

1 ADCOM/EOM/PreC/SecC/TreC/GCDO12SM to LCC-12SM

2
3 116-12G THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AND ITS DIVISIONS—A
4 DESCRIPTION OF ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN LIGHT
5 OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT,
6 CURRENT GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS, AND PRACTICES

7
8 THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AND ITS DIVISIONS—A DESCRIPTION
9 OF ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN LIGHT OF
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12
13 INTRODUCTION

14
15 The General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) appointed the General
16 Conference and Divisions Role and Function Review Committee with an assignment to review
17 constitution/bylaws/working policy statements describing the roles of the General Conference
18 and its divisions and the implications arising from these roles and relationships.

19
20 The topic at hand merits consideration in a much wider context—that of the role and
21 relationships pertaining among the building blocks of Seventh-day Adventist organization,
22 namely local churches, local conferences/missions, union conferences/missions and the General
23 Conference with its divisions. This report primarily addresses one element of the whole, the
24 relationship between the General Conference and its divisions. There will be occasional
25 reference to other organizational units; however their role is not the central focus here.

26
27 Before reviewing governance documents it may be helpful to recognize that structural
28 relationships among Seventh-day Adventist entities cannot be fully described or resolved by
29 policy. The collective nature of Church life is rooted not in formal structure but in shared
30 commitment to an understanding of the gospel and the call to mission. The Church does what it
31 does not simply because some constituency or executive committee has the power to make or
32 impose its decision but because together the Church perceives a certain course of action to be the
33 right thing.

34
35 From this perspective it is evident that the role of the General Conference is far more than
36 that of policy determination and giving direction. These formalities have their place in a global
37 organization. However, a more important role exists—that of enabling/facilitating global forums
38 and conversations whereby the whole Church can experience being part of a worldwide mission
39 not just a worldwide organization. The role of leadership transcends the role of management.

40
41 In addition to analyzing current governance documents the Committee has reviewed key
42 developments in Seventh-day Adventist Church history that have shaped organizational
43 structure, the relationship of units and the manner in which authority and responsibility is
44 distributed and practiced. Such a perspective helps to inform the understanding of intentions and
45 the interpretation of current text outlining structural roles and relationships.

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1 This report does not outline a biblical foundation for Church structure. It assumes there is
2 unanimous agreement that organizational structure must rest on biblical understandings. From
3 the earliest days of denominational organization Bible teachings and principles have decisively
4 influenced Seventh-day Adventist Church structure. Among these teachings and principles are
5 the concepts of order and system, interrelationships of individuals and organizations, the
6 headship of Jesus Christ, and collaborative and consultative decision-making by groups.

7
8 Except where otherwise required by the immediate context, any reference to “General
9 Conference” in this report means the General Conference Executive Committee or the General
10 Conference in Session, not the General Conference office or its administration.

11
12 The report cites governance documents¹ describing/defining roles and relationships
13 among the various components of denominational organization, the General Conference and its
14 divisions in particular. It identifies illustrations (not an exhaustive listing) of variations in local
15 application of General Conference policies or the adoption of local policies. A short statement
16 concerning the distribution of authority and responsibility across denominational structures is
17 followed by a list of principles that emerge from a study of organizational history and decision-
18 making and/or decision-implementing practices. The report concludes with a short list of
19 recommendations for consideration by General Conference administration.

20
21 **I. Relationship of the General Conference and Its Divisions—Structural Design**

22
23 The General Conference represents the collective and worldwide expression of the
24 Seventh-day Adventist Church. Church organizations around the world recognize the General
25 Conference in Session as the voice of the Church. The General Conference Session, and the
26 General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, is the highest ecclesiastical
27 authority in the administration of the Church.² The General Conference is authorized by its
28 Constitution to create additional organizations to promote specific interests in various sections of
29 the world. All organizations and institutions throughout the world will recognize the authority of
30 the General Conference in session as the highest authority under God³ in ecclesiastical matters.⁴

31
32 To facilitate its worldwide activity, the General Conference has established regional
33 offices, known as divisions. A division in general does the “work” of the General Conference

¹ Documents included: General Conference Constitution and Bylaws as revised at the General Conference Session 2010; General Conference *Working Policy* 2010-2011; and the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 18th edition, revised 2010. The Committee is indebted to Robert Nixon for his very helpful research summary.

² See *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 29-31

³ General Conference *Working Policy* B 10 20, 2.

