

TENTH BUSINESS MEETING

Sixty-First General Conference Session, June 9, 2022, 9:15 a.m.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Good morning. If we can take our seats. We are starting our business session. Thank you so much for the wonderful worship we had this morning, very inspiring.

Thank you for the joy that all the delegates are demonstrating. Good spirits, but we need to continue with this last day of the business session. Tomorrow will be a wonderful day with the spiritual reports from the 13 world divisions and then the Sabbath day. So, we need to proceed with our business. I have asked Elder Matthew Bediako to come to microphone number 8. As the world Church remembers, Elder Matthew Bediako was Executive Secretary of the General Conference for many years. A pastor that dedicated his life to the mission of our Church. So, if our brethren can allow Pastor Matthew Bediako to come to microphone number 8 in order for us to start with prayer.

[Prayer by Matthew Bediako.]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: We have a point of order here on microphone number 7. Dr. Tim Standish, please.

TIM STANDISH: Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Yesterday, when I stood to move that the last of the mixed multitude of nominees be referred back to the Nominating Committee, because of the failure to draw in the nominated group on the massive talent and dedication of our female membership in areas where questions of ordination and headship have no bearing in our Church, I was denied the right to speak as a delegate because voting had already started.

Last night I checked the video, there were less than 30 seconds, Mr. Chairman. Less than 30 seconds between the seconding of the motion and the opportunity to speak being cut off. Mr. Chairman, I walked directly to the table to get my badge scanned. That took a few seconds. Then, directly to the microphone when I, as a delegate, was cut off.

I strongly protest the lack of sufficient time to complete the process that we are required to follow, just as I protest the way we have ignored the talent and dedication of the numerous brilliant women, with whom the Lord has blessed our Church. These are the Mary Magdalenes of our day. As a delegate, I insist that on this final day of Church business, sufficient time be provided for delegates to respond to motions. And because the vote that was taken was invalid because sufficient time was not allowed, I move that the final Nominating Committee report given yesterday be referred back, and that the Nominating Committee be responsive to the consistent request of the delegates, under the influence of the Holy Spirit—

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you, Tim.

TIM STANDISH: — for us to use and honor the talent of women in our Church. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you, Tim. As we know, points of order cannot make a motion.

Please, Parliamentarian.

TODD MCFARLAND: So, a couple of items in response to that. First of all, the chairs have endeavored to give sufficient time while balancing the need to move forward. Once an individual scans in, it appears instantly on both the screen I have up here and then the screen down there. The voting had started by that time. So, we do want to give people sufficient time. Regarding the motion this morning, even if it wasn't during a point of order, which you can't interrupt, you can't make a motion from a point or order—

TIM STANDISH: I had 30 seconds!

TODD MCFARLAND: Mr. Chairman, I would ask that there be order in the house. It is not appropriate to scream from the floor.

TIM STANDISH: Give me the mic! Give me the mic, Mr. Chairman. Please, give me the mic.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Tim, you have spoken. I was patient because the time went by, and yet I waited for you to finish. So, let's have a good spirit. The president of the Nominating Committee

explained to all of us, the delegates, the way that they have looked to all the options. The variety of nationalities and genders that were nominated was presented. So, your comments are well taken. Thank you so much, Tim. We need to proceed. We have on microphone number 7, Pastor G T Ng. Thank you.

GT NG: Good morning, Mr. Chair. I notice every time the Nominating Committee makes a report, there is much rejoicing. There is a lot of hand clapping, holy hugging, and holy kisses. While rejoicing is going on, let us not forget there is another group of people where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Some of these people are the incumbents. Before the election, people sing, "I Shall Not Be Moved" and "Is My Name Written There?" For some of these people, their names are not written there, and they are in turmoil, they have loose hearts. Some of them are probably in ICU. They need urgent nursing care to bind up their wounds, and need tender, loving care.

Some years ago, I had an individual whose name was not written there. He told me point-blank as he pointed his finger at me, "You know what you have done to me? You have destroyed me, my future, my family, and my country because my name was not written there." To some people, it is a serious matter. So, I appeal to the world Church to reach out to our incumbents, with love and compassion, whose names are not written there. We need to embrace, pray, and tell them that an election is not about winning and losing. Election is about doing the will of God. Sooner or later, they will be reassigned. There are no surprises in the throne room of God.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments, Elder G T Ng, former Secretary of the General Conference. We have another point of order in microphone number 5, Debbie Jackson, Central States Conference, NAD.

DEBBIE JACKSON: It was apparent yesterday that people were cut off before they had a chance to come to the microphone. I don't believe it was intentional, but I do know that people were cut off.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. I want all of us delegates, brothers and sisters who are watching this program, to reflect in the chapter for today. Numbers, Chapter 30, Verses

1 and 2. “Moses said to the heads of the tribes of Israel: “This is what the Lord commands:”

Interestingly, the Lord was able to speak face-to-face with Moses. What a privilege! He wants to speak to us. And what was the command of the Lord? “When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.” I was reflecting in the Word of God. Have we made a commitment with the Lord this morning? We have been praying for the presence of the Holy Spirit. Have we made a vow with the Lord? Matthew 24:13 says that the ones that will stand firm, the ones that will be loyal to the Lord, will be saved. What a great opportunity and privilege all of us have. Let’s make a commitment to the Lord. Our motto, “Jesus is Coming! Get Involved!” is asking all of us to be involved, in harmony guided by the Holy Spirit, to complete the mission worldwide. Thank you so much for your commitment and your love for the Lord. This morning, we will continue with considerations of the agenda of the *Church Manual*. We will have the last *Church Manual* Committee at 12:30 p.m. Anything that we need to review, we need to do it by noontime. Then in the afternoon, we will come back to you with those proposals. So, Elder Gerson, where do we need to continue?

GERSON P SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. Good morning, everyone. I received some contacts last night and early this morning saying, “Well, thank you for presenting the items!” I want to tell you we are not done yet, and we need your help. As the Chair announced, we’re going to meet as a committee during lunchtime to discuss six items. Right now, we still have 12 items to go. So, let’s get started.

The first item is 420. Let’s go back to this one. Yesterday, we voted on the Adventist Possibility Ministries. This will bring some changes to our *Church Manual*, which is in reference number 430-22. You can see the letter B. The rationale for this item is that a new section on the Adventist Possibility Ministries is being added, resulting in this section being deleted. So, this is the former paragraph, the old paragraph that we had in the *Church Manual* talking about ministry to people with disabilities. We don’t

use those terms anymore. We have a whole new section that we voted for yesterday. So, I move, Pastor Chair, we delete that paragraph that now is obsolete.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Do we have a second? Thank you. We have a second. Any comments? We will try to go fast through electronic vote in order to have all these items completed before noontime. Okay?

[Voting]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: The motion passed with 1,155 votes for “yes,” which represents 95.1 percent.

GERSON P SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. The next item is 428. We’re going to skip some that we already voted for and a couple then that were referred back to the Committee. So, the next item is agenda item 428, which is on the screen, reference number 426-22. This amendment and its rationale recommend auditing of church membership records. And the recommendation is to amend page 82 on the section of “Church Records” to read as follows, the paragraph is the same except we added just the last two lines. And if you have your agenda in front of you, that’s page 95, and starting on line 14, which is underlined on the screen, as you can see on the bottom of the slide. Church records, within the privacy limitations of local law, are subject to audit by the next higher organization. This is the addition we have, to be consistent with the previous recommendation. I move, Pastor Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. We have a second? We have somebody who wants to speak at microphone number 2, Brother Johannes Bochmann, Berlin-Central German Conference, EUD.

JOHANNES BOCHMANN: Thank you, Brother Chair, just one small remark. I believe yesterday, there was some concern about the term audit and that it should be replaced with “review.” I believe the same would apply here. Thank you very much.

GERSON P SANTOS: Pastor Chair, that’s an excellent observation. I will be glad to do that and bring it back to the Committee and present both items this afternoon.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. Let's do that, take it to the Committee. Thank you. The next item, Gerson?

