



General Conference Executive Committee Newsletter

An informative publication for members of the General Conference Executive Committee as a service through the office of the Chair

MAY 2020

Unusual times call for unusual methods of carrying out our God-given mission. During the past several weeks it has been exciting to see how the Seventh-day Adventist Church at all levels, including its institutions, pastors, teachers, and members have come together to find creative, effective ways of moving forward in spite of limitations coming from the recent global pandemic. As we see the wonderful outreach and nurture being done through so many different channels and platforms, we can truly say with Paul, “the word of God is not bound” (2 Tim. 2:9)!

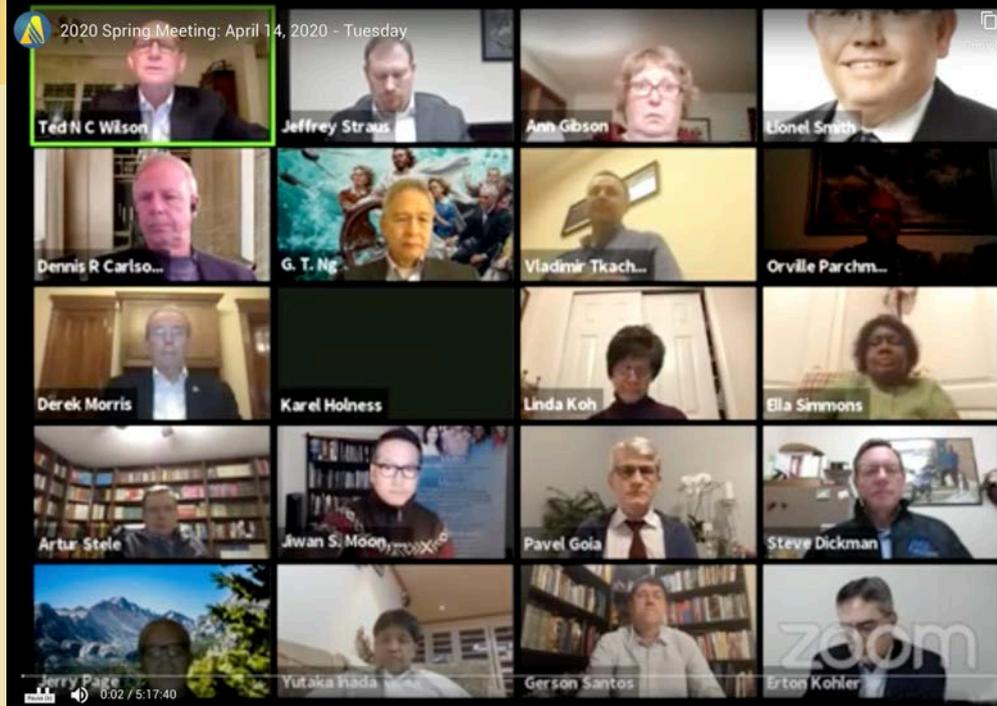
As leaders, we have needed to adapt in ways we could not have imagined, including holding worldwide meetings completely on electronic platforms, such as Zoom. The recent Spring Meeting was one such case when we met together to discuss the business of the Church. This issue of the ECN provides an overview of those meetings, including links for more information.

While we may not know precisely what the future holds, let us continue moving forward in confidence in Total Member Involvement, saying to the Lord, “I WILL GO” proclaim the Three Angels’ Messages, looking not “at the things which are seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). “JESUS IS COMING! GET INVOLVED!”
Maranatha!

TED N.C. WILSON, PRESIDENT
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH



EDITORIAL



HIGHLIGHTS SPRING MEETING: APRIL 14-15, 2020

Due to the global pandemic of COVID-19, Spring Meeting was held, for the first time, completely electronically. Meetings were held using the Zoom platform April 14-15, 2020, from 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. (EDT). These hours were chosen to accommodate as many time zones as possible.

While other reports have been published regarding Spring Meeting, we hope this provides a helpful overview of the two days of online meetings. We invite you to click the links for more information.

