At the 2010 General Conference Session in Atlanta, Ga., a request was made from the floor to study the theology of ordination. A timeline was voted in reference to the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s research and discussion on this issue with the Church’s Biblical Research Institution serving as the facilitator.

Listed below is the theology of ordination study process timeline:

**October 2011**—At the Annual Council, the process is presented and each division is asked to request their division biblical research committee to make a study of the theology of ordination and its implications for church practices. Divisions that have not yet established a division biblical research committee are kindly requested to do so. The Biblical Research Institute will provide the necessary materials, which will be of help in establishing the biblical research committees.

**November 2013**—Each division committee at their 2013 year-end meetings reviews the study made by their division biblical research committee and recommends it to the Biblical Research Institute director for consideration by a theology of ordination study committee.

**November 2013**—The General Conference Administrative Committee appoints a Theology of Ordination Study Committee with appropriate division representation.

**December 2013-June 2014**—The Theology of Ordination Study Committee analyzes the materials received from the divisions and prepares a combined report.

**June 2014**—Report is reviewed by General Conference executive officers.

**June 2014**—Report is reviewed with the President’s Executive Administrative Council (PREXAD) and the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM).

**October 2014**—General Conference administration process the report to the 2014 Annual Council

**October 2014**—Annual Council will review the report and, if needed, take any appropriate action. If voted material needs to be placed on the 2015 General Conference Session agenda, it will be processed accordingly.

The aforementioned process serves as a backdrop to various unions in the North American Division as they have begun to address the role of women in ministry and women’s ordination in their own territories.
At the 2011 North American Division Year-end Meeting, executive committee members voted to allow Division leadership to elect a committee to provide direction to the development of a series of papers, which will contribute to the discussion of the biblical theology of ordination and its implications prior to the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Tex.

Listed below chronologically are the complete statements from the various organizations in reference to their discussions on how to recognize the role of women in ministry:

**Pacific Union on Women’s Ordination**  
*Thursday, March 15, 2012*

After nearly two hours of discussion and prayer, the Pacific Union Conference executive committee today reaffirmed their strong commitment to the ordination of women. The committee agreed that the next steps will require careful planning, so they decided to put specific actions in place at their next meeting on May 9. In the interim, union administrators will work with local conference administrators to develop proposals for specific actions.

**Columbia Union to Study How to Affirm Women in Ministry**  
*Tuesday, March 20, 2012*

At its spring meeting Sunday, the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee voted two items that will propel the subject of women in ministry to the top of its agenda this year, as follows:

“Whereas the North American Division (NAD) Leadership has encouraged each union to be intentional in affirming women in ministry,

**we vote** to establish an ad hoc Committee to study the issue of women in ministry and recommend to the Columbia Union Executive Committee how we can be intentional in affirming women in ministry. In addition,  
**we vote** to affirm our previous action requesting the NAD to grant us permission to ordain women in ministry.”

To ensure that these topics remain a priority on its agenda, the committee also requested that the ad hoc committee present its report at the next union Executive Committee meeting.

Between now and then, the ad hoc committee, which will have representation from each of the union’s eight conferences, will work through five terms of reference:

1. Review past history of Columbia Union practice.
2. Review biblical and Spirit of Prophecy mandates regarding the role of women in ministry.
4. Study and review cultural implications regarding women in ministry.
5. Recommend to Columbia Union Executive Committee appropriate initiatives for supporting women in ministry.

More information will be released following the ad hoc committee’s report to the Executive Committee on May 17.

**Mid-America Union Votes on Women’s Ordination**  
*A statement from Thomas L. Lemon, president*  
*Wednesday, March 21, 2012*

On Thursday, March 8, our Union Executive Committee voted “to support the ordination of women in the Mid-America Union.” We have, with that simple vote, unleashed at least as much
misunderstanding as understanding. In making that short statement we intended to be clear, but obviously we were not. And some of my statements since, along with the statements of many others have further muddied the waters. It is unfortunately true that words cannot totally encompass all the nuances of our discussion or understanding as we voted our consciences 11 days ago. It is also impossible to convey via the printed page the experience that pervaded our committee room. It was a wonderful, heartfelt and honest discussion and a firm resounding vote.

