

# South Atlantic Conference of SDA

## DISPUTE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROTOCOL FOR CONFERENCE EMPLOYEES AND WORKPLACES

Voted June 11, 2023

### Preamble

It is not unusual, nor should it come as a surprise to any, that sinful, finite human beings who comprise the body of Christ will occasionally have disagreements and interpersonal conflicts. This reality makes it necessary that a biblically rooted protocol for mitigating and resolving these eventualities be strategically enacted and lovingly implemented in every SAC congregation.

### Purpose

The following protocol is intended to assist in preventing and resolving disputes and conflict among co-workers employed at SAC Adventist Book Centers, campground, churches, conference office, schools, and any other place of employment owned or operated by the Conference (collectively referred to hereinafter as “workplace”). The aim of this protocol is to inform, instruct, require, and affirm workers to seek, in good faith, to resolve inter-personal difficulties at the lowest administrative level possible and with the fewest number of people necessary.

### Protocol

The following procedures are presented in the spirit of Matthew 18:15-20; Luke 17:3, 4; John 13:34, 35 and Christ’s prayer for His disciples in John 17:6-26.

### Legal Disclaimer

This protocol assumes that no minor or any person who has been clinically diagnosed as mentally or developmentally diminished or disabled is involved in the matter as a complainant or respondent (the “party” or “parties”). This protocol also assumes that there is no physical abuse or threat of physical abuse or harm involved in the matter, in which case, legal or law enforcement assistance or intervention may be the immediate need instead of a non-legal attempt at resolving the matter. This policy further assumes that parties are competent and free to make the judgment to utilize the steps outlined herein.

### Indemnification

By using this protocol to seek resolution to their dispute or conflict, parties agree to hold harmless the South Atlantic Conference and its officers, directors, employees, and their heirs for any failure of expectation of desired resolution.

#### 1. Preventing Workplace Conflicts

- A. **Christian Conduct** – The SAC workplace is a spiritual environment. Conference employees shall remember that first and foremost, the workplace is both part of, and represents the Church organization. Therefore, the same principles of conduct that promote harmonious relationships and interaction in the church are also expected in the workplace. Kind, mutually respectful, considerate, and positive attitudes, actions, and speech greatly aid in preserving the Christian harmony of the workplace.

B. **Professional Conduct** – The SAC workplace is a professional environment. Professional relationships necessitate the skillful exercise of Emotional Intelligence, defined as “the ability to perceive, interpret, demonstrate, control, evaluate, and use emotions to communicate with and relate to others effectively and constructively” ([see reference here](#)). All SAC employees strive to maintain a Spirit-filled, professional, non-hostile work and welcoming environment where co-workers are safe and happy to work. Emotional Intelligence enables employees to accept that each co-worker is created different by God according to His own will and purpose. Employees respect each other’s uniqueness of thought and personality, and embrace these God-given differences to accomplish the organization’s mission.

C. **Causes of Workplace Conflict** – While not an exhaustive list, some of the causes of workplace conflict include: absence or poorly written workplace policies and procedures; lack of attention or adherence to workplace policies and procedures; evil surmising; inefficient management; unclear job description of roles and responsibilities; lack of equal opportunities; bullying and harassment; unfair or discriminatory treatment; poor communication; poor inter-personal skills; gossip; malice; inadequate training, resistance to change; toxic work environment; personality clashes; ego; lack of social graces; failure to practice Christ’s counsel in Matthew 18:15; John 13:34, 35; Luke 17:3, 4, etc.

## 2. Resolving Workplace Conflicts

A. **Personal Effort** - First seek to resolve private matters one-to-one (Matthew 18:15) in a calm and kind manner. Jesus requires us to seek to resolve difficulties at the lowest level possible, with the involvement of the fewest number of people necessary. Most misunderstandings or disagreements can be resolved if this step is faithfully observed.

