

We are, first and foremost, a church!

by Pastor John Surridge, *BUC Executive Secretary*



The constitution is the foundational document of our Conferences and Union. The Missions have a similar document, but, because they are not charities in their own right, it's called an 'operating policy'. Getting these documents right is crucial to the proper functioning of our entire church structure, and drafting them is not a simple matter.

We have two competing forces when it comes to creating, or modifying, our constitutions. On the one hand, we are part of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church;

but, on the other, we operate within the legal and charity frameworks of the United Kingdom and Ireland. There are differences of opinion over which of these should have priority. Some feel that we should focus on producing a document which conforms closely to local legislation, while others feel that we should start from the model given to us by the General Conference (GC) and then customise it just enough so that it complies with the laws of the land.

As Conference and Union administrators, we take this latter

view. We are, first and foremost, a church. We are Seventh-day Adventists. This is our identity. This is our reason for existence. Yes, we are organised here as three charities, but only because we see this as the best way to run the church, given local laws and practices.

So, in writing a constitution, we begin with a document that is given to all Conferences and Unions around the world, and it's called the 'model constitution'. This document has two different elements: things that we *must* include, and other things that we *can* include if they work well in our territory.

This sounds simple until you get to the details. The problem is that there are some things in the 'must include' sections which clash with local charity law. Fortunately, the GC, which has a vast amount of experience in such matters, has made provision for this. Even some of the 'must include' parts *can* be modified, but only with prior approval from the GC.

The work begins with the 'Constitution Committee', which is set up at a Conference or Union session. This committee compares the existing constitution with the model, considers suggestions from administrators, the Executive Committee, and any ideas that might have come from the Session, and tries to formulate a document that satisfies everyone.

It's a delicate process of balance and negotiation. We take legal advice from experts in local charity law, and then report our findings to the GC. After going back and forth, often several times, we eventually have a constitution that is fit for purpose and ready to be voted on by the delegates at the Session.

The next time you hear someone referring to the constitution, or perhaps come across a copy of the document, please spare a thought for the many people who labour very hard to write it.

A time for us to listen to each other

The book of Ecclesiastes reminds us, 'For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven' (Eccles. 3:1, ESV). Is it possible that the murder of US citizen George Floyd on 25 May is a defining moment in the history of racism in the United States and elsewhere? We trust governments to create the necessary laws to protect the citizen, but legislation is not the best agency to change hearts and minds. If we are to change things for the better to help bring about racial justice, both in society and in the church, surely the first step is to listen to each other – really listen.

- *How has the murder of George Floyd affected you?*
- *What is your experience of being black in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? What is your experience of being black in the Republic of Ireland?*
- *How does your faith in Christ help you on the long journey towards racial justice/equality? What particular passages of Scripture do you turn to for encouragement?*
- *For white brothers and sisters to help bring about racial justice/equality, what three practical ways would you suggest to be most helpful?*
- *If you are ethnically white, can you suggest ways which will help promote racial justice/equality?*

The first step to bringing about change is to listen – really listen. Is this the time? Please send a letter or write an article – a testimony, your story – to: editor@stanboroughpress.org.uk.

You never know whom it might help and enlighten.

MESSENGER is your voice.

Editor