

Free Adventist Voice

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"Putting our trust in God, we are to move steadily forward, doing His work with unselfishness, in humble dependence upon Him, committing ourselves and all that concerns our present and future to His wise providence, holding the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end, remembering that it is not because of our worthiness that we receive the blessings of heaven, but because of the worthiness of Christ, and our acceptance, through faith in Him, of God's abounding grace."

— *This Day With God*, p. 196.

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The Two Free Seventh-day Adventist Organizations

The Free Seventh-day Adventist name has been in existence since the early 1900s and holds a notable place in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist church. In this article we will overview the birth, growth, and current status of the Free Seventh-day Adventist movement, and examine recent challenges, claims, and accusations. In order to do so, we will consider the history of this movement by the events that have transpired in its two main organizations, namely, the International Association of Free Seventh-day Adventists (IAFSDA), which is a dba of Berean Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists, and the General Assembly of Free Seventh Day Adventists (GAFSDA). Apart from the rich Free SDA history, unfortunate incidences have occurred between the two organizations. As a result, some have expressed deep concern that these two organizations are at variance with each other, instead of working together.

(A dba means "doing business as." It means that it is the same corporation, but it is simply adding another name to its original name. In other words, both the original name and the additional name refer to the same organization. Therefore the International Association of Free Seventh-day Adventists is the same as the Berean Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists.)

In this article you will see that many attempts have been made to rectify the problems between these two organizations. However, false accusations and claims have been circulated, and some individuals have only heard the allegations of one side (that of the accusers) without also hearing the explanations of the other side (that of the accused). It has therefore become

necessary to address these unfortunate developments for the benefit of the honest inquirers, and thus enable all to finally hear the whole story for themselves. Therefore, in this article we will cover the following issues: the history of the two Free SDA organizations, the accusations being circulated, the threats of legal action, the Free SDA Unity Meetings, and where we go from here.

THE OLDEST FREE SDA ORGANIZATION

To understand the history of Free Seventh-day Adventists, we must carefully consider three key years. These three years are 1916, 1923, and 1965. Each of these years marks the beginning or registration of a Free SDA corporation.

Two Free SDA organizations were formed in the early 1900's, they are: (1) Berean Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists, which now operates under its dba International Association of Free Seventh-day Adventists (IAFSDA), and (2) General Assembly of Free Seventh Day Adventists (GAFSDA).

In the year 1916, Elder Lewis C. Sheafe and the self-supporting church that he

pastored incorporated their church in the state of California under the name Berean Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists. In the previous year Elder Sheafe and his wife left the employ of the General Conference because of its upholding discriminatory practices, and the church he pastored also withdrew from the General Conference. When Elder Sheafe incorporated this same church in California under the name Berean Church of Free Seventh-



Elder Lewis C. Sheafe

day Adventists in 1916, it became the first church in the United States to legally use the name Free Seventh-day Adventist. This therefore makes the Berean Church/IAFSDA not only the first Free SDA corporation on record, but also the very first Free Seventh-day Adventist church in history. Though some may try to cover up these facts or refute them, they can be easily proven by the legal documents on record for the Berean Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists in the office of the California Secretary of State. It is noteworthy that Elder Sheafe was highly recognized by the leadership of the SDA Conference before he left them and started this self-supporting church. Thus, at the 2010 General Conference Session, the Seventh-day Adventist church added his biography to its Adventist Pioneer Series.

In the year 1923, another SDA minister, Elder John W. Manns, registered a new name for a church that was originally called Christian Negro Seventh Day Adventist Church. This church was started some years before while he was still employed by the SDA Conference. However, when Elder Manns left the Conference the church went along with him and he took steps to operate it as a self-supporting church under the name Christian Negro Seventh Day Adventists. In 1916, Elder Sheafe introduced Elder Manns to Free Seventh-day Adventism, but legal documents in the Clerk of Superior Court office in Savannah, Georgia, prove that it was not until seven years later that he decided to legally use Free SDA by changing his self-supporting church's name. Thus in 1923 Elder Manns registered the name of the original or first General Assembly of Free Seventh Day Adventists (GAFSDA) corporation in the state of Georgia.

In a news article printed in the Savannah *Tribune*, dated May 13, 1916, the writer stated that Elder Sheafe was the founder of Free Seventh-day Adventists and said it was "To this standard that Elder Manns and church, of this city, have come." Here the writer showed that Elder Sheafe set the standard or began

the Free SDA work and Elder Manns followed in his footsteps. Professor Douglas Morgan also attests to the fact that it was "the Sheafes who originated the [Free Seventh-day Adventist] name." (See: *Lewis C. Sheafe, Apostle to Black America*, p. 411).