WORSHIP PRESENTATIONS

Each day began with inspiring, practical Biblical presentations by Pastor Mark Finley. On Tuesday, Finley addressed the issue of spiritual personal protective equipment (PPE) and how to protect oneself from a virus even deadlier than COVID-19.

“Church administrators, pastors, departmental directors, and gospel workers of all types . . . need personal protective equipment,” he said. “If in our busyness we neglect our personal protective equipment, we are likely to be infected with the virus of sin.”

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Quoting Paul in Ephesians 6:12,13—“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

“The armor of God is our PPE—our personal protective equipment against the virus of sin,” Finley stated. [Read more of his presentation here.](#)

Wednesday, Finley focused on the love of God. “Many asking, where is God in all this? . . . If God is love—and He is—wherever love is, God is prompting and motivating that love. He is motivating unselfish

behavior. He is in the heart of every physician, every nurse, every medical service provider who is ministering compassionately on the front lines of COVID-19.” Finley then drew the comparison of these selfless front-line heroes, who are willing to risk everything to save earthly lives, with front-line spiritual workers, as he quoted 2 Cor. 5:14, “For the love of Christ constrains us . . .”

“What should hold us back from risking our lives, from leaving the comfort zone that surrounds us to



give people the opportunity for eternal life . . . to share our lives and resources for the salvation of others?” he asked.

The presentation, beginning at 19:10, [may be viewed here.](#)

FINANCIAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

“Our dependency on God for His guidance and sustaining power is today more relevant than before,” said Juan Prestol-Puesán, General Conference Treasurer, as he began his report. “Our current world dilemma is placing before us significant questions. We ended our quinquennium on a positive and strong note, but we are now facing new realities. However, in the middle of an economic slowdown of global proportions . . . we feel encouraged and choose to remain positive, hopeful, and resilient,” he said.

In 2019 the finances of the General Conference ended on a positive note, and so ended the quinquennium 2015-2019, reported Prestol-Puesán.

Highlights from the Treasurer’s Report include:

■ At Annual Council 2019 we projected a break-even, or better. We commented on three critical variables that needed to remain aligned, 1) level of gross tithe and offerings reported to stay as budgeted or better; 2) exchange fluctuation of relevant currencies to remain within specific limits, and 3) holding expenditures and

allocations down. To these three, a fourth one was added. Our investment earnings did better than expected and gave us a net asset increase through December 31, 2019.

■ Net Assets increase was \$2,599,228.39. Working Capital and Liquidity showed slight increases, and depreciation funding entries were recorded for the years 2018 and 2019. As the operations for 2019, and as the quinquennium 2015-2019 come to a conclusion, reserve funds set aside to balance the budget for 2019 if needed, remained untouched.

■ The Operating Cap report is comprised of two major elements—the operating cap itself (2% of gross World Tithe) and GC headquarters office operating expenses that must remain under this limitation. With normal restraint it is typically not too difficult to stay under the cap in the years when tithe increases, but as we experienced in 2015 and 2016, this can be very challenging when Tithe goes down.

■ In 2019, the worldwide Church experienced a decrease in Global Tithe in the amount of US\$120 million. Nevertheless, the good news is that with the Lord’s blessing and the careful work of many people, resulted in Actual Operating Expense of approximately US\$44.1 million, which was US\$4.3 million under the approved annual budget and almost US\$4 million under the Operating Cap calculated at year end.

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■ In percentage terms the Actual Operating Expense in 2019 was 91.7% percent of the cap.

■ Related to the Tithe Parity action of Annual Council 2019, we are recommending the reduction of three elected positions. The Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committee received a full disclosure of the package of reductions of elected/appointed/support personnel effective beginning August 1, 2020. The budgeted value of the intended reductions is \$1,756,410.

■ While the final impact of COVID-19 on Church life is still unknown, we are sure it will affect the finances of the church at every level. We remain confident that the Lord will fulfill His purposes even under the current circumstances.