GERSON P SANTOS: The next item is item 429. And the reference number starts with the same number. And remember just a short announcement before we move forward, Pastor Chair, if you allow me. Last night, a few people were already leaving when we distributed the book about nurture and retention. We still have some volumes. They are placed on the tables. As you go out today at the end of the morning session, you can take one, if you didn't get yours. This is a gift for you, because you behaved so well during those long hours attending the *Church Manual*. And we did not forget those who were on Zoom. This morning, the book was placed in the document section of the app and the website. So, thank you, Tami, for doing that. And to all the delegates who are not attending physically here in St Louis, you can go to the website or look to the app in the "Documents" section, and you can download the whole book. Thank you for this opportunity to share.

Let's go to the next section then, as I mentioned the number 429, which is also the reference number 429 in your agenda. The rationale behind it is this is a new chapter. This is a big thing and took us a few years to produce this recommendation. And we are very thankful for the many people who contributed and participated in creating this document. Because disciple-making is our goal, evangelism is our priority, but disciple-making is our goal. When Jesus was about to leave His disciples, He gave a clear order, "go and make disciples." Because this is the mission of the Church, the *Church Manual* Committee decided to include this recommendation, which is a whole new chapter on discipleship. And the recommendation is to include this chapter as Chapter 6, "Making Disciples." This follows Chapter 5 which is about organizing and uniting, and dissolving churches and companies on page 43. And this is how it is presented. Making disciples is a continuous process by which a person becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, matures as His disciple, and makes more disciples. Baptism is an essential part of the discipleship process, but it is not the end result of that process.

This is very important, Pastor Chair, and all the attendees, because sometimes we think we baptize someone, we give them the church certificate at the baptism, but that should be considered not as a graduation diploma, but just as a birth certificate into their spiritual life. So, that's where the most important part stands, the journey and growing up and maturing with Jesus. Pastor Chair, I ask permission because all the delegates, I believe they read this material, and we are talking about five pages. I really don't think we should read it, not because it's not important because it is extremely important. And I don't want anybody to move their attention to somewhere else, and I believe most of the delegates did their homework and read this document. If not, you're going to have plenty of time to study it later. But for those who already have read this, I really appreciate the work and the time you spent on that.

Pastor Chair, this is extremely important for us as a Church, to highlight the importance of disciple-making, and to integrate disciple-making in evangelism, keeping evangelism as our priority, but making disciple-making our goal. So, I move, Pastor Chair, that we include this new chapter on making disciples in the *Church Manual*.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: It's moved and seconded. What a joy to include in our *Church Manual* worldwide this important concept of making disciples. We have some of you that want to speak. Let's start with microphone number 1. Marcos Luiz Lima de Oliveira Jr, Central Rio Grande do Sul Conference, South American Division. Please.

MARCOS LUIZ LIMA DE OLIVEIRA JR: [Translated] Mr. President, we thank you so much for the proposition for this new chapter discipleship for the church. We believe in the type of discipleship that we can see there. However, we have a little observation in one of the sentences. In the beginning, you can read "go," but we believe we can do better than that. If the correct translation of the verb "go" in Matthew 28, if this is what the manual is saying, we accept it. We, Adventists, we need to follow the Bible text as we read. But the usage of the verb "go" and the participle, sometimes is not the best

translation in the Bible, nor even the understanding of some scholars of the Old Testament, nor even some other translations in the Book of Matthew, with the syntax construction. In the Greek grammar, the verb “go” is an imperative of doing and the verb “to do.” We know that there are some missiologists that agree with the usage of the verb in the participle. But we believe that some of the scholars don’t have this understanding in the New Testament. And Ellen White used the verb “to go” in the imperative in her comments. We just want our *Church Manual* not to have a wrong translation. If the interpretation of the verb “go” is correct, we’ll accept it. But we believe that in our understanding, the translation “so go,” is the best for the *Manual*. So, we make a proposal that it go back to the Committee to be studied by the theologians of the New Testament.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: We have the next one, microphone number 2, Sven Ostring, South Pacific Division.

SVEN OSTRING: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to speak to this item. And I really welcome the whole chapter on making disciples because it’s at the very core of The Great Controversy. However, there are two issues that I would like to address in this chapter. First of all, there’s an ambiguity with regard to the definition of a disciple in this chapter, and on page 96, on line 1, we have one definition, a disciple is a person, and you continue with another definition. I guess, this is internal evidence that this is a chapter which has been developed by a committee, but I believe there’s a necessity for our Church around the world to have clarity rather than ambiguity about the definition of a disciple. And I would like to recommend to the committee to look at a systematic study of the scriptures and with referral to The Spirit of Prophecy, and other books on disciples as well. The second issue that I have is a stronger one. There’s a truncation of the discipleship journey from a salvation point of view. On line 34, it says the discipleship journey starts when one takes the first steps towards Jesus. The reality is the prevenient grace of God, which draws people to becoming a disciple, and Jesus calls a person with the first call, “Follow me.” And I believe in a world where we have a lot of human-centered

understanding of salvation, which often leads toward sinless perfection and an effort to journey towards Jesus by ourselves, or through our own effort. There's an important need to be able to clarify this from a theological point of view. I'd like to refer it back to the Committee if I can and would welcome to be able to speak about both of those matters.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comment. Great. And we are taking notes of all, Pastor Gerson.

Let's go to microphone number 5. We have several speakers, David Prest, Idaho Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, North American Division.

DAVID PREST: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I recognize the current discussion is on 429. However, I'm wondering if it's possible to ask a question on 426. And if it's not appropriate now, I'm happy to wait. It's my understanding that 426 has not yet been voted. Is that correct?

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Yes, the item 426 we will discuss more so you can keep your comment for that time. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Let's go to microphone number 1, Gavin Anthony, Iceland Conference.

GAVIN ANTHONY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would begin by thanking the committee that put together this first draft. I think this is an excellent beginning and could really be a highlight of this Session. I have a practical and theological observation. Firstly, in Icelandic, and I think in other languages as well, the word "discipleship" doesn't exist. So, if a biblical term like "make disciples" could be used as often as possible, that would be helpful when translating. But secondly, I would like to highlight one area which I think would be good for the committee to reflect on in the future, and that is to flesh out with greater clarity what it means to make disciples in the context of the Three Angels' Messages, which is referred to in lines 21 and 22. In many places, there often seems to be a real divide between those who are enthusiastic to promote our prophetic mission and others who want to emphasize what they would call the gospel. And of course, these components should never be separated. Therefore, I think it

would be really helpful if we could include a healthy theological synthesis of how and why the disciple-making work of Jesus is foundational to the eschatological mission of Jesus as we have traditionally understood it in Daniel and Revelation, so that we could strengthen harmony of mission within the local church. Thank you.

GUILLEMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Pastor Gerson, we will take this issue to review with all the other comments and will do the best in the short time we have to bring it for the afternoon. This is an important chapter. Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 5, Ellsworth Baxen, Mauritius Conference, SID.

ELLSWORTH BAXEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to commend the commission on the excellent inclusion on discipleship, particularly. It is long overdue. The Church has desperate need of a much deeper understanding of discipleship. A few comments, Mr. Chair. One of the challenges is that there is a lack of integration of the concepts of discipleship into the life and the practices of the local church. If we look at the discipleship wagon, the challenge is that that wagon often has square wheels instead of round wheels. So, when it comes to the implementation, that's where we sometimes have challenges, where there are hiccups, where there are speed bumps, or where there are obstacles or barriers.

I would like to suggest, Mr. Chair, that in addition to this excellent proposition, that we also look at how we can integrate the DNA of discipleship into the departments of the General Conference, right down, filtering and cascading right down to the various conference levels and right down to the local church. When these departments have been integrated together, I believe that this will bring a much better synergy and that we will be more effective in our ministry and in our mission. Our Church is an organization that is systemic. And we also know that that means that our form and function need to work hand in hand. Structure and mission need to work hand in hand.

If we only change the definition of discipleship or we provide a statement and a description of a discipleship without the concomitant structural support in order to implement the principles of discipleship, then that will be a challenge.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments. Since that we are referring this back to the Committee, please, each one of you making comments, put it by written the specific suggestion for us to consider in the comments.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Okay. Let's go to the next speaker that is from the English Zoom, Bhaju Shrestha, Himalayan Section, SUD.