In the year 1965, the charter of the church Elder Manns incorporated in 1915 under the name Christian Negro Seventh Day Adventist Church was due to expire (since corporation charters in that day only lasted 50 years). In 1965 members of the GAFSDA believed that this was the church whose name Elder Manns had changed to General Assembly of Free Seventh Day Adventists (GAFSDA) in 1923. Therefore, they set out to renew or preserve this charter. However, history shows that for certain reasons they were unable to do so, and eventually the charter of the "original" GAFSDA corporation expired. As a result, these members incorporated a "new" General Assembly of Free Seventh Day Adventists (GAFSDA) organization on May 14, 1965, in order to continue the work that the "original" GAFSDA organization started. At the Free SDA Unity Meeting in November 2011, this information, along with the legal documents to prove it, were presented to all the delegates present. It was a shock to the "current" GAFSDA leaders who expressed unawareness of this, even though we disclosed it to them in one of our earlier communications. Thus it is evident that the "current" 1965 General Assembly of Free Seventh Day Adventists (GAFSDA) organization is not the "original" 1923 GAFSDA corporation, as many have been led to believe.

In a letter from GAFSDA dated January 9, 2012, the GAFSDA stated, "We request that Brother Herbert rescind his charter from the state of California for the Berean [Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists] and that those churches which joined his group be informed that they may make application to this original organization or remain with him under whatever his original name was." Notice here that these brethren refer to the "current" 1965 organization as the "original

organization." This they still choose to do even though this fallacy has been pointed out more than once, including at the Free SDA Unity Meetings in November 2011. Contrary to their claims, the "current" 1965 GAFSDA corporation is definitely not the "first" or "original" Free SDA organization in existence, which we have already seen Elder Sheafe started in 1916, neither is it the "original" GAFSDA corporation whose name Elder Manns registered in 1923 and whose charter eventually expired. The truth of the matter is, they are not "original" in any way, but are simply a "new" GAFSDA corporation that was registered in 1965.

Also, for years GAFSDA leaders have said that Elder John Manns started the GAFSDA organization in 1912, but this too is untrue. Actually, this is impossible since Elder Manns was still employed by the SDA Conference in 1912. If you ask the "current" 1965 GAFSDA leaders for proof that the GAFSDA name was registered in 1912, you will never see it! As stated before, it was not until 1923 that Elder Manns applied for a name change for his self-supporting church to legally use Free Seventh-day Adventist. Although he started using the GAFSDA name from around 1920, the work of the GAFSDA did not legally start until 1923 when the church received the legal right to use the name GAFSDA. Therefore, contrary to the claims of the "current" 1965 GAFSDA, the work of the "original" 1923 GAFSDA organization did not start with the purchase of a piece of property from a lady named Cora S. Cassels in 1912, as they purport, since in 1912 Elder Manns was still working for the SDA Conference and not for Free Adventists. (For proof of this, you may send for our free CD entitled, "Answering Our Critics.")

My brothers and sisters, although the "current" 1965 GAFSDA leaders continue to deny the truth and insist on promoting errors, Inspiration tells us that truth alone sanctifies and error never sanctifies. No one truly gains anything by promoting errors or lies, especially after truth is revealed to them. Therefore, it is important that

all present truth believers today realize that we cannot be truly FREE SDAs, or God's children whatsoever, unless we know and uphold truth, for Scripture says: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32.

CLAIMS OF DECEIT, FRAUD, AND THEFT

For many years the General Assembly (GAFSDA) was the only Free SDA organization known. But in the year 2007 the good Lord led Elder Kurt Walters, one of the directors of The Gilead Institute of America, to discover the charter of the Berean Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists. The process for reviving the charter ensued. Since then, GAFSDA leaders have promoted that the Berean Church/IAFSDA charter was acquired by deceit, fraud, and theft. Up to this point in time we have refrained from addressing all of their claims and accusations in writing in order to avoid affecting any possibility for unity between the two organizations. But since we believe we have tried our best to work out our differences and failed, we have no other choice but to now tell the whole truth. This has become necessary, since the GAFSDA has recently increased its negative campaign against the IAFSDA by sending out more emails and letters to discredit the IAFSDA, and because more innocent people who want to know the truth are making inquiries.