But we did not vote to ordain a woman. When the time comes, after considerable prayerful study and discussion, we will be in a better position to discern how best to move forward.

What we do know is that we want the world church to understand that as a committee we are closely aligned in our support of this cause. We intend to work in harmony with the North American Division (NAD) of the General Conference and at such time as the NAD provides authorization, we look forward to seeing parity achieved across our union for all individuals as we, together with the world church, pursue the mission of making disciples given to us by Jesus.

We want that message of support to extend to those women who have experienced and are pursuing the call to ministry in their own lives. We further want our conferences to feel free to discuss the matter in an environment of safety and openness, and among those six entities we prayerfully desire to achieve a working consensus at our two levels of governance. And thirdly, we are also with this action encouraging the world church to respect the various mores and values expressed in the 13 world divisions. That is a major reason why the divisions were established in the first place more than a century ago.

Please keep us in your prayers as we sail in uncharted waters at this point. And, under the direction of the Scripture, may the Holy Spirit continue to reveal to us the pathway He wants us to walk in.

Southeastern California Conference Makes Decision Regarding Credentials

Thursday, March 22, 2012

The Executive Committee of the Southeastern California Conference voted today “to remove the term ‘Ordained-Commissioned’ and replace it with the term ‘Ordained’ on all ministerial credentials, regardless of the gender of the credential holder.” This is effective immediately.

Since 2000 the conference had issued “Ordained-Commissioned” ministerial credentials to men and women.

The committee believes this step will enable all pastors to better fulfill the conference’s mission statement, which is the expansion of God’s kingdom through preaching, teaching, publishing and living of the everlasting gospel throughout the cross-cultural communities of its territory.

The Southern Union Executive Committee Action Surrounding Women in Ministry

Thursday, March 29, 2012

Due to the current and considerable dialogue regarding women in ministry in the North American Division, the Southern Union Conference Executive Committee voted the following statement:

Whereas the Southern Union Conference and its member conferences and organizations have a long history of actively supporting, encouraging, and empowering women in all areas of ministry including pastoral, evangelistic, conference and union leadership, and all levels and areas of education, and

Whereas the Southern Union Conference recognizes itself as an integral part of the Seventh-day

Adventist World Church, it is therefore resolved:

The Southern Union Conference, following the scriptural mandate of the priesthood of all believers, intentionally chooses to continue its long-held commitment of supporting, encouraging, empowering, and celebrating the involvement of women in ministry. However, we will do so only in harmony with the Seventh-day Adventist World Church as expressed by actions taken during the General Conference in business session.

Union Committee Calls Special Constituency Session to Authorize Ordinations Without Regard to Gender

*Wednesday, May 9, 2012*

At their March meeting, the Pacific Union executive committee voted to table until May 9 a motion that would immediately approve the ordination of ministers without regard to gender. They also set up an Ordination Study Committee to outline the steps necessary to make gender-neutral ordinations a reality as soon as possible.

Today at the La Sierra University Alumni Center, that committee delivered their report to the full executive committee. The committee replaced the original motion with a new one and voted overwhelmingly to call a special constituency meeting, tentatively scheduled for August 19.

The committee voted separately on the main motion, including the preamble. The preamble and main motion were approved by a vote of 42-2. The process, which includes calling a special constituency session, was approved unanimously.

