alec Boronuk will be your translator. Thank you.

VASILII STEFANIV: Well, I'm happy to greet you all here at the General Conference Session and thank you for the report beautifully presented by Paul Douglas. In this report we could see how great our God is and under most difficult circumstances, we could see his blessings, financially. In this financial period that Paul reported, we also felt great support from the General Conference with a number of projects, missionary projects that we had in Siberia. So, on behalf of all our brothers and sisters, I would like to extend our gratitude to the General Conference for helping us, having and implementing those projects. We can feel this great unity that the SDA Church has in particularly implementing the missionary projects, and we feel we could do much more with the support of the worldwide Church. So, I'm speaking in favor of this report, and I invite all of us to pray so that God will lead us further into having financial blessings in the future and distributing all those finances among all those who may need them.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: [speaking Russian] Thank you so much. Great. Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 5, Mavis Mweemba from Southern Africa Union Conference, SID. Please.

MAVIS MWEEMBA: Thank you. I would like to thank the CFO for the encouraging report, especially the strategies on how we can move forward in this COVID period. My first point is on mission offerings. We have all observed that globally our mission offerings have declined. What could be the reasons for this decline? Could it be because it's not well promoted or is it because we are afraid of talking about money? And in order for this church to move forward, our offerings have to improve, especially because we have projects that we cannot find out of tithe. I also want to talk on GCAS. GCAS seems to be having a migration. Our workers are leaving us and at the end of the day we have fewer auditors auditing us. What could be the reason for their migration? Could it be maybe they are not well paid? Can we have an explanation for this one. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you, sister. Paul.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Brother Chair, on our mission offerings, she does touch a point of concern. As I mentioned in the height of mission giving in the thirties, we were at 60 cents on the (tithe) dollar for mission offerings. Now today we are three and a half cents. I would hope the investment has been made by the General Conference with divisions to invest in a stewardship director for each division will bear some fruit in the future as more and more persons are educated about their role in stewardship but also built on the relationship that they must have with their Creator.

As it relates to the matter of GCAS, I'm not so sure in a position here to give all the realities or the reasons as to why there could be migration of some of our professionals. But I'm sure GCAS and their board which is actually administered by an 18-member board comprised of 13 lay representatives around the world and five ex-officio officials of the General Conference, will look at that matter more critically to ensure that the program, which is an integral part of our financial oversight system, is sustainable.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much, Elder Paul. I see in the queue that we have 12 speakers. Our time is almost up for this type of comment. But we appreciate each one of your comments. Let's go to the microphone number 5, Oswell Dzvairo, North Zimbabwe Conference, please.

OSWELL DZVAIRO: Thank you very much for the mission oriented financial report. My concern is on the brilliant idea that is given that we see in the new policy of calculating our liquidity and working capital. It is more brilliant for those currencies that are stable. But for currencies that are hyperinflational, there is some serious challenge. What guidance or counsel can you give to those that are affected by hyperinflationary context where when we try to retain or to keep our working capital or liquidity to reach three months or six months, by the time we reach that far, our finances are eroded in terms of their value. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Thank you, Brother Chair. I'm not so sure I would want to start on a responsiveness to hyperinflation environments right here, but I've taken counsel with the gentleman and as I work with the division treasurers, we will include that concern as to the risk that exists in terms of these environments, how does it address or how does it affect our ability of our organizations to remain stable and to remain financially solvent. So, Brother Chair, rather than trying to respond in terms of theoretical way or practical way to his questions, I'll work with the division treasurers to address that item.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Let's go to the English Zoom, brother Victor Singh from Southern Asia Division, SUD. Please.

VICTOR SINGH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you Elder and CFO Paul Douglas. I have two observations and a small comment. In respect of the auditor's report, it was a qualified opinion, and I will request that that qualification be explained in a simple language to all of the people, barring the few financial people, there's a lot to understand the qualified report. Simply speaking, qualified report is not

a good report unless and until it can be explained in the overall context of why the auditor was not able to give a true and fair opinion without a qualification, I request that it be explained in common language.

The second part, Elder Paul gave a wonderful report on the working capital position and the liquidity position of the General Conference on an average basis. As I understand if you break it down over the various divisions, we will realize that some divisions are in a very, very good position and other divisions will be in a very poor state of position. I also believe the Southern Asia Division might fall into that poor category. But it is one of the hardest territories to work in, in terms of evangelism, especially the northern part of India where I come from and which I represent, the North India Union. We request that a risk analysis be done for the future of the working capital position and the support continue to flow towards the end of this Great Controversy where yes, as you said, that there will be restrictions by the government to send out money or even to receive money so that God's work is not hindered. As I understand our mission as a finance team, as a treasury team, is to ensure that lack of financial resources is never a hindrance in God's work. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Paul.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Brother Chair, I'll take the second one as a suggestion. The first one, the good member is interested in a simpler explanation on the qualified opinion. And he is correct that it's very technical language in the auditor's report, and those are driven by the standards that govern that work. But the simple explanation is that there are several entities that really would form part of a consolidated financial statement for the General Conference. But to present such a report we have found over the years that that information would not necessarily be useful. So, the information that is presented in the General Conference's financial statements only relates to the General Conference itself and excludes all of these other entities that could have been consolidated or included. And that is the premise of that

qualification, to indicate to the reader that only the information related to the General Conference is included, and these other entities have been excluded.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Let's go to the next speaker that is microphone number 4. Abraham Dalu from Ethiopian Union Mission ECD. Please.

