

To Be True to Our Calling

*Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others,
as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*

1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

November 21, 2016

Executive Committee of the Pacific Union Conference

Brothers and Sisters in the Pacific Union—

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we have hope and life!

The Pacific Union Conference is a providential example of unity in diversity. While there are many ways to describe those things that might separate us—race, ethnicity, geography, gender, age, education, political affiliation—we take our life and joy from that which unites us! We are united in the gospel of Jesus Christ, our love for one another, and our commitment to the mission of sharing God's love and the message of salvation with our community and the world.

One of the great strengths of the Seventh-day Adventist church is that the community of God is recreated in each congregation through the power of the Holy Spirit and the all-embracing love of Jesus. We come together in worship and ministry each week, knowing that God will use the diversity of our history, circumstances, and gifts to bring the gospel to those around us.

The opportunity this creates is matched by an obligation to consciously and prayerfully protect our unity of purpose and mission from being threatened by factions or fissures, through faith in God and reliance on His strength and power. As a result, we can trace God's leadership and our growth for more than a century. And while most of our pioneers came to the Pacific Union from homes and communities vastly different from each other, in the community of our Adventist faith we stand together. God has truly led us in our growth and development through these many years!

From the days of our earliest SDA pioneers and missionaries, to the days when Ellen White was actually living here in the west and our Union was organized, to today with more than 225,000 members in nearly 700 churches in seven conferences, we have experienced the abundant grace and leadership of our Heavenly Father. We have learned the truth of the words expressed by Sister White that "the secret of unity is found in the equality of believers in Christ" (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Dec. 22, 1891).

We believe this is why our Adventist church in the western United States has been a leader in innovation in ministry. Our schools and hospitals are in the vanguard of education and care. The Pacific Union has provided a fertile environment for the growth of diverse and effective ministries. Our dependence upon the Holy Spirit and our willingness to be led are the bedrock of the commitments we have made to the church we love and the communities we are called to serve.

Because we are blessed by God to be called His people, the differing viewpoints within our diverse membership are no threat to our core unity. Our hearts and minds are bound together as one people by the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church, the values that have guided our development, and our commitment to mission. We are blessed to be a part of the global fellowship of Seventh-day Adventists.

Our fellowship is rooted in the worldwide ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist church, and in the work of the pioneering missionaries and believers who helped to establish the Seventh-day Adventist church in the western United States. Our witness is continually enriched by those whose customs, culture, and languages deepen our appreciation for the unifying spirit that draws us to the Father's heart. Over the years our membership has changed, but not our mission.

Every member is both disciple and evangelist, and we know firsthand that "when a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work, and it will feel the loss if the talents of both are not combined" (Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 469). Recent events in the Seventh-day Adventist church compel us to affirm our shared faith, mission, and sacred calling, and to state our conviction that "he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6, NIV).

We affirm that the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed in the Three Angels' Messages. Nothing should impede this prophetic mission.

We are committed to the fulfillment of the Gospel Commission. The primary focus that we will sustain is to shepherd our people here in the Pacific Union and to reach out to the 55 million people who live within our Union territory. It is here that, by God's grace, we will continue to model what a healthy church looks like.

The support of the global mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church is a matter of conviction, and we hold the missionaries who serve throughout the world to be our brothers and sisters. Our hearts embrace the church throughout the world as our very own. As a part of one body, we are committed to the generous support of the work of the world church.

We are committed to equality in ministry, and we reaffirm the actions of this Executive Committee and the Pacific Union Conference that stretch back more than two decades affirming the mission-critical role of women in ministry. We support the North American Division in its renewed commitment to focus resources on the development and training of a significantly increased number of women in ministry.

Perhaps no issue has received greater focus in our life together as a people. We have sought the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and have acted under the conviction of God's leadership. And God has blessed us! Our eyes have been opened to the needs of our community, to the immense task that has been given to us, and to the rich gifts of the Spirit that have been given to all of our people. We have called on God to empower His church to respond to the distinctive needs of the communities and diverse population that He has placed within our care.