**Voted (preamble):**

- Whereas Scripture is clear that the end-time Church is blessed precisely because men *and* women preach God’s message (Joel 2:28-29 and Fundamental Belief 17);

- Whereas we are commanded to “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8);

- Whereas “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28);

- Whereas “differences between male and female must not be divisive among us” and “we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation” (Fundamental Belief 14);

- Whereas the Seventh-day Adventist Church is co-founded by a woman, Ellen G. White, who remains an authoritative and guiding voice;

- Whereas the Pacific Union is enriched by Spirit-filled women who are responding to God’s call in our schools, churches and conferences;

- Whereas the Seventh-day Adventist Church assigns Unions the final decision-making authority and responsibility with respect to ordination (NAD Working Policy L45 05 3, Spring Council 2012 116-12G Report);

- Whereas the Pacific Union Conference voted its full commitment to Women’s Ordination, August 30, 1995 (reaffirmed May 12, 2010 and March 15, 2012);

Therefore, [main action]

- The Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee will approve or disapprove candidates for
ordination without regard to gender, effective when the Union Bylaws are amended.

The Process

**Voted**, approval for the following process:

- Because the Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee is committed to following denominational procedures and processes, and to facilitate the involvement of the entire Union constituency, a special constituency session will be called to consider amendments to the Pacific Union Conference Bylaws to clearly authorize the ordination of ministers without regard to gender.

- The Pacific Union Conference Bylaws Committee will examine the Union bylaws and suggest amendments to clearly authorize the ordination of ministers without regard to gender.

- The Pacific Union Conference will provide an informational packet for the delegates, pertinent to the issues to be discussed in the special constituency session.

Both the study committee and the executive committee made it clear that they are committed to following established church processes and procedures. Their recommendations and actions were guided in large part by a summary of church structure prepared earlier this year by the General Conference and distributed at GC spring meetings. The full name of the document is *The General Conference and Its Divisions — a Description of Roles and Relationships in Light of Organizational Structure Development, Current Governance Documents, and Practices*. That document makes clear that:

*Authority and responsibility in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not centralized in a hierarchical structure. Instead authority and responsibility is distributed throughout the Seventh-day Adventist Church structure ...*

*The distribution of authority and responsibility in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is illustrated by the following examples of how and where final decision-making authority and responsibility are located ...*

The document goes on to explain that the “final authority and responsibility” for deciding who will be a church member is located at the local church; the “final authority and responsibility” for the employment/assigning of pastors and other workers resides at the local conference; and the “final authority and responsibility” for deciding who will be ordained is officially located at the unions.

The committee also considered that the same paragraphs that declare ordination decision are to be made by the unions, not by the divisions or the General Conference, include this counsel:

*It is to be understood that the exercise of authority and responsibility is done within the context of the belief, values, and policies of the entire church. No entity is authorized to exercise its authority and responsibility in a manner that is contrary to the interests of the whole church and its activities in fulfilling its mission.*

Obviously the distribution of authority found in the Seventh-day Adventist Church can result in tension between world-wide policy and the “final authority and responsibility” which has been assigned to the congregations, conferences and unions. The GC document has much to say about balancing those centers of authority, especially in the final Conclusions and Recommendations:

The following paragraphs and sentences are chosen from the Conclusion to the *GC Spring Document*.

*The distribution of authority and responsibility in the Church along with the recognition that “authority rests in membership” presents significant challenges in finding a balance...*
between centralized authority (actions of the global church) and the more localized authority (actions of the constituency) in churches, conferences and unions.

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

There must be room to recognize the need for a legitimacy of local adaptation of policies and procedures that facilitate mission while not diminishing the worldwide identity, harmony and unity of the Church.

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

Pacific Union executive committee members made it clear during discussions this week that they are committed to taking seriously the “final” authority and responsibility that the Seventh-day Adventist church has assigned to unions. And they made it clear that their call for a special constituency session is not to be interpreted as a way to delay the ordination of all whom God has called to ministry. It is rather, the result of a commitment to follow church procedures and to make sure the final action, whatever it is, is backed by the full authority that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has assigned to the Pacific Union Conference.