ABRAHAM DALU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me this opportunity. My wife and I are transitioning from the Minnesota Conference to Ethiopia Adventist College, located in Ethiopia Union Mission. Although I'm not a financial person, I just wanted to make two quick points here. Number one, I would like to congratulate Elder Paul Douglas and the Treasury team for the well prepared and delivered financial report, well rooted in the mission of the SDA world Church, and thank you for that. It is very obvious God is leading this team, and I'm very pleased with the report. The second point I would like to make is, Elder Douglas hinted or made the point that chairs must be prepared for an unseen future financial crisis, such as the one we're just coming out from, the pandemic. This is really something each local church has to plan. Maybe the tools or the methodology for how to be prepared can come from the General Conference. In the Minnesota Conference, where I come from, we are an immigrant church, and the tithe and offering significantly increased during the pandemic time compared to the previous years. This was in part due to the diligent work of the pastor and the Treasury Department of the local church facilitating the process, how the church members can turn in their tithe, as in the past in the traditional way of giving through the envelopes. So, I think even for a future crisis, the Church can be prepared. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Great. Let's go to the next speaker.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Brother Chair, I just want to affirm his first point regarding the matter of mission related to this report. That the money that we have, that God has provided us these resources, are purely here for mission.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. Let's go to microphone number 5, Isaac Owusu—Dankwa, West-Central Africa Division, WAD.

ISAAC OWUSU-DANKWA: Thank you very much, Brother Chair. I want to request that there should be a training program, from the GC through the division, to the local level, especially in the Treasury Department. I believe there are a lot of things that have come out here that we've heard. But I think if there is more consultation, more discussion, with the various Treasury teams, from the division, through the union and down, it will make understanding the issues much better. And then we can share the various experiences that we've had from other areas with the other divisions, or other unions, that might be experienced in some of them. For example, you talk about issues about the exchange rate issues and then restrictions on the movement of funds. I know we have such problems at WAD. Thank you very much.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 8, Octavio De Jesus Moreta Cruceta from the Dominican Union Conference, IAD.

OCTAVIO DE JESUS MORETA CRUCETA: Thank you, Mr. President. Please. I'd like to give thanks for the excellent report that was given by the General Conference. I'd like to recognize Mr. Pusan, give him thanks for what he did. The current treasurer presented something that is very significant. I quote what he said. It sounds like the world is jumping from one crisis to another and as a result of this, incomes are going down during the pandemic, 2020 and 2021. The Treasury together with the Stewardship Department of the General Conference propose a plan to motivate world membership.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much, and I think, yes, Treasury and Stewardship will work together on this. So, microphone number 6, Elder Samuel Neves, GC. Thank you.

SAMUEL NEVES: I want to add my voice of appreciation to the report, but I want to thank treasurers at every level for something very specific. As the world shut down in fear, local church treasurers, as well as conferences, unions, divisions, and the General Conference, decided that digital



evangelism was extremely important. And in meetings they struggled together to adjust budgets, to buy equipment, and to invest in the mission field that is opening up in front of us. In the next 24 hours, over a hundred million people will go to Google and YouTube to search for answers to their deepest crisis. We exist as a Church to help them understand the Bible, to find freedom, healing, and hope. And treasurers have been making decisions about adjusting budgets to take advantage of this new mission field. The world is different than seven years ago, when we had another General Conference Session. And in history, as we look forward to the future, the treasurers that will be serving across the world field will have to contend and work with their pastors and everyone else involved in reaching people in this mission field. So, my appreciation to every Treasurer across every level of the church. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Great. Great, great. Yes. You know, funds invested in mission are for souls for Heaven. The best investment we can have. Great. Let's continue with our speakers. English Zoom, Glen Samuels, West Jamaica Conference. Please.

GLEN SAMUELS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to begin by offering congratulations on the reelection of the treasurer, and secondly to commend him for the centrality of the mission in the Treasurer's Report. The question now, for the treasurer, has to do with the policies of the GC, as it relates to the percentage that local fields are allowed to spend on primary and secondary education. Particularly, Chairman, in the area of COVID-19 issues where the finances for our schools was lessened, and the non-tithe funds were not there to fund our schools and we were cited because of the challenge. We did not want to close our schools. How can the GC adjust this policy, so that we can fund our schools without being cited as it relates to a particular policy on the percentage allowed to be spent on primary and secondary education?

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comment. We have at the end some type of interference, but yes, I think Treasury took note of that comment.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Yea, I think I understood his question, Elder Chair, as it relates to the use of tithes, in terms of funding our local schools that are managed by our conferences. And we well understand the limitations or the uses of tithes that have been given us by the counsels of Ellen White, and we have studied that very intensively before the last few years. In terms of changing the policies right now, this would require further study, but I believe that the result would still be the same, in terms of what are the permissible uses of time. We would have to investigate other ways, in which to ensure that our schools, our institutions, our hospitals that are not eligible to receive tithes, have other ways with which they have resources for them to be functional, and effective, in terms of their mission.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. We have two more speakers from the English Zoom, Wendell Serrano, South Philippine Union Conference, SSD.

WENDELL SERRANO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have only one suggestion and observation. I have noticed in several General Conference Sessions the great disparity between tithes and offerings. And I heard our Treasurer saying that there is a full-time Stewardship Director in every division. For many General Sessions that I have attended, we have not seen improved, the great disparity between tithes and offerings. Mr. Chair, maybe I can suggest one Stewardship Director is not enough. Why don't we make it two Stewardship [Directors] in every division? And the next General Conference Session, if it doesn't work, because of the great disparity between tithes and offerings does not improve, then let us abolish the Stewardship Department. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Great. Let's go to the next speaker from English Zoom, Yusuph Zegge from South-East Tanzania Conference ECD. Thanks.