BHAJU SHRESTHA: Mr. Chairman and world Church, the word disciples have general context a servant and a master, and Jesus said that I will call you my friend and disciples. I wonder, we are Adventists, I hear when we say disciples, people think we're making Christians. We are here to help people become friends with Jesus. I wonder, was there some way you can accommodate an insert that making friends with Jesus and the discipleship. How many of us can claim we are a disciple of Christ but we want a friend, we are friend of Christ. And this is what we need to give to understand the message that being a disciple is being a friend. We are here as Adventists, we have hospitals, different entities not to make people Christian but friends. I wonder whether you can somehow incorporate words friend for Jesus. Thank you very much.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments from the highest of Himalaya mountains. And we heard you very clearly. Yes. All disciples are friends of Christ, and He considers us His friend. Let's go to microphone number 2, Stefan Giuliani. Inter-European Division, EUD.

STEFAN GIULIANI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a minor suggestion on page 96 line 34 where the sentence reads, "Their commitment to obey Christ in making disciples should be demonstrated before baptism." And my suggestion would be to replace the word "obey" with the word "follow" in order to highlight that making disciples should be based on an intrinsic motivation and a little more

extrinsic obedience. I'm not speaking against obedience. It comes at a later section. And I'm in full support of it. But I think in this line, we should replace the word "obey" with the word "follow."

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 8, Alida Audrey Mbadinga, Gabon Mission, WAD.

ALIDA AUDREY MBADINGA: [Translated] Good morning, Mr. President. I have two questions as regards this issue of discipleship. I assume that integrating this new concept of discipleship in the *Church Manual* comes from observation and from an audit, which means an observation from the fact that the Church realizes that they have more members than disciples. My first question comes now. What will be the practical procedures or arrangements to make members become disciples? My last question is who are those who are going to make the assessment to use the word "auditing" or "auditor," or I think it's the assessment? Who are those who are going to make the assessment or observation to make sure those members are actually moving from the status of members to disciples, to actual disciples, who are those who are going to oversee, make this assessment?

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for the comments. Let's go to the English Zoom, Norman McNulty, General Conference.

NORMAN MCNULTY: Thank you, Brother Chair. I just wanted to speak strongly in favor of this motion because we as Seventh-day Adventists should not simply be seeking to make members but to making disciples of Jesus and of those who support of the Three Angels' Messages and, as such, I support this motion and I also move the previous question. Thank you, Brother Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. I think you moved the previous question.

[Voting]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: The motion carries with 1,332 votes for "yes," 93.7 percent. Therefore, the comments cease, and we will consider all these good comments for our noontime *Church Manual* Committee and bring this back for the afternoon meeting. Let's go to the next agenda item.

GERSON P SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. The next item is number 430 on your agenda, which is the first one on the next page on the agenda list, 429-B. It is also about discipleship. And the rationale behind this recommendation is to make the wording of this section consistent with the new mission statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as voted by 2018 Annual Council. So, the recommendation is to amend the *Church Manual* Chapter 10, Services and Other Meetings, page 130, Discipleship, to read as shown. And I want to highlight, Pastor Chair, one of the observations we heard earlier from one of the speakers that we are changing the wording instead of discipleship to making disciples, which is a more biblical term. And the recommendation is making disciples. The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ, who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels' Messages in preparation for His soon return [Biblical reference]. The purpose of the Church as the body of Christ is to intentionally make disciples so that they continue in an active and fruitful relationship with Christ and His Church. The next paragraph, changing again from discipleship to disciple-making is based on an ongoing lifelong relationship with Jesus. Pastor Chair, I move we accept this recommendation.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: It has been moved and seconded. We have a comment on microphone number 5, David Prest—Idaho Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, NAD.

DAVID PREST: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm in favor of the motion, however, I just wanted to remind the Chair that I'm still waiting for permission to speak to 426 with a question.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: When we consider that item of the agenda you may be able to speak.

DAVID PREST: Okay. Just wanted to make sure I wasn't forgotten.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: And we go to the next speaker, microphone number 6, Hanna Parodi, Inter-European Division, EUD.

HANNA PARODI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the spirit of our mission to make disciples—Disciples; I wonder if anyone listening to the powerful devotion was not moved this morning. Glory to

our Lord for having inspired our sister. And my question here is who are we to hinder ordination of women? We can all testify that our sister is talented and owns the gift of preaching, and as her, hundreds and thousands of our sisters are blessed and owning gifts and talents through the Holy Spirit. Thank God, the Holy Spirit makes no difference. Who are we to make this difference? We all treasure Ellen White's writings and have also added the position of coordinator in our churches to her writings. But would we appoint Sister White as a pastoral leadership position in our Church if she was here nowadays? Thank you for thinking about it and make the women ordination reality in this Session to focus on our mission and the issue of making disciples and go home, and from here, get involved as Jesus is coming.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments. And let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 1, Michael Doerbaum from Lower Saxonian Conference, EUD.

MICHAEL DOERBAUM: Thank you, Mr. Chair. [Indiscernible] brethren. I want to clearly speak against this motion. Let me be clear, we have, as the Adventist Church, the duty to proclaim the Three Angels' Messages. This is our job to be done on this earth. But let us reconsider what is most important in our personal believing. This is taking the gospel by heart, the gospel of Christ who died for us. This is the most important point in our relation, to bring disciples to personal relation to Jesus Christ. This stands above all of this. In my opinion, what we are doing here, the mission statement is okay, but when we make disciples, it is most important to bring them to this personal relation. And here we are connecting two things on the same level which, in my opinion, are not on the same level. So, I kindly ask you to be clear to the most important point in our believing. This is a personal relation that we need to bring to the people that we are making disciples. So, in my opinion there is no necessity in this chapter to be word and word in line with the mission statement, and I'm against this motion. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. And we continue, as you see in line 14, says live as His loving witnesses, and in line 17, in an active and fruitful relationship with Christ, as our

brother has mentioned. Thank you. Let's go to microphone number 8. Luis Orozco Salinas, West Mexican Conference.

LUIS OROZCO SALINAS: [Translated] Thank you, Mr. President. I am very pleased that the Church is considering these changes to the *Manual* and especially this point. The way it was written before, it connected members with communion with Christ and the church. But now the way it's written, it's about connecting members with the church and with mission, connecting with others who do not believe like us. I would like us not to look only at the ideas and the details but at the spirit that is guiding us to make this change. I think the reality is that discipleship and mission is something that we speak about a lot, but not all of us do it in all of our churches and in a lot of places. We have a lot of consumers of programs instead of disciples. So, I celebrate these changes, and I would like for all of us to celebrate together. I would like for us to cease debate so that we can vote on this amendment.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments and then we will proceed to vote on this question on the motion.

[Voting]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: The motion carried with 1,397 votes for "yes," representing 96.2 percent. We have a point of order in microphone number 6, Brother Kenneth Medlock, Southwestern Union Conference, NAD. Please.

KENNETH MEDLOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for recognizing me. I have noticed that some of our very eloquent speakers have come to the mic and made some eloquent comments on this subject matter. And after making their long, eloquent comments, they've moved the previous motion. That doesn't seem to be a proper thing for a fellow delegate to do, to register their comments and then after their long comments are registered, to move the following motion. Mr. Chair, I object to that practice.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thanks, and we will hear the advice of parliamentarian.

TODD MCFARLAND: Mr. Chairman, that is an appropriate procedure. A motion for the previous question is in order anytime that a person speaks. If you disagree with the practice and want to continue debate, you may vote no. I will point out that every single motion to move the previous question has passed by 90 percent, often the high nineties. And so, it is in order. And if you are uncomfortable with that, then the appropriate response is to vote "no," Mr. Chairman.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: We voted question on the motion. Now we need to go to the motion itself for voting.

[Voting]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: The motion was carried with 1,413 votes for "yes," 95.9 percent. Let's go to the next agenda item, Gerson.

GERSON P SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. Now we go to 431; your agenda item 431. It's on page 102. And it's the reference number 408 on the screen. This item is very simple, and we are just trying to clarify or simplify the paragraph. Instead of presenting a list of notes, just present what our purpose is. So, to represent it in a simple way, this is the rationale, to simplify the language. And on the paragraph "No Additional Tests of Fellowship." And this is on page 64, the *Church Manual*, we are crossing out a couple of lines, and we are leaving with that section, "The authority to establish tests of fellowship rests with the General Conference Session," and we skip next three lines. "Anyone seeking to apply tests other than those herein set forth does not, therefore, properly represent the Church." I move, Pastor Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: It is moved, and we have a second? Microphone number 2. Niklas Rantanen Finland Union of Churches Conference, TED.

