



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

JANUARY-MARCH 2021

The year 2020 will certainly be remembered as the year when massive changes took place rapidly on a global scale! Yet in spite of the challenges, we praise God that through His strength, His last-day remnant movement continues moving forward around the world.

As leaders, we've needed to adapt in many ways, and circumstances led to some very difficult decisions, including, for the first time, holding Spring Meeting and Annual Council virtually, and postponing the GC Session—twice. Nevertheless, God has blessed in marvelous ways and we praise Him for the assurance that He will continue to guide His Church through whatever may lie ahead.

In this issue of the *ECN*, David Trim delves into the history of postponing GC Sessions, and examines the reasons for making such difficult decisions. In addition, you will find a recap of the various reports given during the January 12 Executive Committee meeting that led to the decision to postpone the Session until 2022. Also included is a Q & A with GC legal counsel, Karnik Doukmetzian. We hope you find this material helpful.

Thank you for your commitment to the Lord and His Church during these most unusual times. Maranatha! Jesus is coming soon!

TED N.C. WILSON,
PRESIDENT, GENERAL
CONFERENCE OF
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS



EDITORIAL



"IN VIEW OF THE PRESENT UNCERTAINTY": POSTPONING GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSIONS ¹

BY DAVID J. B. TRIM, PH.D., DIRECTOR
GENERAL CONFERENCE OFFICE OF ARCHIVES, STATISTICS, AND RESEARCH

*S*eventh-day Adventists are prone to viewing current events as exceptional. Both church leaders and church members regularly declare there is no precedent in our past for some recent, present-day development. Ironically, in spite of Ellen White's oft-invoked injunction that Seventh-day Adventists "have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget" our past, in practice we tend to have short memories.

Yet in reality there are few developments that are truly without precedent. And that is the case with the decision taken earlier

this year to postpone the sixty-first General Conference Session, scheduled for June 2020, to May 2021. There is not just precedent: there are several precedents. This is the fifth time a General Conference (GC) Session has been postponed, necessarily extending the terms of officials of the General Conference and its divisions, and unavoidably deferring world Church action on important matters of common concern. It will be the second time that more than five years elapses between sessions.

WORLD WAR I

It took more than half a century



Some of the delegates at the 1918 General Conference Session in San Francisco, California, U.S.A. [ASTR]

and 38 sessions before the first postponement of a General Conference Session. Originally sessions were held annually; after the twenty-eighth session in 1889 they became biennial, and then, after the thirty-sixth session in 1905, quadrennial. In 1913, the thirty-eighth session in Takoma Park ended with the expectation of meeting in 1917. But a year later, World War I began.

By the spring of 1916 North American Division (NAD) church leaders (whose territory at that point was home to 56 per cent of all church members) were concerned that “World conditions are such at the present time that we do not know what a day will bring forth”; it was doubtful that delegates “from countries outside the North American Division” would be able to travel there.

The NAD Committee voted to request the General Conference to give “prayerful consideration” to holding the thirty-ninth session early in 1918 instead of in 1917.² The GC polled leaders from around the world by mail and “found that the vote by

letter was unanimous in favor of postponement.” This is perhaps the first example of what today would be an email vote!

The result was taken seriously. The General Conference Committee (GCC) took an action “to postpone the next quadrennial session from the summer of 1917 to the earliest convenient time thereafter,” with dates to be determined, which they finally were in April 1917.³ The thirty-ninth session duly met in March and April, 1918.

There was, remarkably, no provision in the GC Constitution, as it then existed, for a session to be postponed. But the church confronted truly unprecedented circumstances, including submarine warfare which made it utterly unsafe to cross the Atlantic in 1917. Recognizing the exceptional nature of the challenges facing them, church leaders, after due consultation, acted—and surely made the correct decision in the circumstances prevailing, which were such as past generations of church leaders had never imagined.

“

There is not just precedent: there are several precedents. This is the fifth time a General Conference Session has been postponed.

Ironically, World War I was still raging and the general war situation had not greatly improved in the spring of 1918. By then, however, the naval efforts of the Allies had made voyaging to the United States safer. Church leaders probably also did not want to postpone twice. The thirty-ninth session thus took place in the spring of 1918.



