

B ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION*

B 05 Organizational and Operational Principles of Seventh-day Adventist Church Structure

Organizational life and procedures in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are based upon the following principles:

1. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a worldwide community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and who are united in mission, purpose, and belief. The Church defines its internal governance as representative in form with executive responsibility and authority assigned to a variety of entities and institutions and their respective constituencies, boards, and officers through constitutions or articles of incorporation, bylaws, and operating policies and guidelines.

2. Each level of denominational organization has a defined membership, also known as a constituency. These constituency-based levels are: local church, local conference, union conference, and General Conference. (Local missions and union missions have several similarities to local and union conferences, however their operations are defined by General Conference and division policies rather than by a constitution and bylaws. Divisions are established as regional offices of the General Conference and are not considered as constituency-based organizations. Unions of churches, (see B 85) have been established in exceptional circumstances. However, this is not the standard pattern for denominational organization. Institutions may also be described as constituency-based but are not considered as a separate level of denominational organization.) Membership, held in only one constituency at a time, carries the privilege of participation in the deliberations and decision-making of that particular constituency.

3. Organizational status is granted to a constituency as a trust. Organizational status as a local church, local conference/mission, or union conference/mission is not self-generated, automatic, or perpetual. It is the

*It should be noted in this chapter that other terminology is used in some geographical areas for organizational units such as fields, sections, regions, or delegations.

result of a formal decision by an executive committee or a constituency session at higher levels of denominational organization. Organizational membership and status are entrusted to entities that meet certain qualifications such as faithfulness to Seventh-day Adventist doctrines, compliance with denominational practices and policies, demonstration of adequate leadership and financial capacity, and responsiveness to mission challenges and opportunities. Membership and status can be reviewed, revised, amended, or withdrawn by the level of organization that granted it.

4. Decisions are based on group processes that allow for member participation. Each individual member of a local church has the right of voice and vote (unless under discipline) in the business decisions of the local church. At other constituency levels participation is accomplished through the selection of representatives. For example, representatives chosen by each local church become delegates, authorized participants, in a local conference constituency meeting. Meetings of members to transact official business are called constituency meetings and are conducted within the terms of bylaws applicable to the level of organization concerned. When the necessary quorum is present for a constituency/executive committee meeting, the opinion of the majority participating in a vote is regarded as the decision of the group unless bylaws or rules of order require approval by more than a simple majority.

5. The highest level of authority within the powers granted to each level of denominational organization resides in the constituency meeting. Various officers may be elected and vested with a degree of authority but ultimately each officer is accountable to a group such as the executive committee. An executive committee is entrusted, through policies or constitution and bylaws, with authority to govern between constituency meetings. However, the executive committee is ultimately accountable to the constituency meeting of the organization concerned.

6. Different elements of organizational authority and responsibility are distributed among the various levels of denominational organization. For example, the decision as to who may/may not be a member of a local Seventh-day Adventist Church is entrusted to the members of the local church concerned; decisions as to the employment of local church pastors is entrusted to the local conference/mission; decisions regarding the ordination of ministers is entrusted to the union conference/mission; and the definition of denominational beliefs is entrusted to the General Conference in session. Thus each level of organization exercises a realm

of final authority and responsibility that may have implications for other levels of organization.

7. The constituent levels of the Church may establish affiliated entities, such as educational, healthcare, and publishing institutions, food industries, media centers, and radio and television stations, that are integral parts of the Church's Christian witness but each of which may operate with its own authority and responsibility under its own organizational documents, board of directors, and administrative officers in harmony with Church working policies.

8. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has both a local and global identity. The local church is indeed a genuine expression of the Seventh-day Adventist Church but its identity cannot be fully defined or viewed in isolation from its relationships with other local churches and other levels of denominational organization. The local and global elements of Seventh-day Adventist identity are expressed in documents such as the *Church Manual* and General Conference *Working Policy* that reflect aspects of self-governance and interrelationship. The *Church Manual* and the General Conference *Working Policy* present the collective voice of Seventh-day Adventists regarding beliefs, denominational structure, relationships, and operational procedures.

B 10 Outline of Denominational Organization

B 10 05 Local Church—A specific group of Seventh-day Adventist members in a defined location that has been granted, by the constituency of a local conference/mission, in session, official status as a Seventh-day Adventist church.

B 10 10 Local Conference/Mission/Field—A specific group of local churches, within a defined geographic area, that has been granted, by the constituency of a union conference/mission, in session, official status as a Seventh-day Adventist local conference/mission/field.

B 10 15 Union Conference/Mission—A specific group of local conferences/missions/fields, within a defined geographic area, that has been granted, by a General Conference Session, official status as a Seventh-day Adventist union conference/mission.

B 10 20 General Conference and Its Divisions—1. *Divisions*—To facilitate its worldwide activity, the General Conference has established regional offices, known as divisions of the General Conference, which have been assigned, by action of the General Conference Executive Committee at Annual Councils, general administrative and supervisory