NIKLAS RANTANEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think the point would be even clearer if you would add the word "only" at the end of the sentence so it would create the authority to establish tests of

fellowship rests with the General Conference Session only, but this is just my recommendation. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 5, Mandla Se-Bantwini Lupondwana, Southern Africa Union Conference, SID.

MANDLA SE-BANTWINI LUPONDWANA: Thank you, Chair. I would like to propose we relook at the word "fellowship." I think it comes from the era when we had disfellowship as a disciplinary action. But we have since changed, and we now remove people from membership. In other words, you can still fellowship with us in church but not be a member. When we then say tests of fellowship, instead of probably tests of membership, it is as though we are coming up with a list of things you have — requirements you must meet just to fellowship with us. And sometimes, we are able to use that list which is in the section that covers disciplinary action as though we can police people who are going to come and fellowship with us. I think we intended to say, only the General Conference can come up with reasons why someone may not continue to be a member, because that becomes a basis for disciplinary action. So, I think in that section, probably tests for membership would better capture the idea than tests for fellowship. Because tests for fellowship can be broad, so broad, that it ends up doing things we did not intend to do, which is to monitor who can come and fellowship with us in our congregation, and that was not the intention. Thank you, Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comment. Very good. Let's go to microphone number 2, Jaanus-Janari Kogerman, Estonian Conference, TED.

JAANUS-JANARI KOGERMAN: I do support my previous two colleagues' thoughts to make it clearer, to make it shorter but at the same time make sure that the words are understood. The word fellowship may be replaced with membership and also to add "only." And also, I do move to send this question back to the Committee.

GERSON P SANTOS: Well, Pastor Chair, I don't have a problem with that, if we consider that just have in mind that we already have eight items to discuss during lunchtime in a very short period. And I'm concerned that we have some important items, I'm not just referring to this specific one, but if we continue sending everything back to the Committee, we won't be able to even cover that during lunchtime. And some important items will have to be brought back to this body in 2025. But we follow whatever the Session decides to do. One more thing, if you'll allow me. This was very good; the previous speaker raised an issue and made a clear recommendation. That helps us a lot in trying to take notes, so I understand the special concerns. If you can clarify and make clear suggestions on how to fix what you think is a problem, that will help us a lot. I really appreciate that.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. We will take it back to the Committee. (A specific vote is not needed since the committee is already planning to review several items). Number 4, David Kikwai, East Kenya Union Conference, ECD, the last speaker for this item.

DAVID KIKWAI: Thank you so much, Brother Chairman. My contribution to this, the authority to establish the test of fellowship rests solely on the General Conference. Somehow, I'm not very comfortable with that because I know the Church derives its authority from the Word of God. That's the Bible. Why can't it read this way, that the authority to establish a test of fellowship rests solely on the Word of God, because I know we derive our authority, even the General Conference, from the Bible. Thank you so much.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. And we will take this to the Committee at noontime. Thank you. Let's go to the next agenda item, Gerson.

GERSON P SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. The next agenda item, 432 in the agenda, 432. It's on page 103 in our agenda book. The reference number 432, the rationale behind this recommendation in this amendment clarifies that written notice should be given prior to both the church board meeting and church business meetings before voting to discipline a member. So, it is recommended to add in

Chapter 7, page 65, the fundamental rights of the members to read as follows, and then you have the whole paragraph about fundamental rights of the members. Members have a fundamental right to prior notification of the disciplinary meetings. We put in plural because we are referring to two different meetings. And then on the last two lines—the last three lines, start reading at the end of line 16. “Written notice must be given at least two weeks before the church board meeting and two weeks before the business meeting and include the reasons for the disciplinary hearing.” I move, Pastor Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Do we have a second? Thank you. Great. It’s very clear, is to clarify the right of our church members with time of advance to the board meeting, church board meeting and to the business meeting. It’s very clear. We have some people that want to speak in the English Zoom, Tekjon Naibaho, West Java Conference, SSD. Please. Seems you need to be unmuted for us to hear you. We cannot hear you, and we rely on the technicians helping us with the Zoom and the audio. We can come back to you a little bit later. We go to microphone number 1, Zippora Anson, Trans-European Division, TED.

ZIPPORA ANSON: Hi. I apologize. My voice is gone. I just have a small editorial note. I think line 18 should include the word “must.” So, instead of it saying, “before the business meeting and including reasons for disciplinary hearing,” it should say “and must include the reasons for disciplinary hearing.”

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comment. Very good. Let’s go to microphone number 8, Paul Ananaba, Lagos Mainland Conference, WAD, microphone 8.

PAUL ANANABA: Mr. Chairman, I support this motion, but I think that when the particular paragraph says that there should be written notice, we need to clarify that. In the word of today and following the votes we’ve been having in the previous days; we’ve come to a time when writing may not be appropriate alone. We need to look at the wording again to include the electronic options in our lifestyles today so that such a person can be contacted by even a phone call, and a phone call is not

writing, so electronic options should be brought into it. It's a beautiful provision, but we need to be mindful of this particular development, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Let's go to English Zoom, Peter Alue, Greater Bahr El Ghazal Field, ECD.

PETER ALUE: You see, writing notice can be good, but in some situations, it's not effective because we need to communicate with someone by assigning a member of the church board to go and sit with the particular member, pray with him, and convey the message of the church board in love because we want to redeem a person. But when we write a letter and send it to somebody, sometimes they feel rejected. So, it is so painful. And number two, my point is writing a letter, not everybody can read, and you write, and somebody comes to read and might misinterpret. So, for me, we can give a notice two weeks earlier, but writing a letter is not enough. We should talk directly and understand the pastor or elder is always a member of that committee. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Let's go to Russian Zoom, Vasilii Stefaniv, West Siberian Mission, ESD.

VASILII STEFANIV: [Translated] Dear brothers and sisters, I would like to pay attention to the fact that we are discussing an amendment to the *Church Manual*. And we already have been using this *Church Manual* in our practical life in our churches. And we just speak about some small correction in wording of some phrases to clarify some moments to make the text clearer for reading and understanding. And I think it's wrong if someone is against providing corrections, right away sends the text back to the Committee. During voting, we can see that the biggest part of people support this amendment. So, I think we need to vote, should we accept these texts as it's provided, or do we need to send it back? And the majority decides on these kinds of questions. Because each of us can have our own opinion and desire to make corrections. It's too much. We need to go with the majority opinion.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much, Brother Vasilij, Alevtina. And we go now to English Zoom number 101, Tekjon Naibaho, West Java Conference.

TEKJON NAIBAHU: This issue on this agenda is about discipline and especially now our young youth members seem to be the target. So, before disciplining members, it's better to give the time we write here in row 17, given at least two weeks before the church board meeting. I propose we give it at least one month before the business meeting. Thank you, our loving leader.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments. And let's go to microphone number 2, Stefan Giuliani, Inter-European Division, EUD.

STEFAN GIULIANI: Mr. Chairman, I think the raised concerns were very well covered in the previous proposal and therefore I would like to move previous question.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. Let's proceed to vote then.

[Voting]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: The motion has carried 1,364 for "yes," 97.1 percent. Let's go to the next agenda item.

GERSON P SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. You have in front of you the reference number 416. But actually, agenda item number 433. The rationale behind this recommendation is to add a quotation from the reference text to avoid any concern, and I think nobody on this session will complain about this. We are just presenting a recommendation for a direct quotation from the Bible. And I move this, Pastor Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: We have a motion and a second. We have microphone number 7, Michael Nixon, General Conference.

MICHAEL NIXON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This portion of the *Manual* shares some guiding principles for Sabbath keeping. I believe that this is a good thing, but I wonder if the Committee would give future consideration to expanding its scope a bit. Just a few verses before the cited passage in

Isaiah 58, the Bible says in verse 6: Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? In my mind's eye, I fast-forward and see Jesus citing these very words in Luke 4, setting at liberty the oppressed as He announced the beginning of His earthly ministry in His hometown of Nazareth on the Sabbath. There have been some comments made on the floor about Adventist heritage and social justice, and I'll just say that an honest reading of our Church's history would reveal that several of our pioneers were advocates for equity and justice and sought to set at liberty the oppressed. In this way, these pioneers modeled for us the way of Jesus as revealed to them and us in Scripture, for on the Sabbath, Jesus declared His desire to seek and save the lost. Friends, I believe that our keeping of the Sabbath should be more than just about how we enter into a 24-hour period of rest but also prompt us to consider who are we bringing rest to? Who is experiencing liberation, healing, and harmony as a result of our Sabbath keeping? This too is the call of us Adventists. Sabbath keeping can look like volunteering for prison ministries not to proselytize but to truly see a fellow human. It can look like going to a march and declaring that my life matters. It can also look like telling an LGBTQ+ friend or loved one that they are image bearers who deserve our love and protection. My mission lenses are on. The Bible is clear. It's good for men and women to seek equity and justice on the Sabbath, and I urge the Committee to discuss how to articulate this biblical truth in our *Church Manual*. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. We have point of order in microphone number 8, Miguel Sanon, Haitian Union Mission, IAD (was eventually recognized as a comment, not point of order).