■ We wish to express our immense gratitude to the Lord for providing the resources during 2019, and during the entire quinquennium 2015-2019 that made our program viable. We wish to thank the many volunteer local church treasurers, the treasury personnel that serve in multiple entities around the world, and the dedicated and efficient treasury and accounting staff of the General Conference and the generosity of each faithful member that made this report possible.

■ The full financial report may be seen, [beginning at 1:54:42 here.](#)

GC INVESTMENT REPORT AND ECONOMIC AND MARKET COMMENTARY

In his report, Tim Aka, GC Associate Treasurer and head of the GC Investment Group, reported the General Conference is “invested fairly conservatively, mostly in fixed income and bonds—about 90 percent—so the movement of the stock market on any year has fairly nominal impact on our investments.” He indicated there is “a lot of uncertainty in the market and a lot of things we don’t know, but there are some good indicators of what is to come.”

During his report, Aka played a short video reviewing financial history through 50 to 70-year cycles known as the Kondratieff wave. [The video, produced by ARTV, looks at not only financial trends, but spiritual and eschatological](#)

implications.

“The message I want to give to people today is not so much that we are in an economic winter, but rather that this economic winter, perhaps, is harvest time for the Church—an opportunity to finish the work that God has given us, a time when people are more receptive to the Gospel message and ready to turn to God and seek salvation,” Aka said.

Looking to financial trends leading up to the coronavirus pandemic, Aka pointed out that world markets were already unstable, a “grinding trade war” was taking place, and personal debt was on the rise. He compared the coronavirus to an already very ill patient going into cardiac arrest. He noted that the IMF [International

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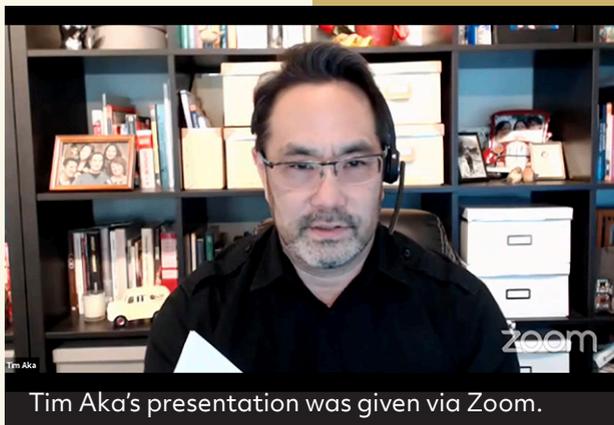
GCAS—CORE POLICIES (S 90): DEVELOPED PATHWAYS FOR COMPLIANCE

Paul Douglas, Director, General Conference Auditing Service, addressed the need for compliance with the Core Policies (S 90) and reported on steps being taken by the General Conference and Divisions to develop pathways for compliance.

Douglas indicated that according to 2018 policy compliance testing, 79 percent of church organizations had at least one violation of the core policies enumerated in GCWP S90. The areas of violation included: financial reports (34 percent), audit committees (32 percent), insurance coverage (31 percent), conflicts of interests (31 percent), service records (14 percent), and operating deficits (11 percent).

He explained what could go wrong if entities are not in compliance and explained why these policies are important to the proper functioning of the organization. He also explained the role of the three Financial Oversight Committees: Financial Statement Review Committee, Audit Committee, and Compensation Committee.

Developed Pathways for Compliance with Core Policies (S90) have been developed by the General Conference and 12 of the world divisions, and during his report, Douglas presented the plans from each of the reporting entities. The entire report can be [reviewed here](#).



Tim Aka's presentation was given via Zoom.

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Monetary Fund] reported they expect to see a Depression as bad or worse as the Great Depression of the 1930s.

“Many of our members are out of work and are facing great uncertainty in the weeks and months to come,” Aka said. “The Church will certainly feel the impact of this at every level of the organization. It’s reasonable to assume a 10-20 percent decline in giving . . . This will change so many things about our lives, our society, and about our Church. It will impact the trajectory of our work for years to come,” he added.