Left: Charles H. Watson, GC president, 1930-1936;
Right: John L. Shaw, GC Treasurer, 1922-1936 [ASTR]

delegates. Yet when, at the 1932 Autumn Council, Watson raised the possibility of rescheduling, he first called an executive session of only the division presidents and the GC headquarters staff members of the Executive Committee to present his case—clearly, he expected it to be controversial.⁵

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The forty-second General Conference Session convened in May 1930, slightly more than six months after the Wall Street crash that kickstarted the Great Depression. Just how bad things would get was, however, not yet clear. There had been terrible economic downturns in Britain and North America in the late nineteenth century, but at that time the major national economies were fairly autonomous, while the Seventh-day Adventist Church had not yet become global. By the 1930s the interdependent nature of the world's economy worsened the effects of the Depression and disrupted every part of the Adventist Church.

In the three years after the Wall Street Crash, tithe receipts in the United States fell by 37 percent and mission offerings by 42 percent (even though membership increased by 23 percent). General Conference Treasurer J. L. Shaw had to find \$200,000 (at least \$4 million today) to cover the expenses of a session, even as he and President C. H. Watson were desperately trying to maintain foreign missionaries in place by cutting the work force in the NAD, and cutting the salaries of the remainder.⁴ Overseas, at least four of the church's eleven world divisions simply did not have the funds to send "representative delegations." Postponing the session gave the GC two more years to save the money needed for its budget and gave divisions two more years to find the money to send

Committee members saw the logic, however, not least because they recognized "the impossibility of the European and other Divisions sending representative delegations if the Conference is held in 1934," and that the only way to pay for a session then would be "by additional cuts in regular appropriations." The GC Committee voted: "That the next session of the General Conference be postponed until 1936."⁶ But the Constitution prescribed a four-year term of office, and so the terms of many "members of the General Conference staff" would expire before 1936. The Executive Committee therefore voted that these staff should "be asked to continue in uninterrupted service" up to the rescheduled Session.⁷

As a result, uniquely, there was a six-year term for GC and division officers and department directors following the forty-second session. Up to this year, this is the only time that the interval between sessions has been longer than five years.

In postponing the 1934 session, this time for *two* years, church leaders had again broken new ground, indeed had taken what some might have seen as a radical step. Again, moreover, while they had taken the only sensible course of action, they had done so, once more, without a constitutional mandate for their decision. When the forty-third session finally met in May and June of 1936, it amended Article VIII of the GC Constitution to enable the Executive Committee to postpone a session up to two years, "where special



44th Session of the General Conference of
Seventh Day Adventists
Civic Auditorium, San Francisco, Calif.
May 27—June 7, 1941
© Photo by Jos. H. Stearns, San Anselmo, Calif.

The delegates at the 1941 General Conference Session in San Francisco, California, U.S.A. [ASTR]

world conditions seem . . . to make it imperative to postpone the calling of the session.”

This provision for two-year postponement has remained in the Constitution ever since. And it would very soon be called into use. For, though surely none could have guessed it, the next two sessions would both be postponed under the new terms of Article VIII.

World War II

Church leaders firmly intended to hold the forty-fourth General Conference Session four years after the postponed forty-third session, in the late spring or early summer of 1940. But in September 1939, World War II broke out. The following month, at Autumn Council, the officers posed “The question . . . whether or not it would be advisable to go forward with plans for holding the [GC] Session in 1940, in view of the present uncertainty.” There was also concern, as in the past, about whether “a representative

conference” could be held given difficulties in travel for overseas division delegations. The minutes record: “The question was discussed at some length, quite a number being in favor of a postponement, while others felt it would be well to hold the session at the appointed time.” In light of the disagreement, a subcommittee was appointed. But it recommended, “because of the prevalence of war [and] of our not being able to have a representative delegation from our overseas divisions,” that the “Session be postponed for one year.” This was then approved.⁸

Twelve months later, the war continued, and the possibility of “a further postponement” was discussed. After another subcommittee gave it brief consideration, however, the Executive Committee decided, without further explanation, to press ahead in May–June 1941.⁹ At this point the United States was still neutral—it was also home to one in three of the church’s half million

members worldwide and would have supplied the majority of session delegates. It was likely thought better to press ahead, after five years, with whomever could come from the various foreign divisions, than to extend to six years again.

After the 1941 session, the intention was to return to the constitutionally-mandated quadrennial terms between sessions. In 1943, the dates for the forty-fifth Session were set as May–June 1945.¹⁰ By the winter of 1945, however, disquiet was growing about the propriety of holding a major international event, for though the end of the war was clearly in sight, hostilities continued, as did travel controls, rationing, and government restrictions on conventions in the United States. Some feared how the church would be perceived in the public eye if it disregarded the wartime realities on top of the serious practical concerns.