YUSUPH ZEGGE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do appreciate the report from our Elder Douglas. I have two inputs. One is about what is the strategy put forward to upgrade our SDA Accounting Manual so that it can be useful in times of crisis? If it can be recalled that the current ECD Accounting Manual, which we are using is over ten years. Let our brother Elder include a strategy for upgrading our SDA

Accounting Manual. Number two is about increasing tithes that some of the tithe users were not affected much on salaries. But this was not the case for higher learning institutions, the universities. Some of them were closed and there was a dropout of student enrollment, and some of the universities paid salaries to their lecturers. What are the strategies that can restore these universities which have been impacted by COVID-19, and other government restrictions. Thank you very much.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much.

PAUL H DOUGLAS: Brother Chair, I'll quickly answer his questions. On the matter of SDA Accounting Manual in the process right now is a revision of the SDA Accounting Manual. The current version dates back to 2011, I believe, and right now there is a team that is working on updating the SDA Accounting Manual, and actually provides three volumes. One that is targeted to the executive level, the second that will be targeted to those who actually do the day-to-day accounting, and then third will be templates and tools that can be used by either executives or accountant types within our treasury organizations or treasury departments.

As it relates to the matter of increase in tithe but not increase in offerings, and the fact that some of our institutions either have had to be closed, or not able to pay their workers, we will continue to work with the division treasurers to do a survey of the financial status of some of our organizations and try to arrive at some plan as to how we rectify or right the ship, as it relates to their financial situation.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Let's go to the microphone number 1, Doctor Luigi Mateus Braga, South American Division.

LUIGI MATEUS BRAGA: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much, Mr. Paul. I'd like to share and suggest a relationship that's very important that we have in the South America Division with GCAS. GCAS and the legal department are having a very special relationship because we are sharing legal information with GCAS, and GCAS has created a kind of protection for us, including, making a

relationship with ARM, to ensure policies are in harmony with the whole relationship with the Church and the local conferences. So, I just say thank you very much to GCAS for this help to us like lawyers of a church.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you, Dr. Luigi. Thank you so much. Yes, we continue working together as a team. Let's go to microphone number 2. David Butcher, South Australian Conference, SPD.

DAVID BUTCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to Mr. Paul Douglas and your Treasury team for your report. I have a question, and I also have a proposed amendment to the current motion. I did not see a use of tithes report. If it was included, then please disregard my question. If it wasn't included, I believe it's a requirement at every level of the Church. It's also provided K metrics, and I didn't see it, if it was provided, well, that's fantastic, but if it wasn't, could it be uploaded to the app or to the documents.

I would also like to make an amendment to the current motion. I believe a brother from the Inter-European Division raised the comment about not receiving the Treasury Report, a number of weeks prior. I do believe it's unsatisfactory not to come here to convocation every five years, and only receive the report basically at this time. I would like to propose an amendment to the motion to the floor, which would be that Treasury Reports be provided to all delegates, a minimum of two weeks prior to all General Conference Sessions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. So, do we have support?

PAUL H DOUGLAS: While you're seeking support for the motion, Chair, I'll just address the item of use of tithe. There was no use of tithe report included in the documentation that you were provided. The use of tithe is still maturing as something we do at the General Conference, and we report on that at our Annual Councils. Now, based on the suggestion that you made we can provide you with a preliminary version that would kind of show you our understanding of that report, and provide it on the

app or the website. So, your point is well taken, but I just want to affirm, or to respond, that in the documents you received there was no use of the tithe report.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you, Elder Douglas, and our Parliamentarian will help us with this issue.

TODD MCFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is the opinion of the Parliamentarian that the motion is not in order. This is simply a motion to receive the report. It really is unamendable. That would be a new main motion that someone could make, in pursuant to our Constitution and Bylaws. Well, first of all, it wouldn't be in order during this report. And second, it would need to go to the Steering Committee. So, as an amendment, it's just not in order. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Let's continue with the next speaker, microphone number 8, Elder Tom Lemon, GC. Thanks.

TOM LEMON: Thank you, Brother Chair. As you know, but as many may not know, I look at a lot of financial statements, spend a lot of time with them, I really have come to love and appreciate treasury types. And this report today has been stellar, as we would not expect it to be any other way. With that in mind, Brother Chair, I would like to move the previous question.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Second? Thank you. Yes. Undebatable, so, let's vote for this.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. 1,503 votes for "yes," 97.4% of approval, and 2.6 "no". Thank you, it's approved. More than two-thirds, and then we go to the main motion in front of us.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Praise the Lord. 1,556, 98.5 percent of approval for Treasurer report. Thank you so much, Elder Paul. And before Treasury leaves the stage, Pastor Mark Finley, if you're so kind to pray to give thanks to the Lord for his blessings.

[Prayer by Mark Finley.]

GUILLEMO E BIAGGI: Amen. Thank you so much, Elder Mark and thank you to all Treasury team. [Applause]

We will call Elder Gerson Santos to continue with the Church Manual. So, Pastor Gerson Santos, we will continue with the Church Manual items 408 for this General Conference Session.