⁴ See *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p.31, General Conference the Highest Authority

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1 and carries out “responsibilities” assigned by the General Conference and has “general
 2 administrative oversight” of the church in its assigned territory. “Work” and “responsibilities”
 3 include plans, programs, and policies of the General Conference in Session and of the General
 4 Conference Executive Committee.

5
 6 **General Conference Constitution**, Article III, Divisions of the General Conference:
 7 “The General Conference conducts much of its work through its divisions, which in turn
 8 are comprised of unions in specific areas of the world. *Each division of the General*
 9 *Conference is authorized to carry out responsibilities in the territory assigned to it. It*
 10 *shall act in full harmony with the General Conference Constitution and Bylaws, the*
 11 *General Conference Working Policy, and actions of the Executive Committee.”*
 12 (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)

13
 14 “In order to carry the authority of the General Conference, *the actions of division*
 15 *committees shall, of necessity, be in harmony with and complementary to the decisions of*
 16 *the General Conference in Session, and the actions of the General Conference Executive*
 17 *Committee between Sessions.”* (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)

18
 19 **General Conference Working Policy**, B 10 20, Section 1, General Conference and Its
 20 Divisions: “To facilitate its worldwide activity, the General Conference has established
 21 regional offices, known as divisions of the General Conference, *which have been*
 22 *assigned, by action of the General Conference Executive Committee at Annual Councils,*
 23 *general administrative and supervisory responsibilities* for designated groups of unions
 24 and other church units within specific geographic areas.” (Emphasis supplied for
 25 purposes of this report.)

26
 27 **Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual** (Revised 2010) p. 29-30 (5), General Conference
 28 and Its Divisions: “The General Conference represents the worldwide expression of the
 29 Church. Its constituent membership is defined in its Constitution. To facilitate its
 30 worldwide activity, the General Conference has established *regional offices, known as*
 31 *divisions of the General Conference, which have been assigned, by action of the General*
 32 *Conference Executive Committee at Annual Councils, general administrative oversight*
 33 for designated groups of unions and other Church units within specific geographical
 34 areas.” (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)

35
 36 Another structural linkage connecting the General Conference with its divisions is the
 37 dual role filled by General Conference vice presidents who simultaneously serve as presidents of
 38 divisions.

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1 **General Conference Bylaws, Article III, Sec. 4.:** *The vice presidents of the General*
2 *Conference elected for the divisions shall serve as chairmen of the division executive*
3 *committees operating in their respective territories; shall have oversight of the work in*
4 *those territories under the direction of the division executive committees; and shall be*
5 *designated within their respective division territories as presidents of the divisions over*
6 *which they preside. (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)*
7

8 A brief summary⁵ of major organizational developments in Seventh-day Adventist
9 Church structure reveals the changing nature of organizational design, roles and relationships.
10 The abbreviated listing which follows will necessarily fail to capture important decisions and
11 nuances of development. The intent here is only to provide illustrations of how earlier church
12 leaders sought to embrace both distributed authority and global unity. The unfolding story is one
13 of change, revision and restructuring to respond to growth challenges and opportunities while
14 preserving collective identity and engagement in mission.
15

- 16 1861 Formation of first state conference—Michigan (RH, Oct 8, 1861, 148).
17 1862 William S Higley, a layperson, elected as president of the Michigan
18 Conference.
19 1863 GC Session adopts model constitution for state conferences.
20 1874-89 Establishment of seven auxiliary organizations as legally incorporated,
21 independent bodies with their own officers and executive board. These
22 included: General Tract and Missionary Society, Seventh-day Adventist
23 Educational Society, General Sabbath School Association, Health and
24 Temperance Association—later known as the Medical Missionary and
25 Benevolent Association, General Conference Association, National Religious
26 Liberty Association, and Foreign Mission Board. Due to their independent
27 status, coordination with the General Conference presented many challenges.
28 1882 European Council of Seventh-day Adventist Missions (*Historical Sketches of*
29 *the Foreign Missions of SDAs*, 1886, 45). The European Council functioned
30 only a few years and then disappeared.
31 1888 GC Executive Committee divides territory of North America into four
32 districts—South, East, West and Midwest.
33 1889 Increased number of districts in North America from four to six.
34 1893 Australasia set up as district number seven, Europe as district number eight.
35 (The districts functioned in practical terms as extension offices, or ‘divisions’,
36 of the General Conference and had no local or regional constituency to which
37 they were responsible.)