A special council was called in February “to consider whether or not



Delegates attend the 1946 General Conference Session in Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A. [ASTR]

“

The decision to postpone is one that has never been taken lightly and unadvisedly, and neither has it ever been taken without some sorrow or heartache.

we should go forward with plans for holding the . . . Session in May.” Discussions were prolonged. While several GC Committee members “spoke of the disappointment that would be experienced if the Session could not be held,” a consensus emerged for postponing, not least because (again) representation from “our overseas divisions” would be very limited. In the end, there was “general agreement that if a postponement would best serve the interests of our worldwide work, then it ought to be postponed.” The result was a voted action that “the General Conference Session that was to have been held in May of this year be postponed one year.”¹¹

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

To postpone a session is not, then, unparalleled; instead, there is quite a history of rescheduling GC Sessions, and of accordingly extending the terms of office of those elected by sessions. As we have seen in this short survey of that history, the decision to postpone is one that has never been taken lightly and unadvisedly, and neither has it ever been taken without some sorrow or heartache. It is still the case that only the Executive Committee is empowered to postpone a session and to extend what are now quinquennial, rather than quadrennial terms.

Such a decision has not been taken

for seventy-five years, during which time the size and expense of a General Conference Session have grown immensely, almost immeasurably. The new scale of GC Sessions made the decision to postpone all the more problematic, given the much greater complexity involved in rescheduling at short notice and the potentially greater financial losses.

However, in the face of truly exceptional circumstances—of two world wars and the Great Depression—Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders did not shrink from making difficult decisions that were in the interest of the denomination as a whole. The grounds included prohibitive expense in a time of limited resources, the safety of delegates, the public image of the church, and the capability of divisions to be properly represented. All of these are factors as we look ahead to the sixty-first session.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not absolutely unprecedented, but is utterly exceptional. Yet, the challenges it poses are similar to those that moved previous generations of church leaders four times to postpone GC Sessions. Further, it provides an opportunity to take stock of just how sessions have grown—of their immense expense and fearsome complexity.

Today’s church leaders have acted decisively, and with prudence (given the financial situation) and compassion (given the potential for infection) regarding 2020. They have also taken the chance to look at how the denomination “does” sessions. Nobody was happy that there was no session in Indianapolis in June 2020. No church leader can contemplate the possibility of having to postpone again with anything but dismay.



1946 General Conference Session African American attendees [ASTR]

But the church has taken the most prudent and most responsible course of action—one for which there is ample precedent in the last eleven decades. Even postponing for two years has happened before and the church emerged stronger as a result. Thus, in the decisions taken about the sixty-first session, the church leaders of today have walked—thoughtfully, carefully, and prayerfully—in the footsteps of past leaders, while still keeping their eyes on the future and our “blessed hope.”

In postponing the 2020 GC Session we are not delaying that future consummation for which we devoutly wish: the Second Coming of Jesus Christ our Lord.

ENDNOTES

¹ This article is a slightly updated version of the original, first published in *Adventist Review* online, March 20, 2020, <https://www.adventistreview.org/in-view-of-the-present-uncertainty-postponing-general-conference-sessions>.

² NAD Committee meeting, Mar. 15, 1916, Minutes (GC Archives, Record Group NA 1), vol. I, p. 349.

³ General Conference Committee meeting, May 9, 1916, in “S.D.A. General Conference Committee Proceedings” (GC Archives, Record Group 1), vol. X, pt. ii, p. 419; Spring Council, Apr. 16, 1917, *ibid.*, pp. 585-86.

⁴ Spring Council, April 27, 1932, Proceedings, vol. XIV, pt. ii, p. 653.

⁵ For financial statistics see the *Annual Statistical Reports* for 1929 and 1933; GCC meeting, Oct. 18, 1932, Proceedings, vol. XIV, pt. iii, pp. 749-50, 751; cf. W. G. Johnsson, “Weathering Financial Storms,” *Adventist Review*, Nov. 21, 1921, p. 4.

⁶ Autumn Council, Oct. 20, 1932, Proceedings, vol. XIV, pt. iii, p. 768.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Oct. 26, 1932, p. 809. Subsequently, sessions of the NAD unions were also postponed to follow the GC Session: Autumn Council, Oct. 18, 1933, Proceedings, vol. XIV, pt. iv, p. 1086.