GERSON P SANTOS: Let's continue where we stopped as it was well said by the chair. This is item 408 in your agenda, and the reference number is 417-22. And as I mentioned before, this amendment expressed how important it is for pastors to focus on training the local church leadership, in the mission and work of the Church. It also explains the role of conference leadership and explains who may be invited to speak at the local church. So, we recommend the amendments that you have—it's actually five pages. I'm going to present the slides with most of the changes of the new amendments, and we can go back if there are specific questions in the pages and lines that you would like to mention. So, the first part, the first paragraph is an introduction about the role of the pastor. In the past, most of the emphasis was put in the pastoral care which was one of the important aspects of the role of the pastor. And this new paragraph introduced the importance of a pastor as a trainer, or equipper, of the church. So, the [417-22GS Pastor and Other Church Employees – *Church Manual* Amendment] “Seventh—day Adventist ministers bear the God-given responsibilities of proclaiming the everlasting gospel, making disciples and equipping the saints according to their spiritual gifts in order to equip them for service.” As Ellen G. White stated: ‘It was at the very beginning of his ministry that Jesus began to gather his helpers. This is a lesson to all ministers; they should be constantly looking for training for those who they think could help them in their work. They should not stand alone trying to do by themselves what needs to be done.’ If you allow me, Pastor Chair, I'd like to skip a few lines and move faster. The last part of the paragraph says, Ellen White stated, ‘Remember, that a minister's work does not consist merely in preaching. He is to visit families in their homes, to pray with them, and open to them scriptures. He who does faithful work outside the pulpit will accomplish tenfold more than he who confines his labors to the

desk". Then you have a paragraph from the Bible, 1 Peter 5, emphasizing the need of the work of shepherding. Then the following paragraph talks about the "royal priesthood." "All believers have the privilege of being part of "a royal priesthood" that proclaims "the praises of Him who called you out of darkness to His marvelous light." To support and guide this work God 'gave some to be prophets, some evangelists, for the equipping of the saints, for the ministry, for the edifying of body of Christ.'" And the following page, if you're following on your agenda, it's page 62, and I have the first two paragraphs on the screen if you want to follow that. "The New Testament describes how the leadership of the church was established. During His ministry on Earth, Jesus appointed twelve apostles to accompany Him on His travels and sent them out to preach the Gospel and heal the sick." The following paragraph, "Soon after Christ's ascension, the apostles faced increasing demands with the fast-growing church in Jerusalem. To cope with these challenges, they divided the leadership responsibilities in the local church into different areas." And then we remember and have a quote here from the Bible about selection of those who are selected to serve, the deacons, and you have a few Bible quotes there. The next paragraph. "In harmony with the leadership model of the Jerusalem church, the apostles appointed elders as spiritual leaders in every church." And it's interesting to see that in the Bible elders refers to plural elders, because this is done better when it's teamwork. That's God's plan. And then we have the example of ". . . Barnabas and Saul delivered to the elders the relief contributions they had collected from far-flung churches for the needy believers in Judah. As Ellen G White indicates," the last part of the paragraph, "the 'organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel.'"

The following paragraph. "These New Testament principles. . . ," I'm reading the last paragraph on page 62, if you are following the agenda, "These New Testament principles of church organization guided Seventh-day Adventists in the years prior to and the decades following its official organization as a church in 1863. During this time ministers were employed by the various conferences as

administrators and evangelists, raising up churches, and visiting established churches that needed counsel. Following the model of ministry of Timothy and Titus, Conference-employed ministers almost never functioned as resident or 'settled' pastors of a local church, in contrast to the practice in most Protestant churches then and now. In this regard, Ellen G White wrote:" in the second part of the last paragraph, page 62, 'Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth, let the members of the churches say to these laborers: 'Go work for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the service of the church. We will keep up the meetings, and, by abiding in Christ, will maintain spiritual life. We will work for souls that are about us, and we will send our prayers and our gifts to assist the laborers in more needy and destitute fields.' As a general rule, the conference laborers should go out from the churches into new fields, using their God-given ability to a purpose in seeking and saving the lost." That would be like a friend of mine just said not too long ago "From the seats to the streets." That would be the goal of the pastors, equipping and preparing the church to do missionary work.

The following page, page 63, the paragraph starts, "As a divinely appointed ministry, ministers are 'to sow the seeds of truth. Place after place is to be visited; church after church is to be raised up. Those who take their stand for the truth are to be organized into churches and then the minister is to pass on to other equally important fields.'" This was so important in the early Adventist Church that no pastor would be ordained if he didn't prove to be a church planter. This was actually a requirement for ordination. "While the new converts should be taught to ask counsel from those more experienced in the work, they should also be taught not to place the ministers in the place of God. Ministers are but human beings, men compassed with infirmities. Christ is the one to Whom we are to look for guidance.' 'Our ministers should plan wisely as faithful stewards. They should feel that it is their duty not to hover over the churches already raised up, but that they should be doing aggressive evangelistic work,



preaching the Word and doing house-to-house work in places that have not yet heard the truth. . . . They will find that nothing is so encouraging as doing evangelistic work in new fields.”

And the last paragraph on this section about the pastoral role we see, “These inspired counsels remain just as relevant today. Our ministers have the solemn responsibility of leading their congregations in the mission of reaching others for Christ. As Ellen White stated, ‘The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.’ And ‘when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.’”

The next section is more related to conference employees. It starts with the conference president. We already had a paragraph about the conference president and departmental directors, and these two paragraphs were revised, starting on line 24, page 64. “The conference president should be an ordained pastor of experience. He stands at the head of the gospel ministry in the conference and is the chief elder, or overseer, of all the churches. He works for their spiritual welfare and counsels them regarding their activities and plans. He has access to all the churches and their services, business meetings, and boards, without vote unless granted by the church, or unless he is a member of that congregation. He may, by virtue of his office, preside over any meeting of any church when necessary. He has access to all church records.”

“The conference president does not have authority to set aside duly elected officers of the church but will work in cooperation with them. They in turn are bound, in recognition of the ties of conference fellowship, to counsel with him over all that pertains to the welfare of the church. They should not attempt to exclude him from a proper discharge of his duties.”