⁵ Information in this summary relies on published and unpublished research work by George Knight, Barry D Oliver and Bert B Haloviak. In addition the Minutes of several General Conference Session were reviewed.

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- 1 1894 First union conference—Australasia. The union structure served as an
 2 intermediary unit between GC and the local conferences. Unlike the districts, it
 3 had its own constitution and constituency, and had executive powers to act on
 4 issues in its region. Union conference officers were responsible to their
 5 regional constituency. In order to unite the new union to the GC, the union
 6 president was appointed as superintendent of district #7—thus automatically
 7 becoming a member of the GC Exec Comm.
- 8 1897 GC Session votes to organize union conferences in Europe and America;
 9 recommends dividing the world into “three grand divisions” or General
 10 Conferences, each with its own General Conference president. It is not evident
 11 that three divisions were actually established. The European and Australasian
 12 fields came to be thought of as unions. This left the North American field
 13 president with the title of GC president in America.
- 14 1901 European Adventist leaders formed the European General Conference.
- 15 1901 GC Session adopts major reorganization concepts: 1) creation of union
 16 conference and mission to supervise local conferences and missions—
 17 dispersed the administrative authority of GC officers; 2) most of the auxiliary
 18 organizations became departments of GC/union/local conf/church; 3) GC
 19 Executive Committee membership increased to 25; 4) ownership of institutions
 20 under jurisdiction of GC and auxiliary organizations now transferred to union
 21 conference; 5) GC would have no president.
- 22 1903 GC Session—reorganization continued. “All institutions are to be owned
 23 directly by the people, either the General Conference, Union Conference, State
 24 Conference or organized mission field.”
- 25 1907 GC Executive Committee in Gland, Switzerland, voted that the organization
 26 known as the European General Conference, organized by advice of the
 27 General Conference in 1901, be discontinued. Provision was made for a
 28 General Conference Committee in Europe. A vice president of the worldwide
 29 General Conference was elected to take the general supervision of its work in
 30 Europe.
- 31 1909 Three divisions approved—Asiatic, European, and North American. These
 32 division structures were given further definition in 1913.
- 33 1913 GC Session creates three division conferences: European, North American,
 34 South American, and one division mission—Asiatic. Each had a defined
 35 constituency along with a constitution and bylaws. The European Division
 36 Conference did not function due to onset of WWI.
- 37 1918 GC Session discontinued the division conferences in an action stating that the
 38 divisions would no longer be independent conferences with their own

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1 constituencies, but rather divisions or extensions of the General Conference in
2 a given territory.⁶ The design for North America was different from the other
3 divisions in that GC staff would serve as officers of North America--the
4 situation that prevailed until the changes that began in the 1980s. Reasons
5 given for the discontinuation of division conferences included:

- 6 1. To preserve the unity of the work; to limit the possibility at any future
7 time of having a large section of the work break away from the general
8 body.
- 9 2. To preserve in the minds and giving habits of the members one great
10 missionary movement in the world.
- 11 3. To preserve General Conference access to the resources (personnel and
12 means) of the unions and conferences for global use.

13 1922 General Conference Constitution and Bylaws amended significantly. Role of
14 divisions outlined. This pattern of relationship has remained largely unchanged
15 with the exception of the decision (1980's) to set up the North American
16 Division in a manner similar to other divisions.⁷

17
18 **II. Relationship of the General Conference and Its Divisions—the Role of Policy**

19
20 **General Conference Working Policy B 10 25 Structural Stability**—“Local churches,
21 local conferences/missions/fields, union conferences/missions, unions of churches, and
22 institutions are, by vote of the appropriate constituency, and by actions of properly
23 authorized executive committees, a part of the worldwide organization of the Seventh-
24 day Adventist Church. Whereas each has accepted the privilege and responsibility of
25 representing the Church in its part of the world, *each is therefore required to operate and*
26 *minister in harmony with the teachings and policies of the Church, and the actions of the*
27 *world Church in Session. While individual units of the Church are given freedom to*
28 *function in ways appropriate to their role and culture, no part of the worldwide*
29 *organization of the Church has a unilateral right to secede.” (Emphasis supplied for*
30 *purposes of this report.)*

31
32 **General Conference Working Policy B 15 General Conference Working Policy, B 15 05**
33 **Authoritative Administrative Voice of the Church**—“The General Conference *Working*

⁶ The term ‘division conference’ continued in the SDA Yearbook for many years thereafter. Evidence suggests that the division conference structure and operations did not fully cease until about 1923.