⁸ Autumn Council, Oct. 11 and 15, 1939, Proceedings, vol. XV, pt. vi, pp. 1237, 1259.

⁹ Autumn Council, Oct. 16 and 22, 1940, vol. XV, pt. vi, pp. 1617, 1620, 1648.

¹⁰ Autumn Council, Oct. 28 and Nov. 4, 1943, Proceedings, vol. XVI, pt. iv, pp. 1103, 1144.

¹¹ Special Council, a.m. and p.m. meetings of Feb. 20, 1945, Proceedings, vol. XVI, pt. vi, pp. 1754-55. As with the postponed forty-third session, the committee also recommended that conference and union conference sessions in North America be postponed by one year: *Ibid.*, Feb. 21, 1945, p. 1764.

GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORTS

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On Tuesday, January 12, GC Executive Committee members around the world met via Zoom to consider whether or not to postpone the 2020 General Conference Session a second time due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Following the presentation of various reports covering key health, logistical, legal, and insurance considerations, the committee voted 185-9 to postpone the 2020 Session to June 6-11, 2022.

A news report was issued the same day and can be read [here](#). What follows is a more detailed report of the various presentations given during the January 12 GC Executive Committee meeting.

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS



SHERI CLEMMER
GC Meeting Planner

Sheri Clemmer, GC Meeting Planner, presented logistical points from GC Session Management through a PowerPoint presentation, and reiterated several of the points given by Dr. Landless (see his report on pp. 9-10), including quarantine requirements for those entering the U.S., CDC travel restrictions, and recommendations from Johns Hopkins University and GC Health Ministries. Other points included:

1. VISA AVAILABILITY

The U.S. Department of State has temporarily suspended routine visa services at all U.S. Embassies and Consulates. Only “emergency” visas are being issued and we do not know if our event would qualify as an “emergency.” Embassies and consulates may now enter a

phased resumption of visa services. As resources allow, embassies and consulates will continue to provide emergency and mission critical visa services and will resume routine visa services as local conditions and resources allow.

[Note: Since this presentation was given on Jan. 12, 2021, the U.S. government has declared a REQUIRED negative COVID-19 test before traveling to the U.S.]

2. INDIANAPOLIS PUBLIC HEALTH PROTOCOLS

Current protocols include the following requirements for any groups meeting in Indianapolis:

- Temperature checks
- Masks
- Hand sanitizing

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- One-way passages
- Six feet apart at all times
- Daily health questionnaire completion
- Limited entry to venues (requiring additional security)

These protocols significantly impact the logistical planning (and cost) for the session, including the need for more security and

other personnel to carry out these requirements, space needed for social distancing of delegates, and more.

3. INDIANAPOLIS POSITIVITY RATE

- The State of Indiana positivity rate is 12.8% (Indicating about 13,000 out of 100,000 individuals have tested positive for Covid-19).
- Marion County has 14.9%

(Indicating about 15,000 out of 100,000 individuals have tested positive for Covid-19) positivity rate as of January 12, 2021 (Source: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/testing/individual-states/Indiana>).

Clemmer then introduced Tim Northrop, president/CEO of Adventist Risk Management, to address GC Session insurance related issues.

ADVENTIST RISK MANAGEMENT REPORT

“Through prayer and good planning, we can keep our organization focused on mission.”

TIM NORTHROP
ARM President/CEO



Due to COVID-19 our Church, like many organizations, has made adjustments to its normal processes, including the timing of business meetings and events. In the case of GC Session, we as the Executive Committee can look to our Constitution for direction as part of our business/ministry continuity plan which allows our Church to continue to move forward nimbly, even under these unique times.

Our Constitution allows for up to a two-year postponement of Session. In effect, we have a continuity plan that allows for us to see a way to solutions that allow our Church business and ministry to continue while addressing delegate and community safety within the current safety standards.

We look to insurance to transfer risk that could result in a sudden or accidental injury or loss. As an organization we have a duty, per the law and, more importantly based on our Christian beliefs, in our planning to provide a Session environment that

considers the mitigation of certain risk. At a high level three, risk should be looked at in the following areas:

- The health and wellbeing of attendees and the community
- Legal liability
- Reputational risk

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Concerning health and wellbeing, there are certain things we will be required to do such as cleaning, social distancing, travel quarantining and COVID-19 testing. As these are not sudden and accidental in nature, they are not covered by insurance but rather by the potential cost of Session. In the event an attendee was to get sick during Session, we would be able to provide coverage solutions through insurance.