In order to address the GAFSDA's false claims or accusations that deceit, fraud, and theft were committed in the reviving of the Berean Church charter, it is essential to share the genesis of this organization's revival. For a number of years, before the Lord led us to the Berean Church charter, I, along with other directors of The Gilead Institute of America, were friends with one of the main leaders of the GAFSDA. This individual is a sister by the name of Sr. Janice Watkins. We visited her in Brunswick, Georgia, several times, and on more than one occasion she invited me to speak at the Temple of Truth Free SDA Church.

With time, we became good friends. When the Lord in His great mercy and love revealed the existence of the Berean Church corporation charter to us, we contacted our dear friend Sr. Watkins and told her about it. Then, due to our long-standing friendship for over a decade and the fact that she was one of the first Free Seventh-day Adventists we knew, we asked Sr. Watkins to become the Secretary of Berean's Board of Trustees.

Upon hearing about this Free SDA corporation in California, which was practically unknown at that time even by Sr. Watkins, and after hearing about our desire to revive this corporation, Sr. Watkins' first question to me was, "Why two Free SDA organizations?" My response to Sr. Watkins was that I believed God wanted this corporation to be revived since its charter was only now revealed to us after so many years and in such a crucial time in the history of God's church. As the charter was left hidden for a time and only now made known, it appeared as though God had a special purpose for it. I also told Sr. Watkins that since we knew she was already a member of the GAFSDA, it was our intention to work in unity with the GAFSDA so that together we could carry forward the work of God on the earth. When I told her this, I meant what I said; and after hearing about our plan for unity and a harmonious working relationship between the two corporations, Sr. Watkins agreed to take the position of Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the Berean Church of Free SDAs, which she held for a little more than one year.

We, the leaders of the Berean Church/IAFSDA, in conjunction with The Gilead Institute, immediately began to write letters and emails, make phone calls, and personally visit some of the GAFSDA leaders in an effort to bring about unity between the two organizations. In the beginning it was very difficult to get a response or to arrange a meeting with key GAFSDA leaders, so some had to be visited individually. Not only did we visit Sr. Watkins, Elder Jones, and others in Brunswick, Georgia, but we also

flew out to Texas to visit Elder Rollin Kilson, then the GAFSDA President. When we visited him we discussed our plans for reviving the Berean Church charter, as well as for working in unity. The talks between us went very well, however, Elder Kilson now denies we ever discussed such matters. We continued to write letters to the GAFSDA leadership expressing our desire to work together with them, and in 2008 they sent us an application form to become a member of the GAFSDA. We filled out the relevant parts of the form and returned it to them with a letter stating that we were not seeking membership, as we already were a Free SDA corporation, but simply wanted to work together with them. Following this, we communicated with one of their leaders, Pastor Eric Betts, in order to try and work together, but unfortunately our talks were short-lived and finally came to a halt. All of these and other efforts for unity were made over the years; hence, contrary to what some might have thought, the Unity Meetings were not our first and only effort for unity.

As time passed, the GAFSDA got new leaders who had no knowledge of what transpired between Sr. Watkins and I in the beginning and apparently were not pleased when they discovered that Sr. Watkins helped to revive Berean's charter. It was later proven that they also lacked knowledge of Berean's history. The thought of having another Free SDA organization in existence apparently was unacceptable to them, for suddenly accusations started circulating that the Berean Church/IAFSDA was acquired by deceit, fraud, and theft. These accusations were spread far and wide, but lacked evidence to substantiate them. In connection with these accusations, many rumors were spread to destroy our credibility, such as, Pastor Herbert and the IAFSDA stole Berean Church from the GAFSDA, we deceived Sr. Watkins and were not entirely transparent in our dealings with her, and we forged her signature on the legal documents. The accusations and claims varied as time went on.

It was for this reason the Berean

Church/IAFSDA leadership thought that the time had finally come to make some of the original documents with Sr. Watkins' signatures public at the Free SDA Unity Meetings, held in Brunswick, Georgia, in November 2011. At that time, original documents used to revive the Berean Church charter were presented, and all who desired were allowed to carefully examine them, including Sr. Watkins herself. After seeing them, Sr. Watkins told everyone present that the signatures on the documents are her signatures, and confirmed that they are authentic and genuine signatures. She also stated that she signed these documents for more than one reason, the main one being because she believed the two Free SDA organizations were going to work together. Thus Sr. Watkins' herself proved the claims of fraud, deceit, and theft to be false.