B. **Mediation** - If good faith personal efforts to resolve the matter do not yield the desired outcome, prayerfully request the counsel of one or two neutral third-party individuals who have the regard of both disputants. It is hoped that in the resulting meeting and in the hearing of “two or three witnesses” (Matthew 18:16) there will be breakthrough and a peaceful conclusion of the matter. Parties should practice the admonition of Christ in Luke 17:3, 4. Those providing mediation shall be neutral, not taking sides or arbitrarily concluding or ascribing right or wrong to either party. The SAC Basic Conflict Mediation Guide will be the governing standard for mediations.

C. **HR and ADCOM Involvement** - Where intervention by neutral parties fails to bring about a peaceful conclusion or resolution of the dispute, the assistance of the Human Resource Department may be sought to help resolve the matter. If this step fails, the HR Director may refer the matter to ADCOM for intervention or action as warranted.

## 3. Mitigating Conflicts of Interest and Fear of Intimidation or Retaliation

A. **Conflict of Interest Concerns with HR Involvement** – Employees seeking redress in disputes and conflicts in the workplace or with coworkers in the field may request the involvement of the Office of Human Resources should their disputes and conflicts remain unresolved after the mediation efforts of neutral third-parties (see 2 B above). However, if the employee’s unresolved concern is with HR personnel, policy, or practice, the employee has the right to appeal to ADCOM through the Executive Vice President (who may request a written complaint, depending on the nature of the concerns raised).

- B. Conflict of Interest Concerns with ADCOM Involvement** – Employees seeking redress through the involvement of ADCOM (only after following the steps outlined above) should contact the Executive Vice President. If the complainant’s concern pertains to the Executive Vice President, the President may be directly contacted and requested to engage the assistance of ADCOM with the employee’s concern. If the employee’s unresolved concern is with the official decisions or inactions of ADCOM, the employee’s recourse is to appeal to the Employee Grievance Committee.
- C. Employee Fear of Intimidation and Retaliation** – At no time shall any employee of the South Atlantic Conference of Seventh-day Adventists be caused to be in fear of intimidation or retaliation for expressing employee concerns. However, employees shall be careful to properly qualify the legitimate cause of any feeling of fear of intimidation or retaliation, as this is a serious charge to make against a fellow worker. Unqualified claims of fear of intimidation or retaliation shall not be recognized as justification for circumventing any step in the dispute and conflict resolution process outlined above.

### **Automatic Right of Appeal and the Goal of Reconciliation**

1. Disputants have the automatic right of appeal of any decision made by either the HR Director or ADCOM. Complainants are entitled to appeal to ADCOM if the employee is dissatisfied with the outcome of their appeal to HR. Appeals should be directed to the SAC Employee Grievance Committee by request to the committee chairperson. The chairman of the Employee Grievance Committee shall grant an automatic hearing of the complainant’s concerns, after confirming that all the steps outlined above have been followed by the employee. The Employee Grievance Committee is a provision of the SAC Bylaws and is accessible to all employees. All SAC employees are entitled to obtain the full list of committee members upon written (email shall suffice) request to HR, no later than the close of business on the next business day that the SAC office is open. Decisions of the Employee Grievance Committee are final, including any decision to recommend a remedy to the Conference Executive Committee for action. The Employee Grievance Committee is a standing committee of the conference, that makes recommendations to HR and ADCOM, and reports to the Executive Committee.
2. To achieve reconciliation and healing, erring parties are willing to acknowledge their faults. Where appropriate, apologies should be rendered in the forum in which the offence was given, whether in private or public. Offended parties should freely forgive repentant offenders (see Luke 17:3, 4; James 5:16; Matthew 6:12; and *Steps to Christ*, chapter 4).

### **Summary of Steps**

1. Be willing to understand people and policies even as you desire to be understood, always giving the benefit of the doubt and not giving way to the temptation of evil surmising
2. Be committed to following the teachings of Jesus for handling concerns and disputes
3. Be faithful in following the steps outlined in this protocol to seek resolution of your concerns
  - Address concerns at the lowest level possible with the fewest number of people necessary (address issues directly to concerned parties one-to-one)
  - Do not disparage coworkers or the conference – follow this protocol fully, seeking intervention by neutral parties where deemed necessary
  - You are entitled to due process and appeal, without fear of intimidation or retribution