Atlantic Union Conference Statement on Women in Ministry
May 15, 2012

At its regularly scheduled quarterly meeting on May 10, 2012, the Atlantic Union Conference Executive Committee voted the following statement regarding women in ministry.

Recognizing the current discussions and the value of women in ministry within the North American Division, the Atlantic Union Conference Executive Committee voted the following statement:

WHEREAS the Atlantic Union Conference and its member conferences and organizations have benefitted from the faithful service and commitment of women in ministry, including evangelistic, pastoral, educational and other roles at all levels of the church and school system, and

WHEREAS the Atlantic Union Conference recognizes itself as a part of the Seventh-day Adventist church, and will act in harmony with its decisions taken during the General Conference in business session, it is therefore

RESOLVED, that the Atlantic Union Conference, in harmony with the scriptural mandates of the priesthood of all believers, is committed to supporting, empowering and celebrating women in ministry.

Columbia Union Executive Committee Calls Special Constituency Meeting to Authorize Ordinations Without Regard to Gender
Thursday, May 17, 2012
At its May 17 meeting, the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee received a report from an ad hoc committee assigned to study how to affirm women in ministry.

After discussing the report (included below), the committee voted:

1. To recognize its responsibility to act morally and ethically by expressing unyielding commitment to ordain qualified persons to the gospel ministry without regard to gender, and
2. To call a special constituency meeting for the purpose of authorizing ordination to the gospel ministry without regard to gender, and
3. To set the meeting date for July 29, 2012, at 10 a.m., at a location to be determined in Maryland.

The committee approved the motion by a vote of 34-6, with one abstention.

“I believe this action represents our committee’s desire to move the mission forward, and we are calling this special session to facilitate a wider conversation,” said Dave Weigley, union president, explaining the need for input from the larger constituency.

To help members understand the committee’s perspective, leaders will publish a special July issue of the union paper, the Visitor. It will provide a review of biblical, historical and Spirit of Prophecy guidelines concerning the role of women in ministry.

Report of the Columbia Union Ad Hoc Committee Affirming Women in Ministry

Women in Seventh-day Adventist ministry are being affirmed through appreciation, recognition and representation at many levels in the church. This needs to be continued and increased. The most significant confirmation, however, requires the action of the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee.

The affirmation of women in ministry in the Adventist church has both a moral and ethical imperative based on Scripture, church history and our diversity in unity.

SCRIPTURE: As a global church that values the authority of Scripture, we acknowledge that:

A. Scripture is clear that the end-time church is blessed with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all believers (Joel 2:28-29 and Acts 2:17-18), with the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) and through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, both women and men preach God’s message (Fundamental Beliefs 14 and 17).
B. We are commanded to practice justice in our actions and relationships (Micah 6:8).
C. Everything contained in the Bible relates to the concepts represented in three words: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. This continuum provides the natural outline to the biblical story. In Eden, God created male and female as equals, both spiritually and relationally, and both are necessary to fully reflect the image of God (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).
D. Multiple times throughout Scripture God chose women to lead His people (Deborah, Esther, Hulda, Anna, four daughters of Philip, Phoebe, Junia etc.).

HISTORY: As a global church that values God’s leading in its history we acknowledge the following significant hallmarks:

A. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was co-founded by a woman, Ellen G. White, who remains an authoritative and guiding voice.
B. At the General Conference Session on December 5, 1881, a motion was made: “RESOLVED
That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry." Reported in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 20, 1881. It appears there was no record of any action taken.

C. Ellen White wrote in the July 9, 1895, *Review & Herald*, of a ministry that women, who gave themselves to it, should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.

D. Willie White ordained deaconesses on January 6, 1900, in Australia. In 1975 an action was taken to ordain deaconesses at GC Session. In 1985 the action was reaffirmed and in 2010 it was recorded in the *Church Manual*. Ordination of women elders was approved in 1975 and reaffirmed at Annual Council in 1984.