LEGAL LIABILITY

Legal liability is liability our Church could face due to not meeting legal or standards of care to the attendees or others in the community,

that often result in a lawsuit. This type of exposure can often be covered by insurance if accidental in nature.

REPUTATIONAL RISK

Reputational risk is our Church's "good name." We don't want Session to be the start of a "super spreader" event, as that could tarnish the reputation of our Church and our trusted standing in the communities

where we seek to minister. Reclaiming our good name is not anticipated in insurance.

While we acknowledge the importance of the GC Session meetings, we have weighed the exposure and examined the hazards and risks. Thankfully, through our Constitution and other plans and resources, our Church is equipped to move forward with a delay to

Session. This business planning is important to ensure the continuity of our organization and it allows us to remain nimble as we navigate unexpected adversity.

Yes, there will be unanticipated items that arise from time to time, but as leaders, through prayer and good planning, we can keep our organization focused on mission. I speak in favor of the motion before us today.

HEALTH-RELATED CONSIDERATIONS

Dr. Peter Landless, Director, Adventist Health Ministries, reported the following:

1. QUARANTINE REQUIREMENTS FOR FOREIGNERS TO THE U.S.

Currently there are restrictions for travelers from China, Iran, European Schengen area (26 countries), United Kingdom (U.K.), Republic of Ireland, and Brazil. There are exceptions but, generally, foreign nationals from these countries will not be allowed entry.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends quarantining for seven days after travel and getting tested 3-5 days after travel *if* you participated in high-risk activities during international travel. This recommendation is for U.S. travelers who have traveled internationally. Therefore, for foreign nationals traveling to the U.S., it might be reasonable to say if they participated in high-risk activities 14 days prior to departure for the U.S., they need to quarantine for seven days upon arrival. High risk activities are defined as travel from a country with a level 2 or greater Travel Health Notice (as ranked by the CDC). Other activities

included are attending large social gatherings (wedding, funeral, etc.), mass gatherings (parades, protests, sporting events), crowded restaurants, bars, or fitness centers, public transportation hubs, travel on cruise/boats.

As of January 4, 2021, travelers returning to the U.S. from the U.K. (or having a layover in the U.K. greater than 24 hours) will be required to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test in order to board the airplane. The airlines will deny boarding for positive results or no proof offered of negative results. This applies to U.S. citizens as well as any permitted foreign nationals.

There are no quarantine requirements for Marion County, IN, (home of Indianapolis) related to travel. Only self-quarantine if testing positive for COVID-19 or having contact with positive case.

2. WHAT ARE THE GENERAL PUBLIC HEALTH PROTOCOLS IN THE U.S.?

Currently, wearing a mask, social distancing (6 feet or 2 meters), avoiding crowds, avoiding poorly ventilated areas, washing hands frequently, covering coughs/sneezes,

"The GCHM Department has been carefully monitoring the pandemic and all its many ramifications."

DR. PETER LANDLESS
Director, Adventist Health Ministries



cleaning/disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, staying home if ill are still the recommended protocols for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

As an organization we should also be mindful of the possible hospital capacities in Indianapolis at the time of the GC Session—not only for COVID-19 related conditions, but for medical services in general. This consideration helps us to make prudent decisions, protect the safety of our attendees and the community, and safeguard the good reputation of our Church.

Any restrictions on the federal level could be changed by the new Biden administration due to be sworn in on January 20, 2021. Currently, they appear to be set to expire on January 21, 2021 with the end of the Trump administration.

3. WHAT ARE THE LATEST REPORTS FROM JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY (WHICH IS TRACKING THE COVID SITUATION PERHAPS MORE CLOSELY THAN ANY OTHER PROFESSIONAL/ ACADEMIC INSTITUTION)? WHAT IS

THE RECOMMENDATION FROM THE GC HEALTH MINISTRIES DEPARTMENT (GCHM)?

We were able to speak with Dr. Gilbert Burnham, professor of Public Health (primary affiliation, International Health) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health today. In the light of the COVID-19 surges occurring in the U.S. and many regions around the world, the emergence of a more aggressively infectious strain, and the slower than expected delivery of vaccines (e.g., only 2 million of the targeted 20 million doses given in the U.S. by December 31, 2021), the advice to postpone the 2020 GC Session to 2022 if possible, remains in place.

