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October 14, 1976

Elder W. R. May
c/o Annual Council
General Conference

Dear Brother May:

Thank you for coming to our office. I am sorry we have no specific counsel from the Spirit of Prophecy that would prohibit or condone the use of a dedicated sanctuary of worship for a banquet or a meal served to the members and their friends.

It might be different if the auditorium concerned was not a dedicated sanctuary, but even then great care would have to be exercised that the dinner served was not attended by entertainment and amusements that were in themselves inconsistent with high Christian social standards.

We all know that our churches meet on the Sabbath at times in college gymnasiums, college auditoriums, et cetera, because they do not have their own church building. I could conceive of a dinner planned in the interest of health evangelism, the Five Day Plan, or vegetarian cookery in such an auditorium. This would certainly be appropriate.

When it comes to dedicated sanctuaries used for meals for the people, I can say this that as I have traveled and we have conducted all-day meetings on the Sabbath, the people have brought their lunch and eaten it in the sanctuary, each having his own little sack of food and eating it in a manner that was in harmony with the place where he was enjoying his repast. I think we must be careful not to become pharisaical about this and ignore human needs.

A dedicated sanctuary could become a hospital, a place of refuge in time of war, even a place to sleep, under emergency situations.

I think what I have written would properly reflect a consensus and that this letter represents principles that would be supported by the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

About social fellowship dinners on the Sabbath, let me say that we do not have a universal agreement that such dinners should be held on the Sabbath regardless of where they are held. If they were held in the church sanctuary more questions would be raised. I have attended such dinners and have also received a blessing from them when properly conducted, but they can become social affairs with a lot of loud talking and laughing. As a general thing I think this procedure would not be in the best interests of the church, but I cannot be unequivocal about this because circumstances, the amount of space available in the church building, et cetera, all would be factors.

The Adventist church sanctuary is for the dispensing of the bread of life.

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How far we should go in dispensing literal bread, except perhaps in emergencies where there is a disaster of some sort, et cetera, is not completely resolved in my mind. I have my doubts about it.

Sincerely your brother,

D. A. Delaffield, Undersecretary

DDW