E. The General Conference voted to authorize women to serve as pastors (1990).

F. Sixteen female pastors have already been ordained in China. These women are playing a significant role in the rapid church growth in their country and the Northern Asia Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists recognizes their ordinations.

**DIVERSITY IN UNITY: As a global church that values diversity in unity:**

A. We affirm that diversity in unity is part of the divine order for creation, redemption, restoration and for the church (Ephesians 4, John 17, 1 Corinthians 12:12).

B. We affirm God's leading in utilizing the talents of women for the mission of the church. "When a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work, and it will feel the loss if the talents of both are not combined" (Evangelism, p. 469).

C. We understand that "there must be room to recognize the need for a legitimacy of local adaptation of policies and procedures that facilitate mission while not diminishing the worldwide identity, harmony and unity of the Church" (GC Spring Council 2012 116-12G Report).

D. We celebrate our diversity of culture, gender and ethnicity.

E. We recognize that "The distribution of authority and responsibility in the church, along with the recognition that 'authority rests in membership,' presents significant challenges in finding a balance between centralized authority (actions of the global church) and the more localized authority (actions of the constituency) in churches, conferences and unions.

"At the same time, the church has worked to preserve unity, the effect of church growth has enlarged the understanding of diversity and its rightful place in a worldwide community. To expect that every entity in the world church will look and function exactly like every other entity of its type may in itself become an impediment to mission. The development of structural designs in the history of the church indicates that unity must be built on a stronger foundation than uniformity" (GC Spring Council 2012 116-12G Report).

F. We acknowledge that "different elements of organizational authority are distributed among the various levels of denominational organization ... decisions regarding the ordination of ministers are entrusted to the union conference/mission ...” (NAD Working Policy B 05, 6).

G. We recognize that ordination is for the world church (NAD Working Policy L 40 and L 45 05). We further recognize that ordained ministers may not function outside the territory of the organization issuing their credential, unless invited to do so.

**Note:** All scriptural references are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

---

**North Pacific Union Conference Looks Toward Gender-Inclusive Policies**

**Recommendations will be brought to November meeting**

*Thursday, May 17, 2012*

The North Pacific Union Conference (NPUC) Executive Committee, during its May 16, 2012, meeting in College Place, Wash., authorized the NPUC administration to appoint an ad hoc committee to create specific recommendations on how to fully integrate committed and called Adventist women into all levels of church leadership within the NPUC territory. The recommendations of this ad hoc committee will be presented to the NPUC Executive Committee at...
the regularly scheduled November 14, 2012 meeting.
ADCOM/EOM/PreC/SecC/TreC/GCDO12SM to LCC-12SM

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

Contd
Revised 04-12-12tkb
This report does not outline a biblical foundation for Church structure. It assumes there is unanimous agreement that organizational structure must rest on biblical understandings. From the earliest days of denominational organization Bible teachings and principles have decisively influenced Seventh-day Adventist Church structure. Among these teachings and principles are the concepts of order and system, interrelationships of individuals and organizations, the headship of Jesus Christ, and collaborative and consultative decision-making by groups.

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

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

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

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

To facilitate its worldwide activity, the General Conference has established regional 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

Contd
Revised 04-12-12tkb
and carries out "responsibilities" assigned by the General Conference and has "general
administrative oversight" of the church in its assigned territory. "Work" and "responsibilities"
include plans, programs, and policies of the General Conference in Session and of the General
Conference Executive Committee.

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

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

**General Conference Working Policy**, B 10 20, Section 1, General Conference and Its
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 responsibilities for designated groups of unions
and other church units within specific geographic areas." (Emphasis supplied for
purposes of this report.)

**Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual** (Revised 2010) p. 29-30 (5), General Conference
and Its Divisions: "The General Conference represents the worldwide expression of the
Church. Its constituent membership is defined in its Constitution. 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 oversight
for designated groups of unions and other Church units within specific geographical
areas." (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)

Another structural linkage connecting the General Conference with its divisions is the
dual role filled by General Conference vice presidents who simultaneously serve as presidents of
divisions.
General Conference Bylaws, Article III, Sec. 4.: The vice presidents of the General Conference elected for the divisions shall serve as chairmen of the division executive committees operating in their respective territories; shall have oversight of the work in those territories under the direction of the division executive committees; and shall be designated within their respective division territories as presidents of the divisions over which they preside. (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)

A brief summary\(^5\) of major organizational developments in Seventh-day Adventist Church structure reveals the changing nature of organizational design, roles and relationships. The abbreviated listing which follows will necessarily fail to capture important decisions and nuances of development. The intent here is only to provide illustrations of how earlier church leaders sought to embrace both distributed authority and global unity. The unfolding story is one of change, revision and restructuring to respond to growth challenges and opportunities while preserving collective identity and engagement in mission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>William S Higley, a layperson, elected as president of the Michigan Conference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>GC Session adopts model constitution for state conferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874-89</td>
<td>Establishment of seven auxiliary organizations as legally incorporated, independent bodies with their own officers and executive board. These included: General Tract and Missionary Society, Seventh-day Adventist Educational Society, General Sabbath School Association, Health and Temperance Association—later known as the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association, General Conference Association, National Religious Liberty Association, and Foreign Mission Board. Due to their independent status, coordination with the General Conference presented many challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>European Council of Seventh-day Adventist Missions (Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of SDAs, 1886, 45). The European Council functioned only a few years and then disappeared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>GC Executive Committee divides territory of North America into four districts—South, East, West and Midwest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Increased number of districts in North America from four to six.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Australasia set up as district number seven, Europe as district number eight. (The districts functioned in practical terms as extension offices, or 'divisions', of the General Conference and had no local or regional constituency to which they were responsible.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^5\) 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.
1894 First union conference—Australasia. The union structure served as an intermediary unit between GC and the local conferences. Unlike the districts, it had its own constitution and constituency, and had executive powers to act on issues in its region. Union conference officers were responsible to their regional constituency. In order to unite the new union to the GC, the union president was appointed as superintendent of district #7—thus automatically becoming a member of the GC Exec Comm.

1897 GC Session votes to organize union conferences in Europe and America; recommends dividing the world into “three grand divisions” or General Conferences, each with its own General Conference president. It is not evident that three divisions were actually established. The European and Australasian fields came to be thought of as unions. This left the North American field president with the title of GC president in America.

1901 European Adventist leaders formed the European General Conference.

1901 GC Session adopts major reorganization concepts: 1) creation of union conference and mission to supervise local conferences and missions—dispersed the administrative authority of GC officers; 2) most of the auxiliary organizations became departments of GC/union/local conf/church; 3) GC Executive Committee membership increased to 25; 4) ownership of institutions under jurisdiction of GC and auxiliary organizations now transferred to union conference; 5) GC would have no president.

1903 GC Session—reorganization continued. “All institutions are to be owned directly by the people, either the General Conference, Union Conference, State Conference or organized mission field.”

1907 GC Executive Committee in Gland, Switzerland, voted that the organization known as the European General Conference, organized by advice of the General Conference in 1901, be discontinued. Provision was made for a General Conference Committee in Europe. A vice president of the worldwide General Conference was elected to take the general supervision of its work in Europe.

1909 Three divisions approved—Asiatic, European, and North American. These division structures were given further definition in 1913.

1913 GC Session creates three division conferences: European, North American, South American, and one division mission—Asiatic. Each had a defined constituency along with a constitution and bylaws. The European Division Conference did not function due to onset of WWI.

1918 GC Session discontinued the division conferences in an action stating that the divisions would no longer be independent conferences with their own
constituencies, but rather divisions or extensions of the General Conference in a given territory. The design for North America was different from the other divisions in that GC staff would serve as officers of North America—the situation that prevailed until the changes that began in the 1980s. Reasons given for the discontinuation of division conferences included:

1. To preserve the unity of the work; to limit the possibility at any future time of having a large section of the work break away from the general body.