We recognize Jesus Christ as the leader and authority of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are committed to being obedient to the Spirit in the issues surrounding equality in ministry. We live our lives and conduct our ministries in response to the Holy Spirit. We affirm the equality of all believers that is expressed in our Fundamental teachings.

Under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and in recognition of the diversity of practice within our community, we affirm again our unwavering support and steadfast recognition of men and women in ministry. In the Pacific Union this is a matter affirmed by our individual and collective convictions. We understand that ordination is the equity for pastoral ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist church. In this, and in all things, we will continue to be guided by the Spirit and by conscience.

We affirm that equality in ministry is not a distraction from mission—it is a fulfillment of mission. It is deeply rooted in our faith. We are committed to consciously reaching out to connect with those who may not understand why this conversation is of critical importance to our mission effectiveness. We pray that we will better understand God’s gracious leading every day.

God is empowering us to be an open, gracious, and compassionate church. We seek transparency before those who observe us. How God has led us is a sign of hope for many in the church, particularly among our young people. Our commitment is that our churches in the Pacific Union will be sanctuaries for the growth and development of our children and young people, unfettered by fear or anxiety.

To be God’s people for such a time as this requires a spirit of inquiry and a willingness to listen with care to those around us. There are voices to which we must be attentive. There are witnesses to God’s leadership from every corner of our fellowship, from every aspect of our life together. There is testimony that we must take seriously, and there are questions that our faith demands us to address.

How can we better address the realities of seeking to live in harmony with God’s plan in this time and place? What will we learn when we confront the difficult questions raised by a faith that is relevant? What happens when we are honest and thoughtful about theology and the Christian life? How shall we approach conversations about our emotional selves, and the feelings that accompany every aspect of our life together? What can we do together to create better understanding with those whose convictions differ from our own and with whom we may simply disagree? Will we listen to each other? Will we be open to the Spirit of God to minister to us individually? Will we be open to God?

We speak these commitments and questions as a prayer—knowing that the Spirit is willing to lead us into all truth. It is within this litany of commitments, affirmations, questions, and aspirations that we will find the motivating focus for truly being God’s remnant people in the Pacific Union, and for such a time as this.

As we have been called, so we call on every member, all who read this, and all those who share in this vision, to seek their place within God’s plan to transform and save the communities we serve and that He loves. Each of us is both disciple and evangelist. The variety of gifts and the diversity of our community are key to our mission effectiveness. We take seriously the words of God’s messenger, who wrote, “We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice

should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publically, to help forward this grand work. Place the burdens upon men and women of the church, that they may grow by reason of the exercise, and thus become effective agents in the hand of the Lord for the enlightenment of those who sit in darkness” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895).

As the child Samuel waited with faithfulness and patience to know the ministry to which God was calling him, we have prayed, “Speak Lord, for your servants are listening.” And the Lord has spoken to us—in our hearts, in our churches, and in the community of believers who comprise the Seventh-day Adventist church in the Pacific Union Conference. We have heard the Lord calling us to greater service and faithfulness. Our Great Commission is to carry the message of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to every person within our diverse field.

Perhaps it was this moment in the future of the church that prompted the Spirit to speak through the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White, words that take on special meaning for us at this time, that “the place, the circumstances, the interest, the moral sentiment of the people, will have to decide in many cases the course of action to be pursued,” and that “those who are right on the ground are to decide what shall be done” (Ellen G. White, “To Ministers of the Australian Conference,” Nov. 11, 1894; *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, p. 70).

The New Testament proclaims, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, NIV). It is the constancy of His love and calling that enthruses our commitment to our calling and the proclamation of the Gospel. It is the constancy of His love that draws us closer to Him, insisting that we be open and responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. “Let us then pursue the things that make for peace and build up the common life” (Romans 14:19, NEB). It is the constancy of His love that compels the community of believers to confront the inequities of the past and embrace a life together of greater faithfulness to His teachings and ministry.

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