The last paragraph on page 64 is about the conference secretary. “The conference secretary, associated with the conference president as an executive officer, should be a person with ministerial and denominational experience. The conference secretary, for example, is responsible for keeping the

minutes of the proceedings of the conference constituency sessions and meetings of the conference executive committee, publishing official notice of key meetings, maintaining correspondence with local churches and overseeing conference records and collecting statistical data and conference membership records. The conference secretary also fosters mission for the expansion of God's kingdom.”

The following paragraph is about the conference treasurer. The conference treasurer, associated with the conference president as an executive officer is the chief financial officer of the conference and should have appropriate finance-related experience. The conference treasurer is responsible for keeping the accounts, financial records, and investments of the conference, and to keep safe all monies which may be deposited with it. These monies consist of the tithes and offerings received from individuals through the local congregations of the conference, which are remitted by local church treasurers at regular intervals, and of gifts, legacies, and bequests made to the conference.”

The next paragraph covers conference departmental directors, as I said, we had one, but this has been edited. “Conference departmental directors foster important lines of denominational work under the general direction of the conference committee in consultation with the conference president. In order to successfully carry on the work assigned to them, these employees must have access to the churches so they can present and develop their plans. These employees will have sympathetic consideration for all church plans, even outside their respective departments. Departmental directors are not vested with administrative or executive authority so their relation to local churches is advisory. Their work does not bear the same relationship to the churches as that of the conference committee or president. In the promotion of their specific kinds of work, they labor throughout the entire conference. However, they are not expected to counsel churches regarding elections and other administrative duties or any other line of service, unless especially requested to do so by the conference president.”

So just to emphasize these two parts, the secretary and the treasurer parts are new, Mr. Chair. You want to highlight that. These are new. The part, the sections about the president and the departmental directors, they were moved from an earlier chapter. So, these two parts regarding the secretary and the treasurer are new.

The last paragraph, and I will finish with this, on page 66, "Only speakers worthy of confidence will be invited to the pulpit by the local church pastor, in harmony with guidelines given by the conference. The local elders or church board may also invite speakers, in consultation with the pastor, and in harmony with conference guidelines."

Pastor Chair, I move we accept these recommendations in our agenda as item 408.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. We have a second. So, let's go to mic number 2, Martin Altink, North German Union Conference, EUD.

MARTIN ALTINK: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I thank Brother Santos very much for all the effort in these proposed changes in our *Church Manual*. Seems to be a lot of work, a lot of thought, was put in there. However, the change seems to reflect a certain, by my view, theological view on the role of pastors and church leadership. This view might be growing in the church, but I don't believe it's an original Adventist view. In the very early years in Adventism, Brother Conradi already noticed how good it is for us as a Church to develop our own ideas, to sharpen our opinions, in exchange with each other. And that may sharpen us in our unity in variety. The *Church Manual*, to my understanding, is not supposed to be a working policy book, but it is supposed to be a guide to us as pastors in our ministry. And therefore, a description of the tasks of pastors and officers of the Church is, in my opinion, not supposed to be written in a *Church Manual*. And I, therefore, do not think it is necessary to describe the role of the secretary, and the treasurer, in addition to the description of the departmental directors. Besides this, there is an emphasis on the gift of evangelism for pastors, leaving out an emphasis on what might be other gifts of pastors. And also, I notice an emphasis on authority in

the description of the different added roles described for the departmental directors. And I cannot support this emphasis and therefore I speak against the proposed changes in the *Church Manual* and I call on my fellow delegates also not to vote for these changes.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. Let's go to the next speaker in microphone number 2, David Butcher, South Australian Conference SPD. Thank you.

DAVID BUTCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is in regard to line 38 and line 39, in regard to the officers and in particular the conference secretary. I believe that this does not align with the General Conference *Working Policy*, and the wording in question, under the Conference Secretary, line 38, “. . . should be a person with ministerial and denominational experience.” We have had, in our part of the world, a number of secretaries that have not had pastoral experience but have worked outside of the Church, but have been faithfully committed to the Church. And the GC *Working Policy*, under the model Constitutions, Article 11, for Officers and Duties, page 253, outlines the role of the secretary, and it mentions nowhere in that about needing to be, or should be a minister, or someone with ministry experience. Further to that, on page 252 of Article 11 of the GC *Working Policy*, and The Officers and Their Duties, it says that “The secretary and treasurer/chief financial officer may be one individual known as a secretary/treasurer. So, if they should be a minister and I happen to be a secretary as well as a treasurer, that would be difficult. So, Mr. Chair, I seek your guidance on what I'm now going to ask. Should I be putting forward a motion, an amendment to the motion, or should I be seeking this to be referred back to the committee that will look at this before the end of the Session?”

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Okay. Yes, we will have a committee meeting Thursday and invite you to make your points at the committee. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: We go to microphone number 2, Stefan Giuliani, Inter-European Division, EUD.

STEFAN GIULIANI: Thank you, Brother Chairman. I have two comments. One is editorial on page 61, line 28. It talks about ordaining elders and I was wondering whether we should add deacons in this line. And I can forward this suggestion to the just mentioned committee that will be meeting. Then my second comment is, I very much appreciate the focus that pastors are there to train leaders and to equip leaders. I think this is a very important issue. However, I want to point out that by amending the *Church Manual*, all we are doing is changing the text. But we're not changing church culture. So, my question would be at this point is, what measures are you proposing, or will you be taking up in the future, in order to change the culture and the role of the pastor in the way that this is lived out? Because that's the key. Just changing the text of the *Church Manual* won't accomplish what we are hoping for here.