MIGUEL SANON: When we say let us gather in the family circle at sunset, there is another sentence that they put in. We cannot perform unnecessary work. We should review the sentence too because when we say only unnecessary work, it's too large. I guess we can say to perform only necessary work in line with God will.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments. It's not a point of order, but we appreciate your comments. So, let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 2, Steinunn Theodorsdottir, Iceland Conference, TED.

STEINUNN THEODORSOTTIR: Thank you, Chair. I just want to start by saying that I love the Sabbath. The Sabbath, knowing the Sabbath was the thing that brought me to this Church. I was not brought up as an Adventist, but the Sabbath was something that was appealing. And I experienced like the Adventists, they had Christmas every week. But it disturbs me—and I'm happy that I didn't read this manual before, because it disturbs me when we want to be the conscience of others and to have so detailed like rules of how to keep the Sabbath or not. And it's the same with the next thing about premarital education. We should not be the conscience of others. It's God. And we should act as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit taught me how to keep the Sabbath and, of course, models from other people. It just makes me worried if we are going to take on this responsibility of being the conscience. I'm an educator, and Ellen White also states that we should not train people to be in other people's minds. We have to think for ourselves, and we have to let the Spirit talk.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments. I think we are ready to vote on this motion.

[Voting]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: The motion carried 1,363 votes for "yes," 94.6 percent of approval. Let's go to the next agenda—agenda item number 434.

GERSON P SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. Let's go for it. Number 434. It is in your agenda page 106. The reference number for this item is 428, but as was stated in your agenda, it is number 434. It's on page 106. I want to make sure everybody has that. It's also on the screen.

The rationale behind this recommendation is that the *Church Manual* will be emphasizing the importance of premarital education counseling, so their recommendation is to add a new section,

Premarital Education/Counseling, to the *Church Manual*, Chapter 13, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage, following Courtship, on page 154 as follows. “Premarital Education Counseling. Considering that marriage is the most important challenge of all relationships, premarital educational/counseling is designed to help couples planning to marry to be better prepared for this important step in their lives. The main purpose of premarital education/counseling is to prepare couples for the challenges they will encounter in married life. Premarital education/counseling is also to strengthen and improve the future happiness of married couples and reduce the potential rate of divorce. Premarital education/counseling should be offered by a professional counselor or specifically trained individuals, including specifically trained spiritual leaders. (For more detailed information regarding premarital education/counseling see the *Elder’s Handbook*.)” I move, Pastor Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: We have a motion and a second. We have a speaker on microphone number 2, Brother Andreas Bochmann, Inter-European Division, EUD. Please.

ANDREAS BOCHMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would identify myself as a pastoral counselor and the area of my university research and my doctorate is premarital counseling. That’s why I would like to support this motion. I would like to especially emphasize the idea of utilizing professional and well-trained people to assist here because this is not a mechanism of control, a mechanism to streamline people into a certain way of understanding marriage, but rather an assistance to assist them to grow up to a wonderful potential. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Great. Let’s go to microphone number 8, Daniel Medina Melgoza, West Mexican Conference, IAD. Please. I think we have the translator here.

DANIEL MEDINA MELGOSA: [Translated] Thank you so much. I would like to thank you for adding this important section to our *Church Manual*. It is very important for young couples to be taught and counseled before they get married. However, I would like to consider revising a word that I think needs attention. And it’s the word “couple.” I would like to specify for it to be a couple made of the

biblical couple described in Genesis, a man and a woman. That is my comment, and I would like you to revise it, please.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Let's go to the next speaker in the microphone number 8, Karen Bazan, North Mexican Union Conference, IAD.

KAREN BAZAN: [Translated] I would like to second what my friend said. Given the diversity of the young people that we work with today. In Mexico, we do have a lot of young people that are same-sex attraction. So, I do think it's important for us to make it clear what we mean by "couple" so that this does not become a problem for our young people. Thank you so much for adding this section.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Very good. Microphone number 7, Bruce Hatimbula, General Conference.

BRUCE HATIMBULA: Thank you so much. I want to be in support of the motion that's before us. For further consideration, I want us to consider putting specific timelines to help young people also in the counseling stages. This is because there are high divorce rates, and I think this is world over, not just where I come from in Zambia. So, we should also include specific timelines that help in the counseling session, to ascertain that young people are actually ready for the holy state of matrimony. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 4, Erickson Marcelin, Central Haiti Conference, IAD. Please.

ERICKSON MARCELIN: [Translated] Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to make a general observation. I totally agree with this topic on marriage. I believe even before the publicization of this amendment on which we have voted, and we vote again, dear delegates, I would like to make a general observation as others have also made observation on Bible topics as the Bible is our sole unique rule of faith, a working tool. I believe we need to get back to the Bible, the unique rule of our faith, the truth as to amend any rules, any policy, at the General Conference level, for as Martin Luther said, sola scriptura, which means only the scriptures. My question is whether all these amendments are based upon sola

scriptura, only the Bible. The other question is whether these articles are above the Bible. I wholeheartedly believe the Lord is living. The Bible is a standard document. And we should not bypass the ontological principles of the Bible. We are waiting for the implementation or enforcement of these amendments. However, this can generate some confusion and bring many ideologies. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments. Pastor Gerson.

GERSON P SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. The observations made so far are appreciated. I think this is extremely helpful for all of us, and I've been taking notes on my hard copies of the agenda here. I want to clarify to you something very important because it was mentioned by a few speakers already. Some highlights were made as if this paragraph was the only reference we have about marriage or relationship forming a family, and about Bible texts. So, I want to affirm to all of you and bring you back to the *Church Manual*. On page 154 of the current *Church Manual*, that's where we are suggesting that we include this paragraph, just before the section that starts talking about marriage. So, to address the concerns raised by previous speakers, at least the three last speakers, about the definition of the relationship which should be considered a couple for premarital counseling, there are two and a half pages in the *Church Manual* talking about marriage. And it's basically Bible quotations. You can open up your *Church Manual*, going to see two and a half pages using the Bible to explain what is a family; what's the relationship and the principle that God established in the Garden of Eden. So, there is no doubt what you're talking about here. The paragraph you see in front of you is just a short introduction for the need to prepare young people for their life in marriage. Well, what is marriage? Well, then we have two and a half pages of Bible quotations explaining what is marriage. So, Pastor Chair, I think this discussion is extremely important, and I thank you the opportunity to highlight how our *Church Manual* is so full of important principles based in the Bible and The Spirit of Prophecy that guide the Church to move forward with the assurance that God is leader in this Church and there is no doubt about what we are doing here.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Also, let's remember that in the *Church Manual* we have the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of our Church, and one of them is on the family, the marriage between a man and a woman. So, it's very clear in the *Church Manual*. Thank you. Let's continue with our speakers. We have from English Zoom Victor Ahuama, Cross River Conference, WAD. Please. You need to unmute your microphone.

VICTOR AHUAMA: Thank you so much, Pastor Chair. I think this is a very important issue, and I want to thank God for inclusion of this in the *Church Manual*. Any project as important as marriage needs proper training. If you are not properly trained and you enter into a project, you are bound to fail. Under this very issue, I think the Family Ministries department of every church should be training young people, or those intending marriage on [indiscernible] of marriage. And also, I want to observe that I didn't see any period specified for people to undergo this training. This needs to be included in the *Church Manual*. After a month or two weeks, graduates should be certificated as the requirement before they enter into marriage. So, I want to really commend the Church for bringing this. If this is properly carried out, I believe that it will reduce the number of divorces that we are having in marriage and our Church should really be in a better position to really move on. So, thank you so much for bringing this up. Let us really implement this and it should go a long way to helping us to consolidate our marriages.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. We have at the moment another 18 speakers for this important subject, but let's focus the comments on the motion in order to save time. If you can say it in half a minute, let's say it and save time to hear other speakers. Let's continue with the English Zoom, Brother Jackson Mwakali, East-Central Africa Division, ECD. Please.

