

Q+A - Dorcas room in church

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Route 2, Box 1110  
Hood River, Oregon

I just received your letter, written November 10, in which you ask if I know of anywhere in Sister White's writings that she speaks of holding a Dorcas meeting in the church building. I understand that you do not mean the auditorium of the church, but rather in one of the basement rooms. We have no record in Sister White's writings, published or unpublished, where Sister White speaks of a Dorcas meeting being held in the basement of a church where garments were made and repaired, or of her attending such a meeting.

In the earlier days our churches often consisted of just the auditorium and perhaps a little ante-room, but we did not as a rule provide rooms for Sabbath school departments and various church activities as we have been able to do in more recent years in building churches with basements. You will recall in Testimonies for the Church, Volume 6, Ellen White "saw in different places new companies of believers being raised up and meetinghouses being erected. Those newly come to the faith were helping with willing hands, and those who had means were assisting with their means. In the basement of the church, above ground, I was shown a room provided for a school where the children could be educated in the truths of God's word." Testimony, Volume 6, page 108.

On other occasions Ellen White, in appealing for church schools, made it clear that we should not conduct our church schools in the main auditorium of the church, for to do so would make the room common to our boys and girls. I think this illustrates a principle. There may be in the church building itself rooms devoted to church-related activities, which are of a character different than the worship service, but more of a secular type of gathering.

The Dorcas work is part of the work of the church. It is entered upon by officers who are elected by the church. It is done for benevolent work. If there is a room in the church building where this work can be comfortably done, we have never in our past history seen any reason why

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this should not be so. Other churches are fortunate in having a Dorcas building, or a room in some other structure outside of the church building itself.

The nearest I can cite you as an illustration involving Ellen White on a question of this kind is the fact that for the later years of her life she was a member of the Sanitarium Church at St. Helena in Northern California. This church was a building erected for church purposes right near the Sanitarium. Under a portion of this building was the gymnasium which was used for physical exercise and for secular programs, as well as for Sabbath school work. Ellen White was fully aware of this room, and the uses to which it was put. This room was not dedicated to the service of God in the sense that the auditorium itself was. She had no word of rebuke or reproof for the fact that secular programs were held in this gymnasium, although at one time she did have some counsel for the length to which the participants went in a program which was held there. She mentioned the room in dealing with the situation. This would lead me to believe that she would have no counsel of reproof to a church fortunate enough to have basement rooms which could be used for purposes of doing benevolent work.

Her counsels relating to the bazaars and suppers, et cetera, in churches had to do with the resorting to the love of pleasure and the indulgence of appetite as a means for calling for church funds, or funds to be used in religious work.

The principles involved in the question before us are quite different, and in studying matters of this kind, we must get down to basic principles.

Sometime ago I prepared a mimeographed document, "Concerning Food Sales," in which we deal with some of these principles, and you will find here some actions taken at the General Conference Autumn Council. I think this document will be of service to you as you study the question which is before you.

I would suggest that if there is some question among the church members as to the procedures which are being followed that this matter might well be called to the attention of the conference officers who can give good counsel. I trust that this information will be helpful to you, and that this question may be handled in such a way as to meet what is the good judgment of the members of the church without bringing in confusion.

Sincerely your brother,

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