Anyone who really knows Sr. Watkins would realize that although she is now elderly, she is not senile, she is not unintelligent, and she certainly is not as helpless as some of her own brethren present her to be. I always viewed Sr. Watkins to be an educated, experienced, spiritual woman. Hence, it was no surprise to me when, at the FSDA Unity Meetings, she made it clear that she has a Masters degree in English. She also stated that she had possession of the legal documents for about two weeks before signing them and mailing them back to us. Therefore, because of her intellectual capabilities and the fact that she had ample time to review the documents, it is completely false for anyone to give the impression that Sr. Watkins was not in her right mind, was not aware of what she was doing, was denied full disclosure or transparency of the contents of the documents, or was deceived or coerced into doing something she did not understand or want to do when she signed the documents to revive the Berean Church. These false claims actually question the intelligence of a woman who still has all her intellectual faculties intact, is still a school principal, and up to this point in time is listed on the Georgia Secretary of State's website as

secretary, registered agent, and CFO of the GAFSDA.

Thus the accusations of deceit, fraud, and theft made by GAFSDA leaders against the Berean Church/IAFSDA leadership and myself were never proven and are untrue. If these claims were true they should have been discovered and exposed by the moderators of the FSDA Unity Meetings, especially since these moderators took the time to study and research the concerns on both sides. But contrary to GAFSDA leaders' claims, these accusations were not endorsed by the moderators, Pastor John Grosboll and Pastor Domingo Nunez, who were specifically chosen by the GAFSDA leaders and accepted by the IAFSDA leaders to moderate the FSDA Unity Meetings. In a recent email from both of these moderators we read their conclusion on this matter:

"Concerning accusations that are being reported, Pastor Grosboll and Pastor Nunez would like to say that they did not find in their research that deceit or fraud or theft had been committed in the setting up of the International Association of Free Seventh-day Adventists." Quoted from Prs. Grosboll and Nunez's email, dated February 12, 2012.

COURT THREATS AND MORE THREATS

Without a doubt, the Berean Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists was revived with the help of Sr. Watkins, who by her own admission knowingly signed the start-up documents that enabled the corporation to function. Also, it is reasonable to say that I, along with other Berean Church/IAFSDA leaders, made many efforts over the years to try and fulfill our promise to Sr. Watkins to work with the GAFSDA. To facilitate this plan, we formed an association to unite together all our self-supporting contacts in order to present them as a sisterhood of churches and ministries to the GAFSDA. To do this we registered a dba of Berean Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists under the name, International Association

of Free Seventh-day Adventists (IAFSDA). Through this association we hoped to unite and bring our contacts or connections as a sisterhood under or as a member of the GAFSDA. Initially, it was never our plan for the IAFSDA to function as a separate Free SDA organization apart from the GAFSDA.

(Note once again that "dba" means "doing business as." Thus legally the two names, Berean Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists and International Association of Free Seventh-day Adventists, actually refer to one and the same organization. Therefore, either name applies to the very same organization; the Berean Church of Free SDA is the same as the IAFSDA, even though one name was registered before the other.)

Early in our research of the history of the Free SDA movement, we learned that around the year 1920 Elder Manns formed a General Assembly of Free SDA, despite his refraining from using the Free SDA name earlier and despite his not registering this name until 1923. We also discovered that after Elder Sheafe left California to continue his work elsewhere, the members of the Berean Church approached the GAFSDA in 1920 in order to become a member. Although they were the first to use the Free SDA name, the Berean Church members were willing to unite and fellowship with others who were now calling themselves Free Seventh-day Adventists.

Therefore, after the Berean Church was revived in 2007, we endeavored to follow in the footsteps of the 1920 Berean Church members by informing our GAFSDA brethren of our shared history in an effort to continue working together. In June 2008 we finally met with some GAFSDA brethren and had an opportunity to share with them some of our Free SDA history, our desires, and our concerns. Following this meeting, we continued to make efforts to foster a relationship with them through letters and emails, and also by proving that the Berean Church became a member of GAFSDA in 1920 (via a fax to Mamon Wilson). Then in September 2008, to our shock and dismay, we received a threatening letter

from the GAFSDA leadership telling us to stop using the name Free SDA or they will take legal action against us. Note the following shocking statements made to us in their letter:

“Our organization has consulted with legal counsel and has been advised to request your refraining from the use of the name ‘Free Seventh Day Adventist’, or it’s shortened reference ‘F.S.D.A.’ and desist from your fraudulent representation of this organization immediately. Your disrespect for this long established group will not be tolerated.” They further stated, “Legal counsel has informed us that the revived charter in this state (Georgia) is in effect from its most recent date of reinstatement. In addition, your non-compliance with the General Assembly’s rules of operation cause us to deny you and your affiliates any claim to ‘Free Seventh Day Adventist’ or ‘F.S.D.A.’ and any association or membership thereto.”