Nevertheless, Aka sees purpose in the crisis. “This famine, this financial crisis, may be in God’s order to prepare His people for the final work. . . . The promise of the latter rain, the refreshing [referring to Joel 2:28-31], comes only after the sorrows that we must face.

“It’s not more tithes and offerings that this Church needs so much as it is the Spirit of God in our hearts. And in this time when we have less resources and less visible things on which to rely, perhaps we can actually be more effective in sharing Jesus.

“It really is Total Member Involvement. For us to receive the power of His Spirit, we as leaders must seek ways to encourage, equip, and empower our people, to energize them to work for God, to seek the empowering of His Spirit, even as He has promised.”

The full presentation may be [seen beginning at 2:50:56 here](#).



REACH THE WORLD: “I WILL GO” STRATEGIC FOCUS (2020-2025)

During the 2019 Annual Council, a new strategic focus for 2020-2025 was voted—*Reach the World: I Will Go*. *I Will Go* was set to launch at the 2020 General Conference

Session. Since that is no longer possible, plans were presented to the Spring Meeting to launch *I Will Go* on July 3 and 4, 2020—what would have been the final weekend of the

2020 GC Session.

“Everyone needs to be part of *Reach the World: I Will Go*,” urged Ted Wilson as he invited Mike Ryan, special assistant to the president, to present plans for the July 2020 launch.

“The *I Will Go* plan covers the broad spectrum of Church life—things that we have a Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy mandate to move forward with,” said Ryan. “Every aspect of what we do is in that plan. And there’s opportunity for every member of the Church to become involved with Total Member Involvement.”

“Divisions have plans to initiate this,” he added, “and we need to assist Divisions in making this very visible. People cannot participate in something they don’t know anything about.”

Mike Ryan introduced four different presenters: Gary Krause, Jennifer Stymiest, Ray Wahlen, and David Trim.

Gary Krause, GC Associate Secretary, presented the overall plan for the July launch:

July 3, 2020—Friday evening vespers program featuring testimonies, video stories, music, and more covering key objectives of *I Will Go*.

July 4, 2020—Sabbath school will involve music, mission stories, and a 40-minute lesson study on “Why Witness?” with Pastor Mark Finley, author of the Sabbath school lessons for third quarter, 2020.

July 4, 2020—A worship service featuring a dynamic sermon with Pastor Ted Wilson bridging to some of the *I Will Go* key objectives through his sermon and live interviews and video.

These special programs will focus on the *I Will Go* ten key



objectives, and will include an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, said Krause.

Information on how to connect with these live programs is forthcoming, according to Rick Kajuire, Communication Director for the Office of Adventist Mission.

Kajuire also announced the creation of the *I Will Go* website, available at IWillGo2020.org. The website contains resources for promoting *I Will Go*, including a downloadable poster that can be placed in local churches. The website is currently being translated into various languages.

Jennifer Stymiest, Assistant Director, GC Communication, explained how the Communication department is promoting the *I Will Go* emphasis, including a:

- 3 to 4-minute spot explaining *I Will Go*.
- series of Facebook Live broadcasts and podcasts featuring the *I Will Go* objectives.
- regular stream of content through articles in Adventist News Network, *Adventist Review*, *Adventist World* and other church publications.

■ series of spots for broadcast on Hope Channel, ARTV, the Adventist Church YouTube channel, and other Adventist media platforms.

Stymiest explained that the Communication department will be working with world divisions to make sure the material is translated in their areas. In addition, the department is working on a visual identity package for *I Will Go*.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN AND RESOURCE ALIGNMENT

“Resource alignment is extremely important these days,” stated **Ray Wahlen**, GC Undertreasurer. “We’re working with extremely tight budgets. Wise use has never been more important than now.”

In determining the best use of funds, Wahlen suggested the following question be asked: “Are funds being used within projects that most closely align with our missional goals and the strategic plan of the particular entity that you are working with?”

Wahlen added, “If the program or project does not fit within that strategic plan, then I would suggest

that project or plan is a waste of money, no matter how efficiently it is run.”