⁷ A notable exception occurred with the South Pacific Division which was organized in 1922 and functioned rather in a dual role—as a union conference and as a division conference. In 2005 the South Pacific Division constituency voted to dissolve its constitution. The South Pacific Division now has the same relationship to the General Conference as any other division.

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1 *Policy* contains the Constitution and Bylaws of the General Conference, the Mission
 2 Statement and the accumulated policies adopted by General Conference Sessions and
 3 Annual Councils of the General Conference Executive Committee. It is, therefore, *the*
 4 *authoritative voice of the Church in all matters pertaining to the mission and to the*
 5 *administration of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in all parts of the*
 6 *world.*” (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)
 7

8 **General Conference Working Policy B 15 10 Adherence to Policy Required**—“1. The
 9 General Conference *Working Policy* shall be strictly adhered to by all organizations in
 10 every part of the world field. *The work in every organization shall be administered in full*
 11 *harmony with the policies of the General Conference and of the divisions respectively. No*
 12 *departure from these policies shall be made without prior approval from the General*
 13 *Conference Executive Committee, except as stated below. The division committee is the*
 14 *authorized body which acts for the General Conference Executive Committee in the*
 15 *respective divisions.* All conference, mission, or institutional administrators shall
 16 cooperate in maintaining these policies as they affect the work in their respective
 17 organizations. Only thus can a spirit of close cooperation and unity be maintained in the
 18 work of the Church in all parts of the world field. In the event laws/changes in the laws
 19 governing a country seem to render compliance with denominational policies a violation
 20 of the law, the organization shall act in harmony with the law, provided the following:
 21 a. Counsel has been sought from the General Conference, and it is established that
 22 denominational policies do indeed violate the law.
 23 b. Compliance with the law does not constitute a violation of scriptural principles.
 24 2. General Conference institutions shall adhere to the remuneration policies of the host
 25 division (Y 05 05, paragraph 6.) with any exceptions approved by the General
 26 Conference Executive Committee at a Spring Meeting or by an Annual Council. *For all*
 27 *other policies, the General Conference Working Policy shall apply except where the*
 28 *General Conference Executive Committee votes that the host division policies shall be*
 29 *followed.*” (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)
 30

31 General Conference *Working Policy* B 10 25 cited above describes in general terms the
 32 interrelationship of all church organizational units and the freedom to function in ways
 33 appropriate to their role and culture yet without unilateral right to secede
 34

35 The analogy of the body (1 Corinthians 12) representing a foundational pattern for
 36 relationships among Church members also has significant implications for relationships among
 37 Church entities. A primary value for Seventh-day Adventists is the idea of oneness or unity. The
 38 Church strives to maintain a global identity and a global witness. The history of organizational
 39 development reveals an underlying conviction that “together we can do more.”
 40

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1 Seventh-day Adventist Church polity is neither congregational nor hierarchical. It is built
 2 on the concept of interdependence—every piece of organization needs every other piece in order
 3 to function effectively. Strong inter-organizational linkages must be maintained even amidst a
 4 variety of pressures that would tend towards independence.
 5

6 Two competing dynamics are at work in every growing organization—centralization and
 7 decentralization. In Seventh-day Adventist Church development the purpose of centralization is
 8 more for coordination than for control. The purpose of decentralization is more for
 9 responsiveness to mission in local situations than for independence. These distinctions merit
 10 remembrance. No part of the Church can exist on its own, nor can any part act as if it exists only
 11 for itself.
 12

13 **III. The Purview of Divisions in Relation to the General Conference**
 14

15 Governance documents of the Church state in general terms that a division “is authorized
 16 to carry out responsibilities” in its assigned territory and “shall act in full harmony” with the
 17 Constitution and Bylaws, the General Conference *Working Policy*, and actions of the General
 18 Conference Executive Committee. *Working Policy* enlarges on that general authority and states
 19 that each division “shall prepare and publish a working policy for the division, its departments,
 20 and the organizations and institutions within its territory.”
 21

22 The purpose of a division working policy, then, would be comprehensive enough to cover
 23 the policy needs of all division organizations. The undefined “limit” is that a division working
 24 policy must be “in harmony” with the General Conference Constitution and *Working Policy*. “In
 25 harmony” is not defined, nor is there a mandate that a division working policy include every
 26 aspect of General Conference *Working Policy*.
 27