GERSON P SANTOS: Excellent observation. If you want to see some change, you need to start somewhere, and several people, administrators, pastors, Ministerial Association, working together, have come with these recommendations. As you know, there is a long process for us to come here. Some of the ideas related to this have come to this *Church Manual*. Follow up with strengthening orientation and equipping pastors through the Ministerial Association, and also influencing the institutions where you have majors in theology and religion emphasizing these areas of equipping, church planting, for the new pastors that will be trained for the future. So, there are a few things that the Church is involved in trying to get aligned with, and this is part of this initiative. This is nothing new. We're just trying to revitalize the principles we had, the values we had, as a Church in the beginning of the Adventist movement.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Microphone number 5, Flaviano Dalisay, Southeastern California Conference, NAD.

FLAVIANO DALISAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I question the rationale on the role of the conference president, specifically page 64, lines 24 to 30, which is referred to as, "he" which is out of context and not in alignment with the rest of the currently designated leadership mentioned in this recommendation. Except for Jesus Christ who is the true and only Head of the Church and not man, as

stated, in Ephesians 4:11-13. A reference in page 61, lines 31 to 44, when the Word of God explains that God gave some apostles, it does not say men apostles. When it says some prophets, it does not say men prophets. When it says some evangelists, it does not say men evangelists. And when it says some pastors and teachers, it does not say men pastors and teachers. For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, who is the only man in this picture. As like many leaders in this congregation, my late grandfather, who was once president of the South-Central Luzon Mission in the Philippines, related to, and shared experiences of struggles and challenges of mission, evangelism, and religious liberty, would advocate for the need of total church involvement without segregation at all levels humanly possible. We are all called into royal priesthood and not just men. Like many conferences in part of this world, the Southeastern California Conference is struggling to find pastors to keep up with the work. I appeal to our Church to look forward and reach for Godly preaching of the gospel at all leadership levels to all four corners of the world, making disciples and not limiting ourselves from receiving the power and the showers of the Holy Spirit.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments. Let's continue with the next speaker at mic 2, Valerie Ballieux, Franco-Belgian Union Conference, EUD.

VALERIE BALLIEUX: We often forget to see Ellen White as a woman, a woman with a leading position. She was not ordained, but she had a leading position, and I'm sure she was involved, and I'm sure, that in this room in the future, we will have other daughters of Ellen G. White, who also want to get involved in work and to be in leadership positions. So, therefore, if I'm allowed to, I would like to make an amendment on page 64, line 24, by adding three words, "The conference president should be an ordained or a commissioned pastor with experience. It's not a question of ordination, but as Elder Wilson told us yesterday and the day before, we are to be totally involved.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comment. Let's go to the next speaker that is in microphone number five, Victor Marley, Norwegian Union Conference, TED. Thank you.

VICTOR MARLEY: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I believe the previous speaker made a proposal for an amendment. So, before I start, let's have a clarification on that.

TODD MCFARLAND: It has been the practice on items and suggestions like this that the Chair can recommend that individuals go to the committee and make their presentation there. Normally, an amendment would be in order, but because it's going to the standing committee, it should be directed there at this time.

VICTOR MARLEY: Okay. Thank you for your commitment to go to the committee. My point is this. I just want to thank you for the inclusive wording of the job descriptions for conference treasurers, secretaries, and departmental directors. This wording is in wonderful harmony with the Fundamental Beliefs of the Church and *GC Working Policy*. However, it won't come as any surprise to you that I'm disappointed that the wording for conference president is gender exclusive, and therefore an expression for the Church's discriminatory employment practices, even though *Working Policy* states that the Church rejects any philosophy that discriminates. So, I don't find the wording of the conference president to be consistent with the rest of the document or with *Working Policy*, and it is also ethically problematic. In addition, just a final point, it also puts unions in Europe in conflict with both national and European law. So, I will be voting against the motion.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. So, all comments for the study should go to the Church Manual Committee on Thursday.

GERSON P SANTOS: A comment, Pastor Chair. I appreciate the observations. As you're saying very well, I am taking note of these observations and comments. However, there is a procedure for us to move into these amendments. And I want to highlight it again that this paragraph was just moved from another part, the one that was refers to the conference president. The new part is the executive secretary and treasurer and the first part related to the church pastor. So, Pastor Chair even though these comments are good, and we are taking notes, I think we'd use better our time if we focus on the

areas that are new and then follow the correct procedure if we want to amend the other parts that are already consistent.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Let's continue with the next speaker. Microphone number six, Heraldo Lopes, Mozambique Union Mission, SID. Please.

HERALDO LOPES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Since we started this Session, the focus was unity and mission. This point of the agenda can and will open doors that do not bring unity. We need to focus on the mission. You saw before us and after me, what we are going to be here with the removal of the text of Ellen G. White from the Testimony for Ministers, pages 52 and 53, as you can read, "Men appointed of God having been chosen to watch with jealous care, with vigilant perseverance that the church may not be overcome by the evil device of Satan, but that she shall withstand in the world to promote the glory of the God among men." That was clear about this issue. It's really dangerous, really dangerous, if removed. That text must continue as it is on pages 63 of the agenda and it is best to reject the amendment.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Next speaker, microphone number 7, Anthony Bosman, General Conference.