Observe that the GAFSDA leaders said they “deny [us] and [our] affiliates any claim to ‘Free Seventh Day Adventist’ or ‘F.S.D.A.’ and any association or membership thereto.” Elsewhere in their letter they described our membership in the GAFSDA as a “self-appointed membership in the Free SDA movement” and even said “[our] claim to membership from 1920 is spurious.” These statements made it clear to us that the GAFSDA really did not know the Free SDA history and were certainly unaware of our legal right as the first organization to use the Free SDA name. Furthermore, by denying that we were members, they showed they did not believe the historical proof we provided them clearly showing that Elder Manns had accepted the Berean Church as a GAFSDA member in 1920.

We recognized that the GAFSDA was not only threatening us, but were already in consultation with the worldly court system, seeking advice against Berean Church/IAFSDA. The fact that they stated in their letter that our continuing to use the name Free Seventh-day Adventist “would not be tolerated” and employed legal terms such as “desist” (as in the legal phrase “cease and

desist”) and “fraudulent representation” told us that they were serious. We saw the GAFSDA’s threat to take legal action as similar to the threats of the General Conference of SDA against independent or self-supporting churches today. Since they believe they have exclusive right to the Free SDA name, they were threatening us for using it without their permission. To us the General Assembly (GAFSDA) is doing no different from the General Conference (GCSDA). Says Inspiration:

“When troubles arise in the church we should not go for help to lawyers not of our faith. God does not desire us to open church difficulties before those



Christ before Pilate & His accusers.

who do not fear Him. He would not have us depend for help on those who do not obey His requirements. Those who trust in such counselors show that they have not faith in God. By their lack of faith the Lord is greatly dishonored, and their course works great injury to themselves. In appealing to unbelievers to settle difficulties in the church they are biting and devouring one another, to be ‘consumed one of another’ (Gal. 5:15). These men cast aside the counsel God has given, and do the very things He has bidden them not to do. They show that they have chosen the world as their judge, and in heaven their names are registered as one with unbelievers. Christ is crucified afresh, and put to open shame. Let these men know that God does not hear their prayers. They insult His holy name, and He will leave them to

the buffetings of Satan until they shall see their folly and seek the Lord by confession of their sin.” 3 SM 299:2.

According to what the servant of the Lord said in the quote above, threatening to use the legal system is a very serious matter with God. We believe that up to this time we did everything possible to try and work with the GAFSDA brethren. By our visits, letters, and emails, we expressed our desire for unity, but their threatening letter proved to us they did not want to work together. We were left no other choice but to disconnect ourselves from them. Therefore, in light of their threat and God’s view of such, on September 30, 2008, we wrote the GAFSDA and officially withdrew our long-standing membership (from 1920 to 2008).

Following this we began to hear accusations of deceit, fraud, and theft being circulated by the new GAFSDA leaders. This was obviously done to discredit the work of the Berean Church/IAFSDA. While we knew that none of these accusations were true, we especially could not understand the GAFSDA’s claim of theft, since they said that we were not a member. Remember, they told us that our “claim to membership from 1920 is spurious.” How can people accuse you of stealing something from them, if it does not belong to them, or if they lay no claim to it? Apparently, these brethren finally came to realize we really were once a GAFSDA member and changed their position by saying we stole Berean Church from them. But MEMBERSHIP DOES NOT MEAN OWNERSHIP! The fact that a ministry or church joins an organization does not mean that the organization automatically owns that ministry or church. Again, MEMBERSHIP DOES NOT MEAN OWNERSHIP! All members should be free to join or withdraw their membership when they choose. Thus, in light of the circumstances in 2008, Berean Church chose to withdraw its membership from the GAFSDA after they threatened to take legal action against us.

But their threats did not stop there. Over the years and right up to and during the FSDA Unity Meetings

we still heard threats: threats to go to court, threats to go to the state, threats to imprison me for fraud, etc. Yet, we still sought reconciliation by reaching out to them. At the suggestion of Pastor Bill Hughes, I communicated with Sr. Watkins to set up a meeting between us in order to put aside our differences in accordance with the Matthew 18 principle. Initially our arrangements went very well until they were apparently intercepted by others and quickly came to naught. Despite this setback and the GAFSDA's continual negativity towards the Berean Church/IAFSDA, we still agreed to go forward with the Unity Meetings.