2. To preserve in the minds and giving habits of the members one great missionary movement in the world.

3. To preserve General Conference access to the resources (personnel and means) of the unions and conferences for global use.

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

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

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

General Conference Working Policy B 15 05 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.
Policy contains the Constitution and Bylaws of the General Conference, the Mission Statement and the accumulated policies adopted by General Conference Sessions and Annual Councils of the General Conference Executive Committee. It is, therefore, the authoritative voice of the Church in all matters pertaining to the mission and to the administration of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in all parts of the world." (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)

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

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

The analogy of the body (1 Corinthians 12) representing a foundational pattern for relationships among Church members also has significant implications for relationships among Church entities. A primary value for Seventh-day Adventists is the idea of oneness or unity. The Church strives to maintain a global identity and a global witness. The history of organizational development reveals an underlying conviction that “together we can do more.”
Seventh-day Adventist Church polity is neither congregational nor hierarchical. It is built on the concept of interdependence—every piece of organization needs every other piece in order to function effectively. Strong inter-organizational linkages must be maintained even amidst a variety of pressures that would tend towards independence.

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

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

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

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

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

---

8 See General Conference Working Policy BA 25
General Conference Working Policy B 40 20 Divisions a Part of General Conference—
"The larger and more extensive the work of these divisions, and the less dependent any
may become upon help from other divisions in the way of personnel or material support,
the greater the necessity of holding closely together in mutual counsel and fellowship. It
is ever to be held in mind that each division is a part of the General Conference. In the
church of Christ, which is His body, there can be no such thing as one part or member
independent of the whole. No division, therefore, is free to pursue a course of action
contrary to the will of the whole, or to appropriate to itself the authority of the General
Conference in defense of such action. Between sessions of the General Conference, the
General Conference Executive Committee is constitutionally the final authority
throughout the world field." (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contd
Revised 04-12-12tkb
7. Recommend Church Manual supplements (GCWP BA 15 20)

8. Incorporation of organizations (GCWP BA 25 05, 25 10)

9. Remuneration policies (GCWP Y 05 05 6.)

10. Retirement policies (GCWP Z 05 05)

11. Approval of alternative methods for transferring members between churches within the division... (SDA Church Manual, p. 53)

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

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

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

1. Constitutions and Bylaws do not mirror model governance documents.

2. Remuneration policies/practices go beyond the GC philosophy on remuneration.

3. Retirement plan policies differ widely around the world. Divisions have been entrusted with responsibility to develop their own retirement plans in harmony with the legal requirements in each country.

4. No policy exists to guide the operation of business enterprises across division territory boundaries.

5. Variation exists among divisions in use of employee licenses and credentials.
6. The General Conference itself has a different tithe-sharing policy for the North American Division than for all other divisions.

7. Divisions adopt policies not addressed in General Conference Working Policy. (One example would be the sexual misconduct policy of the NAD.)

In the course of the annual financial audit the management of each entity is required to sign a statement of assertions regarding policy compliance. The compliance assertions relate almost exclusively to a set of core financial policies. The process that an auditor uses in the course of compliance testing would not necessarily bring to light any or all occasions of policy non-compliance—especially in the non-financial areas of policy.

V. Authority and Responsibility in Seventh-day Adventist Church Structure

Model Constitutions and Operating Policies
D 05 Seventh-day Adventist Church Organization

"The 54th General Conference Session, in its consideration of the Role and Function of Denominational Organizations, pointed out that the constitutions, bylaws and operating policies of all denominational organizations should be consistent with the Seventh-day Adventist concept of the church, its organization, and governance. The fruition of that concept is a representative and constituency-based system. Its authority is rooted in God and distributed to the whole people of God. It recognizes the committee system. It provides for shared administration (president, secretary, treasurer) rather than a presidential system. It recognizes a unity of entities (church, conference, union, General Conference) based on mission, purpose, and belief that binds the believers together in a universal fellowship. While the integrity of each entity is recognized (church, conference, union), each is seen to be a part of a sisterhood which cannot act without reference to the whole." (Emphasis supplied for purposes of this report.)