The GCHM Department has been carefully monitoring the pandemic and all its many ramifications, as well as consulting with international experts and scientists on the issue. The pandemic does not appear to be near to coming under control. A super-infectious strain of the SARS-CoV-2 has recently emerged which both aggravates the situation and will most likely delay mitigation of the pandemic. Travel and quarantine requirements are frequently being revised, and a number of countries

are returning to full lockdown, all within six months of the current projected date (May 2021) for the 2020 GC Session. Convocations of large numbers of people have been proven to give rise to the “superspreading” effect, and we as a Global Church wish to model best public health practices and prevention principles.

Taking all the aforementioned factors into account, the GC HM Department fully believes that it is prudent, as well as being practical, responsible stewardship, to postpone the GC Session until 2022, giving this unusual and difficult situation the optimal time to settle and for the Session to take place in more normal, predictable and manageable circumstances, should the Lord tarry.

OTHER SOURCES:

- <https://covid19.who.int/>
- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub>
- <https://www.who.int/travel-advice>
- <https://www.iata.org/en/youandiata/travelers/health/>



Taking all the aforementioned factors into account, the GC Health Ministries Department fully believes that it is prudent, as well as being practical, responsible stewardship, to postpone the GC Session until 2022.

SECRETARIAT REPORT

Executive Secretary of the General Conference, G.T. Ng, shared the results of a survey measuring the likelihood of delegates attending the 2020 GC Session, that had been re-scheduled for May 2021. The survey was sent to delegates from all division and attached territories in November/

December 2020. The three slides below illustrate the survey results.

Ng noted that had the survey been given in January 2021, the results would have been even higher (of those not planning to attend) due to the resurgence of the coronavirus pandemic.

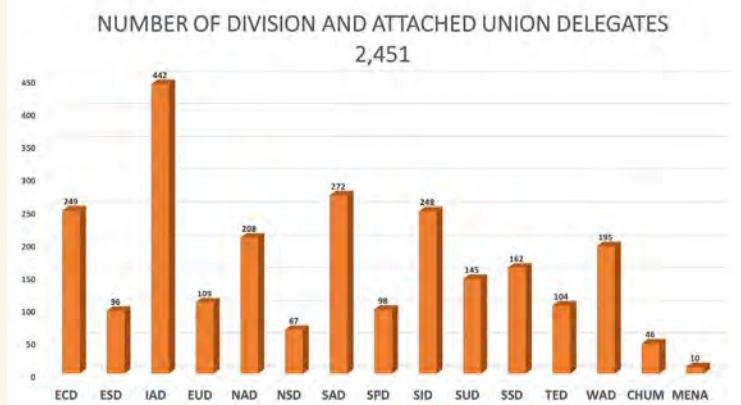
“The recommended proposal came to the GC Executive Committee following the regular process of being supported by the President’s Executive Advisory Committee, the GC Administrative Committee and the General Conference and Division Officers.”

G. T. NG
Executive Secretary
General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists

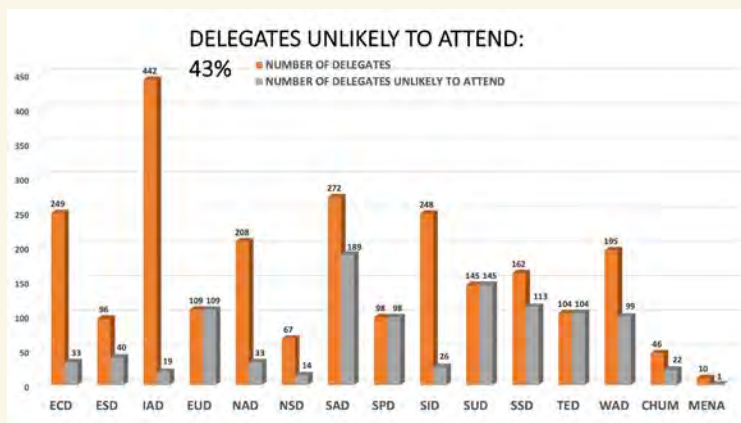
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THE RECOMMENDED PROPOSAL

The recommended proposal came to the GC Executive Committee following the regular process of being supported by PREXAD (President's Executive Advisory Committee), the GC Administrative Committee (ADCOM), and the General Conference and Division Officers (GCDO).