JACKSON MWAKALI: Can we please display the passage for the session and then read it together? I'm proposing better wording.

Okay. The first line says, “Considering that marriage is the most important and challenging of all relationships,” and so on and so forth. I have an issue with the use of the word “the most.” I think I would rather put it “one of the most important.” It’s presumptuous, I think, to say that it’s the most important. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comment. Let’s continue with microphone number 6, Josias Flores, Carolina Conference, NAD. Please.

JOSIAS FLORES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am encouraged by this inclusion. I think the research shows that premarital counseling and premarital training does make a positive difference inside of marriages. This is especially encouraged by the wording of professionally trained, and I am encouraged by hearing other delegates also emphasize this point. And moving forward, I would like to make a suggestion. Especially as we are still trying to get past this COVID pandemic, we have seen the need for mental health awareness and professional counseling for young people and members, adult members alike. And so, moving forward, if we could be aware of these issues, and as we make changes to our Church, please let’s reach out in positive ways with mental health and make efforts to reach out to our young people who may be suffering and our adult members alike. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Let’s go to microphone number 1, Rumbidzai Sithole, Trans-European Division. Please.

RUMBIDAZAI SITHOLE: Rumbidzai Sithole. I’m speaking on behalf of the youth. I absolutely welcome this recommendation but from what I understand of the *Church Manual*, it takes more than adding a paragraph. It also takes enforcing it in the world Church. So, I’m wondering, with this addition, is there a difference in training in pastors? Do the local churches of the conference get extra funding for these professional people? Because me and my peers who are not just young people who get married, if we go back to our local churches next month, year, and I say I want to get married, will the local church

have the resources to enforce this? So, from my understanding, it's not just a manual with an added paragraph, but something that needs to be done. But I do love the recommendation.

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

Let's go to the microphone number 7, Beniah Ojum, Eastern Nigeria Union Conference, WAD. Please.

BENIAH OJUM: Thank you, Chair. I am pleased that at this time we can discuss topics like this. I want to join in saying that this is a very important topic. We have witnessed several problems with marriages where I come from. But I'm joining one of the speakers who emphasized a time frame for this training, and if it is possible, we make it compulsory for people who are about to marry. This is going to help us to forestall several issues we are having recently. Mr. Chair, I so submit, and I urge delegates to vote in favor of this amendment.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Let's go to the next speaker in microphone number 7. Michael Nixon, General Conference. Please.

MICHAEL NIXON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There was a reference made to an effort to reduce the rate of divorce, and I think that is a valuable and great endeavor. But I did want to speak about the issue of divorce for a moment.

Divorce is one of the most difficult and tragic things that a person can experience. It very much is a death. And I want to provide this for the consideration of the Committee. This might be covered elsewhere. But I think that just as it is important for there to be premarital counseling from trained professionals, the local church body should also be empowered to have trained grief counselors to walk with fellow members who may be going through the painful road of divorce, who may be on the other side of it, who may be considering whether or not that needs to happen for them, because for a lot of people, as painful and as difficult as that is, it's unavoidable. And I think we have to name that because there are surely folks in our midst or who are watching who are either currently going through divorce

or have gone through divorce and now, they're coparenting or they're trying to figure out how to make their family whole again. But we do know, through the grace of God, that in the midst of any difficulty, God can restore, God can bring healing, God can bring restoration even when we have to make difficult, unavoidable decisions, perhaps due to abuse or other things that break down that union. So, I'd urge the Committee, if it's not covered elsewhere, to make that addition in the future. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Let's go to microphone number 7, Geoffroy Dotou, Benin Mission, WAD.

GEOFFROY DOTOU: [Translated] Thank you. I am glad this item was added to the *Manual*. Many of our youth and members don't know that preparation is needed before getting married. It is true that it is not only the preparation that will secure an enduring marriage that will last long. There are many other things or factors that are needed for maintaining a sustainable home. Now let's focus on preparation. I would like the Committee to think about after marriage, the post marriage period. In such a way that effective, efficient doors or instruments will be at the disposal of families of couples so that we will have blessed families, happy families, happy homes. This being said, I second this motion.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 4, Fredrick Nyagah, East Kenya Union Conference, ECD. Please.

FREDRICK NYAGAH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm very happy that we have entered the aspect of premarital counseling in the *Church Manual*. In Africa, particularly in Kenya where I come from, the Church membership is quite young and always facing challenges in their marriage. As I speak on family life, at times when I'm asked the questions that I'm being asked by young people are questions that could have been answered if they had received proper premarital counseling. We need not assume here that the church has the capacity to provide this. I like the idea of professional counselors. But in Africa, particularly in Kenya, we do not have many of these professional counselors. And therefore, the membership relies mostly on pastors. And these pastors are overloaded with handling many other

church issues. My plea, therefore, is we need to go one step further and ensure that our pastors are properly trained during their courses in their universities and that they are able to handle all the matters to do with premarital counseling. And secondly, they are able to inculcate the same, and mentor the departments of Adventist men and women ministries so that they are able to handle these issues. Otherwise, if we don't do this, we are going to witness what is happening in other parts of the world, where young people, the Church is not going to grow because the greatest method through which the membership is growing in Africa is through in-reach where families are bringing up their children to continue the Church. If we do not counsel these young people, they will not bring up their children well, and we are going to have an aging and a dying Church.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. I want to advise the delegates that we have many speakers yet, and we have less than one hour for noontime, 12:30, when we will have the last *Church Manual* Committee before the afternoon session. The items that we are not able to consider now in the morning will not be able to be reviewed in the Committee if needed. So, we need to have that in mind. Thank you. Let's go to the next speaker, microphone number 2, Stefan Giuliani.

STEFAN GIULIANI: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move the previous question.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Okay, thank you. Parliamentarian, let's go to vote. Nevertheless, I saw in the microphone many of you. I think you love, and you appreciate this paragraph. And I see Dr. Willie Oliver that was the main contributor. So, thank you so much to all of you because it's very important to have professional people helping our young couples preparing for marriage to be properly trained. Thank you, Willie.

TODD MCFARLAND: Mr. Chairman, the ballot on the previous question is open. You have three minutes to vote.

[Voting]

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: The motion to call the question carries with 1,292 votes for “yes”, 95.1 percent. Let’s go to the main motion.

[Voting]

The motion passes with 98.3 percent, 1,333 votes in favor. Thank you so much. Very important motion. Let’s go to the next one. Agenda item 435.

GERSON P SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. As you can see on the screen, this is in reference to number 439 in your agenda, item number 435. In the agenda book is page 107.

This is a very important item and talks about the purpose of organization. This amendment expresses the importance of finding new ways to reach the varied and diverse cultures of the world with the Seventh-day Adventist message, including the forming of new mission groups.

So, the recommended action is to add the word “Missionary” at the beginning of this section, Purposes of Organization. And as you can see, mission is the emphasis in the first four paragraphs of this section.

So, the first paragraph reads “Our mission remains unchanged wherever we find ourselves in the world. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been organized for the purpose of a mission. However, the way in which we fulfill that mission will of necessity take a variety of forms due to different cultural and societal norms.”

We cannot, we should not change the message. But in certain places, it needs to be packaged in a specific way to make it more relevant and understandable. So, this introduction highlights the importance of adapting not the message but the format or the strategy that we use to present the message.

The second paragraph talks about the conditions Seventh-day Adventists face in sharing the message of Jesus to people of other religions largely parallel those that the apostles encountered.

Sometimes we think that we live in a difficult world. Well, go back and read again the Book of Acts. You're going to see how difficult it was for Paul and others to preach the gospel during that time.

And the following paragraph talks about groups being formed to lead the people from a non-Christian religion into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. To be clear, we're not talking about small group ministries. We're talking about groups of believers, maybe not even big enough to be organized as a company or as a church, but it is a group of believers that are being brought from a world religion to be followers of Jesus. Informing such groups, theologically sound culturally informed plan of action should be prayerfully developed and followed to guide these new believers into membership. These groups should be established and nurtured in collaboration with local administration and guidelines of the world Church. Leaders of these groups should make every effort to lead the people into membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Church is a missionary community, and it exists to fulfill this purpose. And then follows the rest of the text as it is in the *Church Manual*. Pastor Chair, I move to accept the recommendation.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. It's moved and seconded. On microphone number 5. Ngoy Kyala, Quebec Conference, NAD.