THE FREE SDA UNITY MEETINGS

In an effort to bring harmony between the two Free SDA organizations, arrangements were made for Unity Meetings, which were held in Brunswick, Georgia, in November 2011. The Meetings were conducted on two days, November 4th and 6th, and were attended by the leaders or Executive Committee members of both the International Association of Free Seventh-day Adventists (IAFSDA) and the General Assembly of Free Seventh Day Adventists (GAFSDA), and were moderated by Pastors Grosboll and Nunez of Steps to Life. It was during the first day of meetings that I presented the documents with Sr. Watkins signatures, which she confirmed were her signatures.

After two days of deliberations between the two organizations and near the close of the second day, the leaders of the International Association presented a Unity Agreement to the leaders of the General Assembly for consideration. We, the International Association leaders, told them that they could make additions or deletions to the proposal wherever they saw it necessary. They initially told us that they did not see anything wrong with the proposal, but just wanted to review it and possibly make additions to it before signing it. The leaders of the General Assembly promised

us a response in 30 days, and we were hopeful because the Unity Agreement contained things we considered to be important for both organizations. The following paragraphs are taken from the IAFSDA Unity Agreement presented to the GAFSDA:

"In order to bring an end to the disagreements and conflicts that have arisen between us, and thus pave the way for unity and a working relationship between our two organizations, we the members of the International Association of Free Seventh-day Adventists (IAFSDA) and the General Assembly of Free Seventh Day Adventists (GAFSDA), do hereby agree and declare the following:

"(i) We apologize for anything we have said or done in the past to threaten, unjustly discredit, or malign the characters of the leaders of the other organization.

"(ii) We agree to the work of the 1923 GAFSDA organization as being carried forward or continued by the 1965 GAFSDA organization, as well as the membership of the Berean Church of Free SDA in the GAFSDA from 1920 to 2008.

"(iii) We acknowledge the right of both organizations to exist and function as separate and legitimate organizations.

"As a result we do herein affix the signatures of the highest officials and secretaries of the two organizations to this document, as representatives of their respective organizations and members."

Thirty days came and went, but we heard nothing from the General Assembly. Nearly 60 days after the Unity Meetings, we asked the moderators of the Meetings, Pastors Grosboll and Nunez, to contact the General Assembly's leaders for their official response to our proposal. We finally received their decision approximately 65 days after the close of the FSDA Unity Meetings. Unfortunately, we are sad to report that the General Assembly (GAFSDA) out-rightly rejected everything we proposed: they accepted absolutely nothing and made no suggestions, no recommendations, no alterations, and no changes to the proposal

to make it work.

In their Rejection Letter the GAFSDA made it quite clear that only one thing would satisfy them and that is the total dissolution or eradication of the Berean Church/ IAFSDA. The following is what Mamon Wilson wrote in behalf of the General Assembly:

"It is the consensus of this organization (GAFSDA) that we will not sign this document from IAFSDA. We do not agree to Pastor Herbert's proposal as long as he uses the Free SDA name, which he fraudulently acquired. We request that Brother Herbert rescind his charter from the state of California for the Berean [Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists] and that those churches which joined his group be informed that they may make application to this original organization or remain with him under whatever his original name was. He is not a member of the General Assembly of Free SDA, Incorporated. We cannot be unified with unharmonious situations which will lead to more ungodliness. We do not need further time for any deliberations." Quoted from GAFSDA Rejection Letter, dated January 9, 2012.

After reading this response, we, the IAFSDA leaders, had to conclude that despite their claims, the GAFSDA proved to us again that they really do not want unity. The GAFSDA leaders simply want the Berean Church/ IAFSDA to disappear. They see no room for the two organizations to co-exist and work together, and despite the proof we provided they still think that they are the original Free SDA organization. Also, the leaders of the GAFSDA are now trying to present themselves as being interested in protecting others from the GC's trademarks, but when Pastor Rafael Perez had approached the GAFSDA for help with his trademark case against the General Conference of SDA, he told us that they refused to do anything to help him.

My dear readers, why would anyone want a legal or legitimate charter to be rescinded, especially when it affords God's present truth believers the opportunity to use the SDA name and writings at a time when the GC's

trademarks threaten these privileges? What would motivate anyone to think along such lines? The answer may lie in the fact that, if the Berean Church/IAFSDA rescinds its charter, then only the GAFSDA would exist and maybe that is exactly what these brethren want. But is that what God wants? Do we honestly believe that God would want a legitimate organization to just simply disappear to accommodate the selfish desires of others, especially after He in His great wisdom and providence saw fit to preserve the Berean Church charter for nearly 100 years? Can we really say that God did this without a good reason? My brothers and sisters, to answer these questions we must first put “self” aside. Only the wise can understand God’s purposes.