ANTHONY BOSMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the last five years I've served as a professor at Andrews University. These last years have been trying, going through COVID, we've been tested. But I've seen firsthand, how under the leadership of our president, Dr. Luxton, she's led us capably with excellence and faithfulness. And now we are emerging stronger than before the pandemic. I believe God called her to be our president for such a time as this. Andrews is a large University with over 200 faculty and several more staff and a global presence. I have to ask myself, if God could call a woman to be a president of a university, why can't God call a woman to be a president of a conference? After all, we're a larger university than many conferences are in terms of infrastructure and complexity. Not only that, this morning we recognized the leadership of Dr. Simmons as the first female vice president of the



General Conference. And when we acknowledged her, all of us stood in applause because we recognized that God had worked through her and put her in that position for such a time as this. If we can recognize that God can appoint a woman to be vice president of the General Conference, can't we recognize that perhaps he might call a woman to be a president of a conference? And then this morning once again, when a woman was appointed to be a general vice president of the General Conference, we all voted overwhelmingly in favor of it. If God might call a woman to be our general vice president, is it possible that God might also call a woman to be a president of a local conference? I want to speak in favor of using gender neutral language in the description of a conference president, so we do not restrain the spirit in whom He might call. [Applause]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Next speaker is at microphone number 5. Oswell Dzvairo, North Zimbabwe Conference, SID.

OSWELL DZVAIRO: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. My concern is on the point of conference president. The initial rendering has three last words which I consider very important and are not supposed to be removed. The first sentence reads, "The Conference President should be an ordained pastor of experience and good report." Now, the amendment seems to suggest that we need to remove the last three words, and I propose that we retain them, because in some areas or some cultures, morality is highly relativized, and we need to retain these three words. For they are in accord with the biblical counsel of leadership recorded in I Timothy 3.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Next speaker, Ellsworth Baxen, Mauritius Conference SID, microphone number 5.

ELLSWORTH BAXEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to speak about the point of the pastoral role within the church. I believe this has been one of the most restrictive factors, with regard to church growth in many parts of the global Church. And so, this is why I welcome this inclusion. And I would like to also state that it has become esoteric knowledge, because so many of us here are

aware of the biblical paradigm, not commonly known among membership. So, this will be a paradigm shift. And I would like to suggest, Mr. Chair, that a strategic document be prepared that will focus on not only communicating this at the grassroots level, but there will be a strategic alignment document because this has major complications for the mission, the growth, and the health of the Church.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. You see in this section that we are considering, that is the item of agenda 408—408, speaks first of the pastor's role and then some church workers who are the workers of the local conference or local field. Now the section, because we receive several people commenting about the president's role that was explained that we are not changing. We are changing from the section. Therefore, we need to highlight it, because of the section. But we are not proposing any change in that paragraph. We are the other one, referring to the secretary and treasurer of the local field. Okay. Let's go to the microphone number 5, Passmore Mulambo, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, SID.

PASSMORE MULAMBO: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to speak to the spirit of the rationale which I see to be very, very important in calling, in highlighting the role of the pastor to ensure that the church is energized. You know, when the pastor is working in harmony with the local church leadership, there is growth. The church grows when there is unity. The church grows when there is effective visitation. The church grows when the pastor embraces the role of an equipper. Where we come from in SID, we can see evidence of church growth in the areas where the pastor has taken the role of an equipper. My last point, Mr. Chairman, is to speak to the removal of those statements, Spirit of Prophecy statements. I want to appeal that we return them, because if in this house we begin to remove statements of the Spirit of Prophecy from the document such as the Church Manual, then what are we saying with our belief in the writings of Ellen G. White?

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Now we have the following two speakers from the English Zoom. So, we have Telisha Williams, Guyana Conference, IAD.

TELISHA WILLIAMS: Good evening, all. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I know, as it relates to paragraph 24 to 35 of page 64, The Conference President, that it's basically not an amendment of the paragraph. However, I know that the words "and of Godly report" have been removed, and I'd just like to ask what would have been the rationale for removing that, in light of the fact that the paragraph that were amended in relation to pastors, specifically on page 61, at lines 29 to 30, emphasized the fact that the pastor should be an example to the believers, in faith and in practice, relating to I Timothy 4:12 and 1:5-3. So, just inquiring as to why "and of Godly report" was removed from the conference president article.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: We have received information that before departing for dinner, for supper, we will have a Nominating Committee partial report. Let's go to microphone English Zoom. Yusuph Zegge, South-East Tanzania Conference.

YUSUPH ZEGGE: Mr. Chair, I am speaking about page 65 on the title of Conference Treasurer. If I can recall, during the previous Annual Council, it was voted to adjust the title Treasurer to Chief Financial Officer, but I see here we are still using the Conference Treasurer title. So, my question is, is the title Treasurer consistent and in harmony with other documents? Can we be consistent in the title of Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer?

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Let's continue with microphone number 2, Andreas Bochmann, Inter-European Division EUD.

ANDREAS BOCHMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I stand here opposed to the motion, especially because of the pastoral picture that is being given. I am a pastoral counselor, and I know the needs of churches. We've heard this morning how many people are being lost over time that have been won. And I think there is a danger of a complete shift of paradigm, if we present pastors to be nineteenth century itinerant preachers. In the parts of the world I'm acquainted with, this is not realistic, and we risk losing pastors and future pastors. I would urge you not to accept the motion as it is now.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Let's go to microphone 3, Omaiko Anyona, East Kenya Union Conference, ECD.

OMAIKO ANYONA: My concern is in regard to the conference treasurer, conference secretary, and conference president. Knowing that in some of our entities we have fields, we have not become conferences. Are we assuming that titles Treasurer, President, Secretary are not used for fields?

GERSON P SANTOS: That's an excellent observation. The *Church Manual* on page 18, on the last paragraph we have this on the use of terms., we use the same titles for churches, companies as well as missions, sections, and local fields. We just use the word conference, but it's implied for all those different entities regardless of how they are named in different parts of the world.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 2. Jaanus-Janari Kogerman from Estonian Conference, TED.