28 Further, a division is not “free to pursue a course of action contrary to the will of the
 29 whole, or to appropriate to itself the authority of the General Conference in defense of such
 30 action.” (General Conference policy recognizes that “General Conference divisions, unions, and
 31 local conferences/mission have separate identities for their legal purposes.⁸) However, policies
 32 describing the work of the three division executive officers do not use the “in harmony” with
 33 policy but say the division officers must “work according to plans and programs voted by the
 34 General Conference Session and/or the General Conference Executive Committee and according
 35 to the plans and policies agreed upon by the executive committee of the division.” Similar
 36 language for the division secretary and treasurer appears in the Bylaws.
 37

⁸ See General Conference *Working Policy* BA 25

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1 **General Conference Working Policy B 40 20** Divisions a Part of General Conference—
2 “The larger and more extensive the work of these divisions, and the less dependent any
3 may become upon help from other divisions in the way of personnel or material support,
4 the greater the necessity of holding closely together in mutual counsel and fellowship. *It*
5 *is ever to be held in mind that each division is a part of the General Conference. In the*
6 *church of Christ, which is His body, there can be no such thing as one part or member*
7 *independent of the whole. No division, therefore, is free to pursue a course of action*
8 *contrary to the will of the whole, or to appropriate to itself the authority of the General*
9 *Conference in defense of such action.* Between sessions of the General Conference, the
10 General Conference Executive Committee is constitutionally the final authority
11 throughout the world field.” (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)
12

13 **General Conference Working Policy C 10 05**, Division Working Policy: “*Each division*
14 *committee shall prepare and publish a working policy for the division, its departments,*
15 *and the organizations and institutions within its territory, in harmony with the*
16 *Constitution and Working Policy of the General Conference.*” (Emphasis supplied for
17 purposes of this report.)
18

19 Certain types of authority and responsibility have been delegated to divisions. These
20 include:
21

22 1. General administrative and supervisory responsibilities for the division territory.
23 (GC Constitution, Article III; GCWP B 10 20) These general responsibilities would include
24 overall direction of the spiritual life and mission of the Church throughout the division, the
25 development and implementation of strategic plans, and the mobilization and allocation of
26 resources—all done in ways reflecting the urgency of the Church’s mission.
27

28 2. Facilitating, within division territory, the activity and purposes of the worldwide
29 Seventh-day Adventist Church. (SDA CM p. 29-30)
30

31 3. Operation of institutions (GCWP B 10 20—assumed as part of general
32 administrative and supervisory responsibilities)
33

34 4. Recommend modified structures and/or administrative relationships
35 (GCWP B 10 30)
36

37 5. Address continuance or discontinuance of alternative administrative arrangements
38 (GCWP B 10 30, clause 2.)
39

40 6. Policies for aviation programs (GCWP C 75 05)

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- 1
 2 7. Recommend Church Manual supplements (GCWP BA 15 20)
 3
 4 8. Incorporation of organizations (GCWP BA 25 05, 25 10)
 5
 6 9. Remuneration policies (GCWP Y 05 05 6.)
 7
 8 10. Retirement policies (GCWP Z 05 05)
 9
 10 11. Approval of alternative methods for transferring members between churches
 11 within the division... (SDA Church Manual, p. 53)
 12

13 **IV. Variations in Policy Application and Areas of Operation Where Policy is Silent**
 14

15 Without conducting exhaustive research the Committee notes that there are several,
 16 perhaps many, instances where organizations have adapted General Conference and/or division
 17 working policy in a manner that reveals considerable diversity of application. In other situations
 18 organizations may be operating within the sphere of their authority to determine policy but
 19 comparing the policies among divisions reveals a wide variance. Further, there are some areas of
 20 organizational life for which no policy exists (i.e. Church-sponsored business operations crossing
 21 division territorial boundaries).
 22

23 The following list illustrates some of the ways in which General Conference policies
 24 have been adapted or implemented in ways that might be viewed as a variance to policy. Other
 25 examples in this list illustrate areas in which no global policy exists or in which it is not possible
 26 to maintain a single worldwide policy.
 27

- 28 1. Constitutions and Bylaws do not mirror model governance documents.
 29
 30 2. Remuneration policies/practices go beyond the GC philosophy on remuneration.
 31
 32 3. Retirement plan policies differ widely around the world. Divisions have been
 33 entrusted with responsibility to develop their own retirement plans in harmony with the legal
 34 requirements in each country.
 35
 36 4. No policy exists to guide the operation of business enterprises across division
 37 territory boundaries.
 38
 39 5. Variation exists among divisions in use of employee licenses and credentials.
 40

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1 authorized to exercise its authority and responsibility in a manner that is contrary to the interests
2 of the whole Church and its activities in fulfilling its mission.