NGOY KYALA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to speak in support of the motion and these additional material to the *Church Manual*. And as I go through this proposal, I really appreciate that we have to consider the context where we are bringing the message. However, I see that it is only addressing the issue of non-Christian religion. I would prefer that instead of only non-Christian religion background it stated non-Christian only, because as I see it, some areas are not even religious but are secular. I would prefer that we say from a non-Christian background or something like that so it can include every background context. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Let's go to microphone number 6, Flaviano Dalisay, Southeastern California Conference, NAD. Please.

FLAVIANO DALISAY: Mr. Chair, in considering the topic of mission, it seems that our Church unintentionally, mistakenly defined the mission of the Church in item 430, page 101, lines 13 to 19, which was voted without further debate or discussion. The mission as stated in that item is apparently defined as only to make disciples which is not in alignment with the Church's mission to also proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels' Messages in preparation for His soon return. As it is already voted, I move to reconsider the voted motion and revise its language to bring it into alignment. If it's not possible due to parliamentary procedure, I ask the Chair to reconsider an alternative action to make that important correction.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: We will receive the explanation of parliamentarian.

TODD MCFARLAND: All right, Mr. Chairman. A motion to reconsider is in order. It cannot interrupt, but he had the floor. It is debatable. So, Mr. Chairman, if there is a second, then we can go to the motion to reconsider.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: So, do we have a second to reconsider a previously voted amendment? Hearing none, we will proceed with the next speaker that is English Zoom, Tekjon Naibaho, West Java Conference. Please. Unmute your microphone.

TEKJON NAIBAHU: Thank you. Our leader, I just want the comments to achieve the proposed organizations. I propose to add in these amendments we can open Adventist online church, specially for unreached areas. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Let's go to microphone number 2, Hilde Huru, North Norway Conference, TED. Please.

HILDE HURU: Thank you. I also want to say that we actually want to reach more than other people from other religions. I live in one of the most highly secular areas of Scandinavia, probably of the world. We have had the privilege in our church to have a lot of refugees coming from the Middle East. Some of them were seeking our churches because of the way we were able to meet them and help them

in the community. And I have found it is easier to get Muslims, which is supposed to be very hard to evangelize, but it's easier to get them to join and to take part and to walk into our churches than the secular Norwegians. So, I really want us to have a focus on mission to all people. I even think that we should have a special focus on reaching secular people. So, I would also like us to change this from non-Christian religions to non-Christians. And I also would say that we who are working in this very secular environment, we need understanding from the GC and the world Church of the special challenges we face when working with secular people. Many of them have a keen sense of fairness; so, these people will not even listen to what we have to say if they perceive us as unjust or discriminatory or abusing our power in the way we relate to others. So many of our male pastors in our churches have humbled themselves and given up their ordained ministerial credentials in order to touch these secular people with the love of Christ. So please, do not interfere with this but allow us to fulfill the mission God has given to us, which is spreading the everlasting gospel in this part of the world where He has put us to live and to work. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comments. We have a point of order on microphone number 7, Dr. Tim Standish. Please.

TIM STANDISH: Thank you, Brother Chairman. The motion that was made earlier that you asked about a second to was in fact seconded by our sister sitting right down here, and I would like us to go back to that. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: From here we were not aware of any second, because of that, I looked to my colleagues, we were not aware of any second, then we rule to continue with the comments that we are receiving at the moment.

TIM STANDISH: I'm well aware of that. However, women are not invisible in our Church. Her hand was distinctly raised directly in front of you and in the front section. Right there. Can you see her now? There she is.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Now I can see her, but before we were not able to see her. And since that I ruled to continue, we will need to continue. Thank you so much for your comments.

TIM STANDISH: In that case, Brother Chairman, I would like to resubmit the motion that was made.

TODD MCFARLAND: That motion is out of order because a motion to reconsider cannot interrupt the business, and the speaker is on a point of order so it would be out of order at this time, Mr. Chairman.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your understanding and support. Let's continue with the speakers in microphone number 7, David Trim, General Conference. Thank you, David.

DAVID TRIM: Thank you, Brother Chairman. I broadly support this. I do have one concern, which is the section originally intended to assert the importance of organization. If you look at the two quotations from Ellen White that used to comprise this section, that's what they're saying. So, it's talking about how our Church structure is crucial. And at the moment, by changing it to make it the missionary purpose of organization, it creates an odd disjuncture between the existing text and the proposed new text. I have a simple solution for that, which is that on line 41 it be revised to say the Church is a missionary community and its organization exists to fulfill this purpose, and then the rest of the text will follow very naturally from that. So, I think adding just one word can make this whole section hang together more coherently.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you, David. Gerson?

GERSON P SANTOS: Pastor Chair, I think this is very important recommendation. I am taking notes here.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. The next speaker is microphone number 6, Paul Bhaggien, Southern Asia Division, SUD. Please.

PAUL BHAGGIEN: Thank you, dear Chair. I'm very much in favor of this motion. However, I do have some observations. On the proposed section for inclusion. I really like the way the section begins, acknowledging the diversity of challenges to mission in the global fields, necessitating flexible approaches to sharing Christ. However, as we progress to the end of this proposed section, ironically, the flexibility seems to be lost in a series of rigid prescription culminating in line 38 where it reads—and I quote—“leaders of these groups should make every effort to lead the people into membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” Coming from a sensitive region of the world where religious conversion is often met with persecution and even death, I would still recommend that our approaches be as flexible to encourage innovation and creativity. Any rigid prescription would only kill the mission of the Church. I believe as a Church, we do recognize that while there may be individuals like Cornelius, the Ethiopian official, or the jailer of Philippi, there may be others like Nicodemus who may choose to be secret followers of Christ until an opportune time. Another question that I'd like to pose is what is the mission of the Church? And going back to line 31, it looks like the mission of the Church as proposed here is to lead people into the membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I'd like to ask, is that really our mission? Or is it to lead people to Christ? Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments. Let's go to microphone number 2, Stefan Giuliani, Inter-European Division, EUD.

STEFAN GIULIANI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few editorial suggestions. One is following up on what other previous speeches have said already and that is in line 34 on page 107, issue with talking about a non-Christian religion, and I think that could be resolved by adding “or worldview,” for then it would be saying from a non-Christian religion or worldview, and that should cover pretty much everybody. I'm also concerned with the mission, that it appears in this sentence that our mission is to make members. However, our mission, as we have noted before today, is to make disciples. And then, a third item is in regard to lines 16 and 17, those first two sentences, it feels to me that it would be better

to change their order so to start with “the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been organized for the purpose of mission,” and then continue with, “our mission remains changed wherever we find ourselves in the world.” I think that would add to the flow of reading. And unless you have planned to take the— the suggestions that have been mentioned so far to the Committee anyway, I would move that this item be referred to Committee.

GERSON P SANTOS: It’s the pleasure of this body if we will meet during lunchtime, we can include another item. We have several.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Okay. Let’s take it back to the Committee. Thank you. A few more want to speak. Microphone number 8, Monday Benson, West-Central Africa Division, WAD.

MONDAY BENSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I stand to support the motion on the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be properly defined and included in the amendment of the *Church Manual*. You see, it appears that the mission of the Church has been diluted considerably in the sense that when we came into the Church, evangelism was the core assignment. In fact, it was the motivator. Evangelism was the thing that inspired us to remain consistent in the Church. But as time goes on, the Church system began to look into certain other things within the Church system, that is, instead of reaching out to the unreached within the context of the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ when He says go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations now, that is very important and wasn’t apparently a suggestion but an order. And then for us to be judged righteous before God, we need to be consistent in obedience to this marching order. And so, it does not really suggest whether it is within the Christian community or the secular world, but rather what Jesus Christ was saying is that it should be to all the world. Whether it is a believer or a nonbeliever, an atheist or a Christian, we should reach out with the gospel of the Three Angels’ Messages to the world. Now, defining it further, I would stand to say that the Church should include in the amendment of the *Church Manual* that our core assignment in

this particular life today is to reach out to the world because it is the only enterprise that has a word in the present world and even in the life to come.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Thank you. Let's go to a point of order in microphone number 5, Rambelani Maligudu, Northern Conference, SID.