He explained further the need of “re-working our budgets,” going line by line in examining how resources are being used.

“We just need to make sure that everything we do is in alignment with the strategic plan,” Wahlen said. “I encourage every organization, every church, everyone, to be looking to make sure everything we do is totally aligned with our plan, and what we’ve agreed upon with our colleagues, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

“FOUNDED ON THE WORD”—STRATEGIC PLAN RESEARCH

I Will Go involves all church members in reaching the world, inspiring and equipping them to use their God-given spiritual gifts in witness and service for Christ. It is more than a strategic plan. It’s a mission-focused tool based on real data and the Great Commission.

In his presentation, “Ensuring that we are founded on the Word,” **David Trim**, Director, Archives, Statistics, and Research, laid out the *I Will Go* strategic framework and

plans for research in the new quinquennium.

“The reason for our strategic plan is to make certain we are focused on the really important matters,” he said. “And how do we know what the really important matters are? We know it by the research that we do.”

Trim noted that *Reach the World* was based on research, and still remains as the overall strategic plan, but we are now transitioning to a new strategic focus for the new quinquennium.

I Will Go has three areas of emphasis:

- 1) Mission
- 2) Spiritual growth
- 3) Leadership

as well as ten objectives and 54 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

“The KPIs are not merely aspirations or rhetoric,” Trim said. “They will be tested by research. We want our Church to continue to be anchored in the Word of God, and proclaiming the Word that is God. We want our people, and in particular, our young people, empowered by prayer and the Word of God, to say yes to mission: to say, ‘*I Will Go.*’”

The *I Will Go* booklet is available for [download here](#).

TWO-PHASE ADVISORY ARRANGEMENT

Usually, departmental advisories are held after a GC Session. However, since the Session has been postponed until 2021, the advisories will be held in two phases, announced Ted Wilson, GC President. The first phase will be held—on Zoom—in two to three months (after Spring Meeting 2020), where departments can discuss the information and strategize on how to implement the new emphasis of the strategic plan.

The second phase will take place after the Session in 2021. Most of these advisories will also take place through Zoom. “This will provide a number of ways to be more efficient,” said Wilson. “It saves time and money and gives opportunity for more people to be involved. It will also afford us better scheduling. In the economic challenges we’re facing, we need to be as prudent and careful as possible. We’re living in unusual times and we have to use unusual methods.”



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SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION REPORT

At the request of General Conference administration, world division leaders prepared reports on what they are doing to deal with the crime of sexual abuse within their territories, including prevention, educating church members, caring for victims, reporting abusers to appropriate authorities, and more. Division leaders presented their reports during the General Conference and Division Officers (GCDO) meeting on April 9. A summary of their reports was brought to Spring Meeting by Gary Krause, GC Associate Secretary.

“A large amount of time [at GCDO] was taken to listen to church leaders from each world division talk about what they’re doing to deal with the crime of sexual abuse,” said Krause. “We heard that some divisions have a very professional, very compassionate approach and they have long-standing, voted protocols and policies in place. Some even have staff who are working full-time on this issue. Other divisions are newer to this issue and they are still working through it, but there is evidence that all the divisions are addressing it.”

In addition to the verbal reports, written reports were also received and have been shared across the divisions so that all leaders can learn from each other, said Krause. “We recognize that, sadly, our church is not immune from the blight of sexual abuse in its various dimensions, but we saw evidence that the world divisions are taking it seriously . . . They’re not just abiding by the letter of the law; they are treating it aggressively, putting protocols in place for prevention, and policies so abuse and abusers are dealt with properly,” he said.

Ted Wilson, GC President, affirmed the work of the division leaders, stating, “They took this so seriously. They have worked with unions, local fields, and institutions. It has been a tremendous move forward, helping our church members to be sensitized to the situation of sexual abuse prevention—both children and adults. This is a situation that we need to be giving strong leadership in and helping our church members. Divisions will be working with their entities to try to bring about optimum arrangements to help in sexual abuse prevention.”