3 4 Structural unit	Illustrations⁹ of final authority and responsibility
5 6 Local Church	7 Decisions on membership (admission/discipline/dismissal) 8 Selection of local church officers and boards 9 Furtherance of mission within its territory
10 11 Local Conf/Mission	12 Employment/assignment of pastors and other workers 13 Establishment and operation of elementary schools 14 Selection of local conference officers/staff/executive committee 15 Revision/amendment of its constitution and bylaws 16 Counsel/guide churches/employees within its territory
17 18 Union Conf/Mission	19 Ordination of ministers 20 Establishment and operation of institutions (education/healthcare) 21 Selection of union conference officers/staff/executive committee 22 Revision/amendment of its constitution and bylaws
23 24 GC Session	25 Approve the statement of denominational beliefs 26 Creation/revision/amendment of <i>Church Manual</i> 27 Revision/amendment of its constitution and bylaws 28 Election of General Conference officers and department directors 29 Election of division officers
30 31 GC Exec Comm	32 Establishment and configuration of division boundaries 33 Approval to form new unions 34 Establishment and operation of General Conference institutions 35 Establishment/revision of <i>Working Policy</i> 36 Authority, between GC Sessions, to act on behalf of the Session
37 38 Divisions	39 Establishment and operation of institutions 40 Responsibility for a delegated range of policies 41 Acting/speaking on behalf of the General Conference 42 Adoption of employee licenses and credentials 43 General supervision of work in division territory 44 Authority to set up corporations

35 **VI. Principles Informing the Use of Authority in Seventh-day Adventist Church Structure**

- 36
37 1. Authority originates with the membership and is entrusted to structures.
38

⁹ The illustrations are not intended to be an exhaustive listing of responsibility for each structural unit.

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1 ***Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, p.28-29:*** “The Seventh-day Adventist form
 2 of governance is representative, which recognizes that authority rests in the
 3 membership and is expressed through duly elected representatives at each level of the
 4 organization, with executive responsibility delegated to representative bodies and
 5 officers for the governing of the Church at each separate level.”
 6

7 2. Authority is distributed throughout the organization. See section V, Authority and
 8 Responsibility in Seventh-day Adventist Church Structure.
 9

10 3. Authority is exercised in a spirit of interdependence.
 11

12 **General Conference Working Policy D 05:** “...representative and constituency-
 13 based system. Its authority is rooted in God and distributed to the whole people of
 14 God. It recognizes the committee system. It provides for shared administration
 15 (president, secretary, treasurer) rather than a presidential system. It recognizes a unity
 16 of entities (church, conference, union, General Conference) based on mission,
 17 purpose, and belief that binds the believers together in a universal fellowship. *While*
 18 *the integrity of each entity is recognized (church, conference, union), each is seen to*
 19 *be a part of a sisterhood which cannot act without reference to the whole.* (Emphasis
 20 supplied for purposes of this report.)
 21

22 4. Some of the authority/responsibility entrusted to the General Conference is
 23 delegated to divisions. (See sections I. II. and III. of this report.)
 24

25 5. Some major organizational initiatives arose in response to mission contexts far
 26 removed from the Church headquarters.
 27

28 Two prominent features of SDA denominational structure which were adopted in the
 29 re-organization measures of GC Sessions 1901 and 1903 actually began, without prior
 30 authorization, in areas geographically remote from the headquarters. These two
 31 features are: 1) the formation of unions, and 2) the establishment of departments.
 32

33 It must be noted that these developments occurred in response to conditions that were
 34 not experienced or realized on a worldwide scale. The realities of the situation had
 35 been described to General Conference leaders who did not see the legitimacy of what
 36 was being proposed. Due to significant lag time in postal communications the local
 37 leadership implemented structural changes that were not previously endorsed by
 38 headquarters. In the case of departments, by the time that communication and counsel
 39 from headquarters arrived, the changes had been implemented and were working
 40 well. In the case of the union, when General Conference leadership arrived on site the

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1 proposal for a union was viewed as appropriate to fit the need. Within a fairly short
 2 time this model of structure was adopted as a pattern for the whole Church.
 3