The item was read by Hensley Mooroven, GC Undersecretary. Following a brief discussion, it was voted 185 to 9.

PREXAD/ADCOM/GCDO/GCC to GGM

2020 GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION POSTPONEMENT

WHEREAS, The General Conference Executive Committee took an action (GCC 20-7) to postpone the 2020 General Conference Session to May 20-25, 2021; and

WHEREAS, World conditions have not significantly improved and remain uncertain, making the holding of the General Conference Session unpracticable; and

WHEREAS, The General Conference Constitution, Article V, Sec. 1, allows for the postponement of the General Conference Session not to exceed two years; it is

VOTED,

1. To postpone the 2020 General Conference Session to June 6-11, 2022, in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA.
2. To note that the current term of office for officeholders will continue until June 6, 2022, or until their successors in office have been appointed/elected. The subsequent term of office will end when the scheduled 2025 quinquennial General Conference Session convenes.
3. To reaffirm that based on Article X, Sec. 3, of the General Conference Constitution, divisions may appoint laypersons, pastors, and frontline workers as representatives to the General Conference Executive Committee, if necessary.
4. To reaffirm that based on Article XIV, Sec. 2, of the General Conference Bylaws, divisions may appoint members of their executive committees, as necessary, and in harmony with division working policy.



TREASURY ITEMS

Juan Prestol-Puesán, GC Treasurer/CFO, provided a brief summary report on GC Finances, pre-closing of FY2020. He began by thanking all of the division officers, unions, and local fields they represent for facing the challenges of administering the Church throughout this past year under the varying degrees of difficulties presented by COVID-19.

His report included the following:

Although the results of the 2020 operations will be unknown until all the reports are received and the financial statements are audited, we are sharing general impressions based on the November 2020 financial statement, and the anecdotal information and general observations on 2020.

We reported in November 2020 an operating loss due to lower tithe, mission offerings, investment income, and currency exchange impact experienced during 2020. The liquidity level of the GC is approximately \$20 to \$23 Million below the liquidity level experienced in 2019.

The anticipated impact of the Tithe Parity program with the North American Division began January 2021 with a lower liquidity than desired, and the expected operating losses of the next five years will pull the GC liquidity level lower than desired.

We informed the GCDO group that four Treasury employees have been terminated. They will be replaced with fewer employees. The expectation is that some functions will be outsourced to lower-cost personnel in the Philippines. The

net result will be less FTEs and a potential yearly operating savings.

The sale of the warehouse located in Elkridge, Maryland, is expected by April 2021. The construction of the new warehouse will be finished in February 2021. The sale of the Review and Herald property is expected to take place the middle of 2021.

“I am open to miracles, and I’m hoping that the Lord will have a few things to show us during this COVID time as to how the work can be done under trying circumstances,” Prestol-Puesán said in concluding his report.

He then introduced an item voted by the Southern African-Indian Ocean Division (SID) Executive Committee at their year-end meeting, having to do with trying conditions in Zimbabwe.

“The request is for a variance to our policy on auditing . . . it comes with an action and recommendation of Treasury and GCAS,” he said.

After Paul Douglas, Director of GCAS, presented the recommendation, which was moved and seconded, Solomon Maphosa, SID president stated, “I would like to assure the committee that this request does not come from any incompetence from our people there [Zimbabwe]. The problem arises out of the economy of the country.”

Hopekings Ngomba, SID treasurer, added, “I just want to concur with the president with the issues in Zimbabwe. The situation is still unstable, and we would be very thankful if the committee would vote this.”

The recommendation passed, 178 to 7.

“I am open to miracles, and I’m hoping that the Lord will have a few things to show us during this COVID time as to how the work can be done under trying circumstances.”

JUAN PRESTOL-PUESÁN

Treasurer
General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS REGARDING POSTPONING GC SESSIONS

“The Constitution simply states ‘in case special world conditions make it imperative to postpone.’”

**KARNIK
DOUKMETZIAN**
General Counsel
General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists



1. What does our Constitution say about postponing General Conference Sessions?

The General Conference Constitution gives the power to call or set the date, time and place of a General Conference Session to the Executive Committee. Article V Section 1 of the Constitution makes provision for the General Conference Executive Committee, in cases where world conditions make it imperative to do so, to postpone the calling of a session for a period not to exceed two years. The date, time, and place of the 2020 Session was set more than 10 years ago but because of world conditions, a postponement was voted in March of 2020.