“Great progress has been made, certainly in plans, and by God’s grace, in practice,” Wilson said. “It is our responsibility, everyone’s responsibility, to do what they can to alert people and to bring this to the forefront.”

Acknowledgment and appreciation was also expressed regarding the resources provided through Women’s Ministries and the EnditNow program, and resources available through Adventist Risk Management.



ECD IMPLEMENTS MEMBERSHIP AND STEWARDSHIP SOFTWARE

The East-Central Africa Division (ECD) is the Church’s largest division in terms of membership, with 4.2 million members. Alain Coralie, ECD Secretary, reported how ECD is implementing the Adventist Church Membership Software to provide accurate membership accounting throughout their Division—including providing solar-powered laptops to rural churches, and training church clerks in using the membership software. In addition, the Division is providing safe and secure ways for members to return tithe and give offerings through their mobile phones, using the Church Financial Management System (CFMS) developed by ECD.

According to Jerome Habimana, ECD Treasurer, nearly 90 percent of church members in Kenya have mobile phones. “We can maximize the use of these cell phones to improve the management of our local church tithes and offerings,” he said. “CFMS is an initiative by ECD to automate the process of collecting, managing, and reporting of tithe and offerings from the local churches to the division. CFMS is primarily based on mobile money technology. It also accommodates online and traditional giving methods (cash, checks, etc.) with full integration to the bank for collection, disbursement, and direct settlement of all trust funds into the local

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TOP: Blasious Ruguri, ECD president introduces the new giving plan via cellphone. ABOVE: A Maasai farmer shows his joy in giving via his cellphone.

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conferences’ bank accounts and all non-trust funds into the local churches’ bank accounts.”

Mobile money technology is used widely in East and Central Africa, where the majority of members are farmers, small business traders, etc. The system allows them to return tithe and offerings anytime.

According to Blasious Ruguri, ECD president, “It’s been a big blessing. The membership software is very important because it improves the accuracy of our membership data. These two programs are a big blessing to us in the areas of membership and finances.” Those wishing further information may contact the ECD officers.

ANNUAL COUNCIL 2020 & SPRING MEETING 2021

On April 14, 2020 the GC Administrative Committee (ADCOM) voted to transition the following meetings **to be held online**:

1

2020 Annual Council Pre-Meetings (Sept. 29-Oct. 8, 2020)

2

2021 Spring Meeting Pre-Meetings

3

2021 Spring Meeting

Note

The 2020 Annual Council beginning with the LEAD Conference will be **held on location**, October 9-14, 2020, in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.

GC SESSION 2021

On March 19, 2020 the GC Executive Committee voted to postpone the 2020 General Conference Session to May 20-25, 2021 in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA.

■ Number of attendees will be reduced to only delegates (spouses/dependent children), a limited number of technical staff and no special guests.

■ There will be no exhibits/booths or ancillary meetings at the 2021 General Conference Session.

■ Registration for the 2021 GC Session will be May 19, 2021, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., in Indianapolis.

■ All Session meetings and Sabbath worship will be held at the convention center.

■ The GC has requested and received from hotels available room blocks, totaling 3,225 rooms.

■ Eight meals will be served during session from May 20-25, 2021. Further [details available here](#).



HELPFUL RESOURCES

Due to the global pandemic, a new **2021 Missionary Book of the Year** will soon be available: *Hope for Troubled Times*, by Pastor Mark Finley. A full report was given by Almir Maroni, Director of GC Publishing Ministries, and is [available here](#).

Signs of the Times has produced a special sharing issue, “**COVID-19: FACING THE CRISIS WITH CONFIDENCE**,” [available here](#).

ADVENTIST RISK MANAGEMENT has prepared [Information Regarding Coronavirus, including a FAQ page](#) addressing travel, property and casualty, and liability insurance issues during this global pandemic.

The **GC ADVENTIST HEALTH MINISTRIES** department has made [available on their website much information regarding the Coronavirus Pandemic](#), including links to various video resources and more.