During the FSDA Unity Meetings one of the GAFSDA leaders, Pastor Richard Harris, once a good friend of mine, repeatedly told us that he was in direct contact with the General Conference about the problems between the two organizations and that the GC was awaiting his report on the outcome of the Unity Meetings. Since when does a self-supporting church consult with the GC about self-supporting brethren? Surely, as strange as this may appear, we must not forget that although the Sadducees and Pharisees had problems between them, they united to destroy Christ.

After the Unity Meetings, in their continuing efforts to turn others away from the IAFSDA, the GAFSDA spread rumors that Steps to Life and its leaders left the IAFSDA. But this claim is totally untrue, as Steps to Life and its leaders never left the IAFSDA and are still members today. However, Pastor Rafael Perez did resign from the IAFSDA Executive Committee, and GAFSDA leaders have circulated his letter. While we are saddened by Pastor Perez’s decision, we recognize that everyone is free to believe in the claims, rumors, or accusations of others, be they right or wrong. However, we are not entirely surprised since Pastor Perez was absent from more than one Executive Committee meeting in which important matters involving the GAFSDA were addressed. Also,

he was not present at the meeting when I presented the original documents with Sr. Watkins’ signatures, and she acknowledged them as hers.

Despite the fact that the Unity Meetings have failed, we actually believe significant gains were made. The moderators’ research into the GAFSDA’s accusations of deceit, fraud, and theft resulted in their rejecting this claim as being untrue, and we believe that this conclusion by the moderators is very important. Furthermore, in researching the process to revive a corporation in the state of California, the moderators learned that the legal documents had to be signed by someone affiliated with or a member of the Berean Church or a member or officer of the GAFSDA. We did not know that this was required by the state of California when we revived Berean Church, but God knew what was needed and He in His providence led us to meet all the requirements by our asking Sr. Watkins to be the Secretary of our Board of Trustees. However, the Lord still had another way to fulfill the requirement. After we discovered the Berean Church charter, God also led us to meet and become friends with a sister who was an original member of the Berean Church of Free Seventh-day Adventists. She willingly became an honorary member of our Board of Trustees and could have helped us to revive the charter. In other words, we could have revived the Berean Church with just her help and without any help from the GAFSDA, but we believe God wanted us to approach Sr. Watkins first. The other sister may have been God’s way of showing us He can accomplish His will in more ways than one. We publicly thank God for His leading, His mercy, and His grace, and for ensuring and securing the legality and credibility of the Berean Church/IAFSDA.

Brethren, the Berean Church/IAFSDA does not want supremacy or control over the people of God. All we want is unity among all faithful present truth believers so that God can empower us and use us to finish the work He has called us to do.

IT IS TIME TO MOVE ON

In this Article we have already shown that since the Berean Church/IAFSDA was revived, we made many efforts to work with the GAFSDA, but they never made any real effort to do the same except for the Unity Meetings, and now they have rejected our last effort with the Unity Agreement. Therefore, although over the years we have avoided publishing the whole truth of what transpired between the two organizations to avoid hindering any unity efforts, it is now obvious to us that all our efforts have been rejected, proven by GAFSDA leaders continuing to publish negativities against us and more so because of what they said in their Rejection Letter, of January 9, 2012: “We do not need further time for any deliberations.” We understand this statement to mean that they want no further talks with us and have therefore officially ended the unity talks.

Thus by their own declaration, the GAFSDA has brought an end to all unity efforts. Since we cannot force others to do what they do not want to do, I really believe it is time to move on. Since these brethren say that they “do not need further time for deliberations,” then no one should insist that these talks continue; there is a point where we all need to know when to quit—for time is too precious to be wasted. We have to accept the fact that not all wounds can be healed, for even Jesus acknowledged that He could not perform miracles in certain places where He was not accepted. Also, Ellen White says that “God does not hear [the] prayers” of those who threaten to take their brethren to court, and it is my personal conviction that efforts for unity between the two organizations cannot be successful until the GAFSDA leaders officially acknowledge that their threats to the IAFSDA are wrong and repent. In other words, I believe what Inspiration says, that unless the way is prepared, God’s blessings will not come.