2. How is a postponement approved?

Since it is the GC Executive Committee that is empowered to set the date, they also are granted the power to change the date if necessary. The postponement is to be voted by the full GC Executive Committee at a duly called meeting.

3. What are the reasons why a Session can be postponed?

The Constitution simply states: “in case special world conditions make it imperative to postpone.” Sessions have been postponed in the past during times of war and other calamities.

4. Who votes the postponement?

The postponement can only be voted on by the General Conference Executive Committee.

5. According to the Constitution (Article 5, Section 1), how does the quinquennial cycle operate, and how is it that we are now in a new quinquennium even though the 2020 GC Session has not yet met?

The Constitution provides that the General Conference shall hold quinquennial Sessions. The 5-year provision was inserted into the Constitution in 1970 and has been followed every 5 years since then. The 61st General Conference Session was scheduled to be held in June of 2020 but because of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic it was initially postponed by the GC Executive Committee in March of 2020 to be held in May of 2021. However, since world conditions had not improved sufficiently and for the safety of the delegates, the action was taken to again postpone the 2020 Session to June 2022. A postponement is simply putting off to a later date or time something that was scheduled. For example, if we say that the football game was postponed until next month, it is still the same football game only held at a different date. The rest of the schedule does not change. Since this is a postponement or deferral of the 2020 session, the 5-year sequence does not change in that the quinquennial cycle continues.

6. By delaying the 2020 Session to 2022, what implications does that have, if any, for a GC Session in 2025?

Since this is a postponement, it does not change the timing or sequence of future meetings. The Executive Committee has confirmed this in its action to postpone, voting to conduct the next Session in 2025 as originally scheduled.

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1 Students from four schools in the **Lake Region** of the United States presented [an online evangelism series, “Countdown to Eternity”](#) in November 2020. Streamed on the Lake Region’s YouTube channel and Facebook page, the series focused on the book of Revelation and end-time events. Each night began with a welcome, health nugget, and Countdown theme song, followed by the presentation and review quiz. Sixty students participated in various aspects of the series.

2 Following four days of captivity in **Haiti**, Pastor Elie Henry, president of the Inter-American Division, and his daughter, Irma, were [released unharmed on Dec. 28, 2020](#). Pastor Henry and wife, Kettle, were visiting family in Haiti when Pastor Henry and daughter Irma were kidnapped following a special event held at the Haiti

Adventist Hospital. Irma Henry had been working at the hospital as head of the physical therapy department. The Henry family shared how God saw them through this experience on [an episode of the television program *Revival for Mission*](#).

3 Recent construction projects in **Côte d’Ivoire** attracted the attention of local news media. The small country in the West Africa Division has just 10,000 Adventists, and yet [the building of two new churches in Anan and Abbebroukoi by Maranatha Volunteers](#), was of high interest to the community as construction took place during the pandemic. Adding to the interest were the construction of classrooms next to one of the churches. Adventist education is highly respected in Côte d’Ivoire.

4 In spite of COVID-19 challenges, the

Advent Welfare Organization (*Advent-Wohlfahrtswerkes*) in **Fürth, Germany**, has opened [a new building housing a day-care center and community center](#). The Christian kindergarten had been operating in an older building with 24 children in attendance. The new facility has room to accommodate up to 60 children comfortably in several rooms and includes a dining room and kitchen.

5 Following severe flooding in the southern **Philippines** in late December-early January, thousands of people experienced great loss. [ADRA-Philippines partnered with local conferences and Adventist Community Services](#) to provide cash assistance to those most affected by the disaster, allowing them to purchase their most urgent needs. Priority was given to those who were disabled, pregnant, and elderly.

6 A group of 30 Adventist teachers in the **Solomon Islands** formed a team, “Mission of Hope,” to [minister to needy school communities](#) during the pandemic. The team went to a remote area of Honiara where they conducted workshops and worships, distributed goods and prayed with the community. Seeing further need, the group raised funds and later returned to lay a concrete slab for a classroom. They also distributed clothing and soap to the community.

Beginning in 2021, the *GC Executive Committee Newsletter* will be issued quarterly, with the exception of additional special issues that may arise. We will continue to provide informative and inspiring content for Executive Committee members and other ECN readers.