JAAANUS-JANARI KOGERMAN: My comment is probably editorial, but it has some deeper meaning as well. Page 64, line 24, talking about conference president, current wording is, "The conference president should be an ordained pastor . . ." to be in line with *Working Policy*. I would like to see that the word "should" be replaced with the word "shall," making sure that current *Working Policy* requirements are still met in the *Church Manual*. And second as a treasurer, I do know that there have been several different funds, not only monies, and hence I would like to see also that on page 65, lines 7 and 8, words "monies" should be changed with the words "funds." To cover different funds, not just money.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 5, Marc Woodson, North California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, NAD.

MARC WOODSON: I want to thank the *Church Manual* Committee for the addition of something very practical. In the manual as it has been printed from 2015, it only had conference president and then departmental directors. Adding the conference secretary and conference treasurer is very important

and very practical because in other aspects of this *Church Manual*, those offices are mentioned because they work directly with our churches. So, it's a very practical matter to include their roles, especially the conference secretary who works with the membership of our churches and our clerks, and our treasurer who works with our churches in their remittances. It makes sense to have those officers mentioned here.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Let's go to the next speaker, Hilde Huru, Norwegian Union Conference, TED.

HILDE HURU: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I disagree with the comment from the presenter of this item that the passages that are not changed by the committee are not up for revision because in our agenda the whole section has been crossed out and rewritten. Some of it has been changed and some of it not, but it seems to imply then that this whole section is up for revision. So, I really want to refer back to the committee to listen to these comments and to do a revision of what we are saying here. And then I also want to say that where I live, my union is a very small union. If we are going to reach our mission goals, everybody has to take part. And God has gifted so many people in our church. Unfortunately, I've been a member of the nominating committee, and I've seen how hard it is to get a man to say yes to the job of being a conference president. We ask so many who say "no" before somebody is willing to say "yes," I'll do the job. So, we need everybody who is willing, everybody who got called, who is willing to say yes to do this job. We need to allow them this opportunity, male, women, anybody who can do the job who God gave the gifts, we need them because we have a job to do. We have a mission. We have to preach to the world. We have to spread the gospel. And we also need some administrators to help us do this. So please take these comments back to the committee.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Microphone number eight, Emmanuel Dike, West-Central Africa Division, WAD.

EMMANUEL DIKE: The beauty of our church is that the Bible is clear when it says he made them male and female, and again in the book, "If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work as a bishop and must be blameless, the husband of one wife." The Bible is clear the role the pastor will play and who should be a pastor. I do not know whether I want to change the Bible. I think that as a church we must stick to the Bible, and we must stick to the counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy. And if that is the case, we will return what is there in that motion. Everybody has a role to play in the church, the male, the female. But when it comes to ordination and when it comes to the assignment of being a bishop or being a pastor, you must respect the teachings of the Bible and the guidelines that the Bible has given.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Let's continue with microphone number 7. Lessaro Lelenguiya, East Kenya Union Conference, ECD.

LESSARON LELENGUIYA: On the area pertaining to the executive secretary or the secretary, as indicated in the *Church Manual*, Mr. Chair, I want to support that the secretary should have the ministerial experience because he works well and closely with the president. Sometimes he sits in the ministerial councils, and he supports and also assists the president when it comes to the executive committees and many other areas pertaining to ministerial work. I stand to support the idea that the secretary should have ministerial experience. And when it comes to the president, it is important that as he executes his work, the policy, the president, the secretary, and the treasurer consult daily for the progress of the gospel work in the conference or in any given area to make sure that the work of the Lord progresses as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Let's try again our brother Elder Rubio Eslava Northeast Venezuela Mission from Spanish Zoom. [Speaking Spanish].

ELDER RUBIO ESLAVA: Sorry that my internet failed me. I just want to give thanks to God and express I believe the item 417-22 is excellent. That item allows us to work. I'm in favor of it. I think it's excellent.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 5, Elder Randy Roberts, North American Division.

RANDY ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much to those who have been working on this. I know that these kinds of tasks are often thankless. I stand to speak against the use of the gender exclusive language that is contained in the document on page 64. I appreciated much the previous speaker from Iceland who suggested the simple change to ordained or commissioned pastor, as it is true in different parts of the world, the promulgation of our mission calls on different kinds of people to lead. I've had the wonderful privilege of serving for ten to 12 years under a conference president who is female. She's now moved to the union so she's not in that post, but during that time she was deeply loved and profoundly respected by both pastors and members. She was consistently ignored, ignored in official documents like the SDA yearbook, and yet the conference, which is one of the largest in this country, supported and loved and cared for her and thrived under her leadership. It's a deep burden to be able to explain to our church members how that is possibly true. At one time I might have told you that it's hard to go back and to explain that to our young adults. But it is no longer young adults. It's people all across the age spectrum. It seems a simple matter to change it to "ordained or commissioned" and to change the language to gender inclusive, thus allowing those who wish not to move in this direction the ability to not do that, and those who feel led by God to move in this direction, to do so. So, I would encourage that to be examined and that language to be changed. [Applause]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. And we have a point of order regarding microphone number 8, Armando Miranda.

ARMANDO MIRANDA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that comments about the conference president are not a part of this discussion because this is something new for the *Church Manual*. The place where these kinds of things are discussed is in the Bylaws and Constitution Committee. [Applause]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for all of these. You know, the time is 5:30 to go to supper. Unfortunately, the Nominating Committee was not able to make it now. They will come after supper for the evening session. So, we will need to close here and all the speakers, all the ones that want to speak, we'll keep the queue, and you will have an opportunity after supper. So, now it's time to refresh, to stretch, and let's pray for the Lord to bless us during this time of recess. So, let's stand for prayer. And pastor Rafat Kamal, if you will pray for the Lord to continue to guide us in this 61st GC Session and to bless us as we have supper and the evening meeting. Thank you.

[Closing Prayer by Rafat Kamal.]