Authority and responsibility in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not centralized in a hierarchical structure. Instead, authority and responsibility is distributed throughout Seventh-day Adventist Church structure so that all parts of the Church structure become inter-dependent. No part of the Church can exist on its own, nor can any part act as if it exists only for itself.

The distribution of authority and responsibility in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is illustrated by the following examples of how and where final decision-making roles are located in organizational structure. It is to be understood that the exercise of authority and responsibility is done within the context of the beliefs, values, and policies of the entire Church. No entity is

Contd
Revised 04-12-12tkb
authorized to exercise its authority and responsibility in a manner that is contrary to the interests of the whole Church and its activities in fulfilling its mission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural unit</th>
<th>Illustrations of final authority and responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Church</td>
<td>Decisions on membership (admission/discipline/dismissal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selection of local church officers and boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Furtherance of mission within its territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Conf/Mission</td>
<td>Employment/assignment of pastors and other workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishment and operation of elementary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selection of local conference officers/staff/executive committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision/amendment of its constitution and bylaws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counsel/guide churches/employees within its territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Conf/Mission</td>
<td>Ordination of ministers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishment and operation of institutions (education/healthcare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selection of union conference officers/staff/executive committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision/amendment of its constitution and bylaws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GC Session</td>
<td>Approve the statement of denominational beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creation/revision/amendment of Church Manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision/amendment of its constitution and bylaws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Election of General Conference officers and department directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Election of division officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GC Exec Comm</td>
<td>Establishment and configuration of division boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approval to form new unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishment and operation of General Conference institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishment/revision of Working Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisions</td>
<td>Authority, between GC Sessions, to act on behalf of the Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishment and operation of institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility for a delegated range of policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acting/speaking on behalf of the General Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adoption of employee licenses and credentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General supervision of work in division territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authority to set up corporations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

1. Authority originates with the membership and is entrusted to structures.

---

9 The illustrations are not intended to be an exhaustive listing of responsibility for each structural unit.
Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, p.28-29: "The Seventh-day Adventist form of governance is representative, which recognizes that authority rests in the membership and is expressed through duly elected representatives at each level of the organization, with executive responsibility delegated to representative bodies and officers for the governing of the Church at each separate level."

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

3. Authority is exercised in a spirit of interdependence.

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

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

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

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

It must be noted that these developments occurred in response to conditions that were not experienced or realized on a worldwide scale. The realities of the situation had been described to General Conference leaders who did not see the legitimacy of what was being proposed. Due to significant lag time in postal communications the local leadership implemented structural changes that were not previously endorsed by headquarters. In the case of departments, by the time that communication and counsel from headquarters arrived, the changes had been implemented and were working well. In the case of the union, when General Conference leadership arrived on site the
1. A proposal for a union was viewed as appropriate to fit the need. Within a fairly short
time this model of structure was adopted as a pattern for the whole Church.

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

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

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

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

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

The authority and responsibility entrusted by the General Conference to divisions is
defined in rather general terms although there are specific areas of responsibility for which a
division is expected to establish its own policies. The general terms outlining division authority
and responsibility are to be interpreted within the context of the division’s role as an extension of
the General Conference. Division supervision within its territory is to be exercised in harmony
with General Conference policies and actions.
The distribution of authority and responsibility in the Church along with the recognition that “authority rests in the membership” present significant challenges in finding a balance between centralized authority (actions of the global Church) and the more localized authority (actions of the constituency) in churches, conferences, or unions. In the interest of preserving global unity the historical trend has been towards increasing the size of the General Conference Executive Committee and ensuring that there is global input in policy decisions.

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

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

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

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