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Subject: A Concern from My Heart

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Dear LC Board Members,

I would like to take a few minutes to share with you a concern from my heart. I have been thinking and praying about this over the past week since our board meeting on Sunday. The board's discussion about reopening the church seemed to give little consideration to the needs and space requirements of our Spanish-speaking members and guests. Rather, the dialogue and subsequent decision prioritized the needs and wishes of the English-speaking members in the use of our facility, granting them usage of the largest and nicest space of the building—our sanctuary. However, this group of members is much fewer in number than our Hispanic membership. This preferential treatment of one group above another is deeply concerning to me—even more so because the dividing lines between the two groups are ethnicity, culture, and language.

Furthermore, some statements were made regarding our Hispanic brothers and sisters that were deeply wounding and not in harmony with the teaching of the Scriptures about the unity and oneness that should characterize the body of Christ. Paul penned in Galatians 3:28, ESV, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking members together compose one local body of Christ in Lenoir City. Discussions and decisions of the board should be representative of that one body that it serves, taking into consideration all its members and friends and not giving preferential treatment to one group over another. Moreover, the singular mission of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church—both locally and abroad—is to proclaim the "eternal gospel" of the three angels' messages to all "who dwell on the earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people" without preference (Rev 14:6, ESV).

The board's decision has placed our church family in a position of vulnerability to fragmentation. On Thursday evening, I met with our Hispanic members to discuss options that would meet their needs as we restart in-person services. Because the board's decision left them with insufficient space to worship on Sabbath mornings in compliance with social-distancing guidelines, they resolved to begin holding Sabbath School and worship services in a rented gymnasium elsewhere in Lenoir City. Our board must consider if this is how we want to represent our church's treatment of other ethnic groups within our community, and also the risk it takes in prompting the largest and fastest growing portion of our church family to meet elsewhere.

Over the past year, it has been a blessing to see individuals from different nations and languages worshipping and serving together as one. However, I was profoundly saddened by the outcome of our recent board meeting. It is my recommendation that the board reconsider Sunday's decision in order to give due attention to the needs and wishes of all of our members equally. Additionally, I would urge those among us who may harbor negative sentiments to spend some time in prayer and thoughtful reflection about how to represent biblical teachings regarding unity and equality in our one church family.

In Christian love,

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"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14, ESV).

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