4 At times, situations may arise which are very localized and do not affect a worldwide
 5 process or pattern. Such situations may warrant localized solutions which have been designed in
 6 consultation with or reviewed by the next higher organization. For example, General Conference
 7 *Working Policy A 20, Roadmap for Mission*, describes certain circumstances where mission
 8 activity in an area may not have reached a stage where formal church structures are feasible.
 9

10 6. Engaging in mission requires decision-making at all layers of organizational
 11 structure. Overlapping membership on executive committees (conference, union, division,
 12 General Conference) is designed to facilitate collaboration and cooperation. Consultative,
 13 disciplinary and appeal processes are available to resolve situations where entrusted authority
 14 and responsibility has been exercised in a manner that creates differences and disagreements.
 15

16 **General Conference *Working Policy B 45 25 Adjustments of Differences—***
 17 **Divisions and General Conference—**If any adjustment is needed regarding
 18 differences of opinion arising between the division committee and the General
 19 Conference Executive Committee or the General Conference Administrative
 20 Committee, the matter shall be referred to the next Annual Council.

21 **General Conference *Working Policy B 45 30 Appeals—***The Seventh-day Adventist
 22 Church makes provision that every agency in the work, from the individual in the
 23 remotest station to the responsible committees at every stage of the organization, is
 24 assured full privilege, without prejudice, of representing opinion and conviction, and
 25 asking consideration and counsel in matters affecting life and service.
 26

27 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
 28

29 Governance documents for the Seventh-day Adventist Church clearly identify divisions
 30 as a creation of the General Conference for the purpose of representing and acting for the
 31 General Conference within a specific geographic territory. A division is expected to speak with
 32 the voice of the General Conference—not with its own voice as separate from and in contrast to
 33 that of the General Conference.
 34

35 The authority and responsibility entrusted by the General Conference to divisions is
 36 defined in rather general terms although there are specific areas of responsibility for which a
 37 division is expected to establish its own policies. The general terms outlining division authority
 38 and responsibility are to be interpreted within the context of the division's role as an extension of
 39 the General Conference. Division supervision within its territory is to be exercised in harmony
 40 with General Conference policies and actions.

116-12G THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AND ITS DIVISIONS—A
DESCRIPTION OF ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN LIGHT
OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT,
CURRENT GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS, AND PRACTICES - 15

1
2 The distribution of authority and responsibility in the Church along with the recognition
3 that “authority rests in the membership” present significant challenges in finding a balance
4 between centralized authority (actions of the global Church) and the more localized authority
5 (actions of the constituency) in churches, conferences, or unions. In the interest of preserving
6 global unity the historical trend has been towards increasing the size of the General Conference
7 Executive Committee and ensuring that there is global input in policy decisions.

8
9 At the same time as the Church has worked to preserve unity, the effect of church growth
10 has enlarged the understanding of diversity and its rightful place in a worldwide community. To
11 expect that every entity in the world church will look and function exactly like every other entity
12 of its type may in itself become an impediment to mission. The development of structural
13 designs in the history of the Church indicates that unity must be built on a stronger foundation
14 than uniformity.

15
16 This committee concludes that current governance documents contain adequate language
17 outlining the relationship between the General Conference and its divisions. But the committee
18 also recognizes that governance documents cannot embrace every detail of general and specific
19 authority delegated to divisions. There must be room to recognize the need for and legitimacy of
20 local adaptation of policies and procedures that facilitate mission while not diminishing the
21 worldwide identity, harmony and unity of the Church. Furthermore, divisions need to address
22 situations for which no global policy exists. In doing so however, a division should also bring
23 these to the attention of the General Conference for review.

24
25 Existing General Conference governance allows for divisions to make policies
26 concerning certain operational activities within their geographic territory provided the policies
27 can be harmonized with and not in conflict with the governing documents or policies of the
28 General Conference even when working to localize or adapt to cultural needs within the
29 particular division. Continued church growth and the inevitability of changing circumstances and
30 environments will require the global church to have systems in place for dialog and consultation
31 on matters that may be perceived as requiring some response other than doing things the same
32 way everywhere.

33
34 The relationship among entities of the Church is more than a matter of law and policy.
35 Therefore attempts to codify that relationship will always be inadequate. The primary strength of
36 the Church comes not from its structure but from its collective desire to live out a commitment to
37 the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Such a commitment embraces a call to community.

38