Looking back now at the outcome of the meetings, I truly believe that as long as these brethren fail to repent

for their threats, a dark cloud of unrepentant sin hangs over the GAFSDA organization as a curse from God. Furthermore, I believe that this curse will remain until this matter is addressed and that all efforts to work with them will be thwarted by God until this is done. Some may not agree with me regarding this cloud or curse over the GAFSDA organization, but like everyone else I too am entitled to my personal convictions. However, when we are made aware of those who threaten to use the worldly court system against their brethren, Inspiration tells us that we are to **“Let these men know that God does not hear their prayers.”** Therefore, since I have already tried to warn the GAFSDA leaders and they will not hear me, those who are really interested in saving their own souls and the souls of these brethren are encouraged to let them know that Inspiration declares: “They insult [God’s] holy name, and He will leave them to the buffetings of Satan until they shall see their folly and seek the Lord by confession of their sin.” 3 SM 299. Therefore, I pray that others will do their part to help these brethren to acknowledge and make right this wrong before it is too late.

The greatest disappointments I experienced while dealing with this Free SDA dilemma is when I encountered those who are willing to hear only one side of the issue, that of the accusers, and not that of the accused. The Scriptures admonish us, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” Matt. 18:15. We are herein told that if our brother does us wrong, offends us, is considered by us to be in great error or at fault, we are supposed to go and discuss his “fault” with him alone and with no one else. But most people usually do the opposite. They usually listen to the complainers, gossipers, accusers, and faultfinders, and close their ears to the one considered to be at fault. This practice usually stems from cherishing friendships above God, for by pleasing friends or influential people instead of God, we place them

in a position above God and the requirements of His holy Word. We all have to train ourselves to focus on justice, equity, and truth, even if it puts us in conflict with those whom we love and respect. But here I want to commend and thank those who were not afraid to call, write, or visit us to hear the explanations of the accused or to simply extend words of encouragement or prayer during our difficult times.

Now that the whole truth about the disagreements between the two Free SDA organizations has finally been presented from the perspective of the accused, let those who were standing on the sidelines waiting for the outcome, waiting to see who is right from wrong, those who have long been in the valley of decision because of a lack of sufficient information, those who have neglected to apply the Matthew 18 principle and unwisely opened their ears to only the voices of the accusers and neglected to hear or inquire of the accused, those who have already drawn their conclusions and taken their stand on the wrong side because of friendships or influential persons, let all carefully and prayerfully examine all of the facts contained herein. Neither I nor any of the other IAFSDA leaders who have been wrongly accused hold anything in our hearts against such, for we all make mistakes. But now as the facts have been presented, all have an opportunity to redeem the time. You must now go to God and let Him, and He alone, tell you which of the two Free SDA organizations He is leading, and stand on “the weight of evidences,” for says Inspiration, “Indifference and neutrality in a religious crisis is regarded of God as a grievous crime and equal to the very worst type of hostility against God” (4 T 232; 3 T 280). At the same time those of us who have been wrongly accused shall hold fast to God’s Word that “none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise SHALL understand” (Dan. 12:10).

My dear brothers and sisters, just before I came to the United States and became an American citizen, God gave me a Scripture text that has sustained me over time. I have come to

understand and cherish it more and more as I have come to see it as a personal promise and assurance from God. Over the years I have faced many battles, but held fast to God’s promise and learned that as long as I strive to follow His leadings in my life and try to live in harmony with the law and the testimonies, unworthily though I be, He fulfills this special promise to me: “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord.” Isa. 54:17.

Therefore, it is time to move on! God has given me, and the other leaders of the Berean Church/IAFSDA organization a work to do, and we must hasten to get it done. He has blessed us with the first Free SDA corporation ever registered in this country for the purpose of bringing honor and glory to Him through the proclamation of the Three Angels’ Messages. This cannot be done in union with those who are under a cloud or curse of sin, unless they repent. I truly believe that if the GAFSDA fails to do so, God will remove them from the scene of action.

On the other hand, those who God has called to help advance the work of the Berean Church/IAFSDA must move on. We must advance present truth throughout the world. Therefore, I, along with the leaders of the International Association of Free Seventh-day Adventists, accept that God’s will be done in all things and agree to go forward with the responsibilities of this sacred work as we dedicate our lives and our all to the eternal Godhead of the universe, and commit ourselves to do our best to fulfill this high and holy calling, for in God do we place our trust!

Yours to advance present truth,



Pastor Patrick M. Herbert
Chairman, Executive Committee of
the International Assoc. of Free SDAs