RAMBELANI MALIGUDU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I seek clarification. Is the motion to refer an item back to the committee not supposed to be seconded and debated? I realize that this is the second item since we began this meeting which was referred back without any second and debate.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comment and the parliamentarian will explain it.

TODD MCFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We covered this, I think a day or two ago, but I understand it's been a long time. It has been our custom and practice at a General Conference Session for a number of times when there are standing committees, and those standing committees are set, to consider items for, at the discretion of the Chair, to take certain items back to the Committee just as a routine matter. And when the Chair sees it in his or her wisdom to do that, then we do not vote on the motion to refer. There have been other times when in the chair's discretion, they felt that the item was not something they were willing just to take back and instead was to be voted and debated. So that's why you hear us talking about it. It's because of our special structure here to consider items. And one of the reasons for this is, we want to hear input, we want to hear ideas, but trying to do that in a group this large and amend and draft on the floor is very difficult. And so that has been our normal process, and that's why you see the discrepancy there, Mr. Chairman.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you, Dr. Todd. You see that it was planned to have a noontime Church Manual Committee to give opportunity for any suggestion for the Committee to review any of the suggested amendments. So that was the reason, for some items, we are able to bring again to the committee. We have a few more speakers for this motion, microphone number 1, Max Mckenzie-Cook, British Union Conference, TED.

MAX MCKENZIE-COOK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I speak in support of this motion. Being a pastor for many years in the UK, the mission context is quite complex, and so I appreciate the idea of various expressions of ministry. I would like to make a suggestion going forward. We have a robust set of processes and policies which revolve around the normal way we do church. Different expressions need different sets of skills and understanding. It has an unintended consequence of being seen as a second-class ministry. Going forward, if we could continue to develop the idea of legitimatizing different expressions of ministry, especially where it's needed in certain contexts, so that it's normalized with our pastors and our members. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much. Let's hear again from the Himalayan Section, SUD. If you can unmute, Bhaju Shrestha, English Zoom.

BHAJU SHRESTHA: Mr. Chairman, when we go to our communities, are we presenting ourselves as the Sunday-keeping Christian Church (that doesn't keep the ten commandments)? Or are we reflecting Christ? Are we to reflect the Adventist Church or Christ? We are to give the positive impact of Christ in our lives and through our people. People don't have a problem against Christ, they have a problem with Christians who don't keep the commandment and who don't keep the Sabbath and who go to church on Sunday. And so, I wonder whether there is some way that you could accommodate the concept that we are the body of Christ, we are not just the Church. Thank you very much.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you for your comments, and we have a point of order, microphone number 5, Boyce Mkhize, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, SID.

BOYCE MKHIZE: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Is it not so that when the Chair has granted that the matter be referred to the Committee, that we should cease discussion thereon because then the discussion becomes counterproductive? If that is not upheld as a point of order, I would like to call the previous question, Mr. Chair.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Well-taken, your comment. But since this is a point of order, you cannot make a motion. The idea of letting other speakers to comment is because we are bringing it back to the Committee, and we need to know what the suggestions are that you want us to consider. But, if we cut the speakers, then we will change only a few and later when we bring it back, what will happen if you have more comments? We will not have any other *Church Manual* Committee. That was the reason.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. Microphone number 3, Wesley Szamko, Southern Asia-Pacific Division, SSD.

WESLEY SZAMKO: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I want to speak in favor of this motion. I want to say that I highly appreciate the mission focus but also bring this focus to the local church. I want to speak about the organizational aspect of this action. As the Adventist Mission Director for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, one of the greatest challenges that we face in doing mission are groups who are highly resistant to mission. When we reach them, we face challenges in knowing what to do with them because oftentimes this brings danger or risk to the local organizational level or to the local church itself. As local churches are here encouraged to engage in mission in this way and are being instructed on structure, I wonder, as I believe we are already taking this back for reevaluation, if there would be value in considering that within this particular action.

What I would like to suggest is, again, at times church in areas experiencing high political or religious tensions may suffer hardship when bringing people from certain ethnicities or faith backgrounds into fellowship. In such cases, the local church should consult with the conference and union leadership to determine the most effective structures for mission. So, Mr. Chair, I would like to suggest that perhaps something such as this could be considered by the Committee when they're looking, particularly as this is talking about organization for mission.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. Pastor Gerson, you were able to take notes? Thank you so much. Let's go to the next speaker from the English Zoom, Glen Samuels, West Jamaica Conference, IAD.

GLEN SAMUELS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I speak in broad commendation to the *Church Manual* Committee and in support of the item on the floor. I'd like to ask the Chairman if we could, especially in acknowledgment of the diversity and challenges in sharing the gospel, since we're putting into the *Manual*, I think particularly that most of our local churches are accustomed to funding without any problem the usual, traditional approaches. I suggest that we include in this segment the acknowledgment of the power and value of digital evangelism, thus allowing our local church boards to understand that it's okay to fund digital media evangelism. Thank you, Chairman.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you so much for your comment. Let's go to microphone number 5. The two last speakers are in microphone number five, Sandra Colon, Central California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, NAD.

SANDRA COLON: I'd like to call question on the motion.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: The motion to call the question has been seconded.

[Voting]

The motion carries with 98.7 percent for "yes," 1,280 votes. Let's go to the next agenda item.

GERSON P SANTOS: 426. That's the agenda item number. It's on page 93 of your agenda book. Let me check again. Yes, page 93, item 426. The reference number is 440-22. This is referring to "Church Board Cannot Grant Letters." The rationale behind this recommendation is that this amendment allows the church business meeting to be informed of a member's request to be removed from membership. So, we have a couple of lines being recommended here on page 54 about membership in Chapter 6. And the paragraph, "Church Board Cannot Grant Letters." And then you see on line 17 and 18, I will read, "The church may be informed of the member's request, but no discussion will take place." As you remember, before we voted on the item regarding that only the church can recommend a member to—membership to be retired from the church, from the church roll. And there are three categories we mentioned. One is by vote of the church in business meeting. The second one is by death of the

member. And the third one is member's request. So, we are addressing the last one, which is in the case of a member's request. And the addition here is that even though the member may request that, no debate will take place on that case. But the church would be informed of that request. And the rationale behind, Pastor Chair, just one more minute, maybe this will save some time in the comments later, but I think this more like a church family, and I think in my own house, if I have dinner with my family every day, and all the members of the family are there for dinner every day of the week, and then one day something happens, and one of the members of the family just steps out and says I don't want to be part of this family anymore. And then in the afternoon, we meet again for dinner, and nobody says a word or doesn't even say, well, we are missing someone here? I think it's kind of weird. And many pastors have been talking to me, we had this discussion in Annual Council, we brought this to those who were there in Battle Creek when we had Annual Council there. And the recommendation was presented to be brought as an information to the Church, then we considered that the following Annual Council, we brought the item again, and this is the recommendation we are bringing. We are not suggesting that we should discuss this in a business meeting, but if the member requests to be removed from the membership roll, the church as a family needs to be informed of that, but no comments, no debate takes place after that information is shared. So, I move Mr. Chair, we receive and accept the recommendations.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: Thank you. It's moved and seconded. And we go to the comments. Pay attention to what is in lines 18, 19, and 20. "Efforts should be made to restore the individual to the church family." Gerson mentioned that we had already, but we are considering the line to be added there, as you can read in the proposal. We have somebody who wants to speak in microphone number 2, Jaanus-Janari Kogerman, Estonian Conference, TED.

JAANUS-JANARI KOGERMAN: Thank you, Chair, I fully support this motion because this is a fundamental right of believer to leave the Church if he or she wishes so and also the right of the church

family to know who are the members of the church. Therefore, and in order to save the time of this body as well, I will move to the previous question. Thank you.

GUILLERMO E BIAGGI: The motion is seconded, and we are ready to vote.

[Voting]

The motion carries with 99.2 percent “yes,” 1,289 votes. We will conclude our business session this morning just on time. Pastor Rudy from SSD, if you’re so kind to pray from microphone number 3. Thank you, Elder Rudy, for your life of dedication and ministry to the Church. Let’s stand for prayer.

[Prayer by Rudy Baloyo.]