

The Varieties of Church Structure

by Raymond F. Cottrell

The polity of a church reflects what the church thinks it is and should become. This comparative study of church polities examines the structure and *modus operandi* of a variety of representative church bodies in North America, with particular attention to their electoral, decision-making, and administrative processes, and the role of the laity in these processes. This study assumes that the participation of knowledgeable laypeople, with the clergy, in the governance of the church will strengthen its ability to fulfill its mission to its own members and the world.

Of special importance in evaluating the polity of a church are such matters as structure (levels of authority and administration and their relation to each other), electoral process (how a church selects its leaders), legislative process (how it determines its objectives, policy, plans, and *modus operandi*), administration (how a church implements its policies and how it holds its leaders accountable for the way in which they administer its affairs), and adjudication (how it resolves differences of opinion respecting constitutional and administrative matters). Also important is the balance between clerical and lay participation in church government.

Case studies were made of 12 North

American church bodies with a combined membership of 90 million, representing the spectrum of polities from the purely hierarchical through the representative to the purely congregational. Direct contact was made with the national headquarters of each church. Some responded fully by personal letter to a series of specific questions, others with more or less extensive documents, including, in several instances, their official publications on church order and discipline. Interviews were on occasion conducted with local representatives, or by phone with national headquarters.

Obviously the objective of this study was to compare the Seventh-day Adventist Church polity with that of other churches. According to the *SDA Encyclopedia* (Article "Organization"),

The SDA form of church government came to have characteristics of several systems—particularly the congregational, with its emphasis on local church authority; the presbyterian, which provides for government by elected representatives; and in some points the Methodist, in that it has conferences as organizational units and in that the conference assigns ministers to the local churches.

The church bodies covered in this report were selected to provide a spectrum of church polities in North America. In addition to those mentioned by the *SDA Encyclopedia*, the Roman Catholic Church was added as a representative of pure hierarchy and because of basic similarities between its polity and that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod because of certain similari-

ties to Seventh-day Adventist polity; and the Southern Baptist Convention because of the noteworthy way in which it combines congregationalism with highly effective cooperation in aspects of service and mission.

Data for each of the church organizations (except the Roman Catholic Church and the congregational churches) are presented in five sections covering structure, the electoral process, the legislative process, administration, and adjudication. The order in which the churches appear suggest their approximate polity type, from strict hierarchy (in which the local congregation and laypeople have little or no voice in the government of the church as a whole) through various degrees of representative government to a strictly congregational polity. For purposes of comparison, a similar analysis of Seventh-day Adventist polity appears in sequence, at its appropriate location in the spectrum of church polities.

An important aspect of church polity is the concept that structure and procedure are dynamic and not static. As the faith and life of a church and its members are an expression of its divine dimension, so structure and function reflect its human dimension. Being human, structure and operating procedures require attention and adjustment from time to time in order to meet the needs of a changing church in a changing world. A comparative study of church polities implies that an in-depth study of the Adventist church structure and *modus operandi* would contribute to a more effective realization of its objectives. The ability to carry through a meaningful evaluation of this kind requires a high level of maturity on the part of the church.

Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church is a pure hierarchy. Supreme legislative administrative/adjudicatory authority resides in the Holy See, who governs the church through the Roman Curia. The Holy See is

represented in the United States by an "apostolic delegate."

The 49,812,178 members of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States belong to 24,161 parishes, which makes an average of 2,062 to a parish. There are 59,059 priests, or one to every 843 members. The parishes are grouped together in 170 dioceses, over each of which a bishop (or archbishop) presides—with approximately 142 parishes to a diocese. Although each bishop is directly and solely responsible to the Holy See, within his own diocese he has absolute authority.

Vatican Council II gave the bishops of a country permission to organize a national episcopal conference in which they can meet regularly to share experiences, exchange views, and jointly formulate a program for the common good of the church. These national conferences do not have legislative, administrative, or adjudicatory authority because canon law prohibits any other authority between the Holy See and the bishops. The bishops of the United States formed an organization known as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, a "canonical entity," and the United States Catholic Conference, a "civil entity." Both organizations are sponsored by the bishops and are responsible to them.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, or "Episcopal Conference" of the church in the United States, is composed of some 350 bishops who meet twice each year to consider the pastoral needs of the church. Its officers are elected for a term of three years, except the general secretary who serves for five years. The Episcopal Conference has an administrative committee composed of 48 bishops, an executive committee composed of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops officers, one member of the administrative committee elected by that body, more than 30 standing and *ad hoc* committees, and a general secretariat.

The administrative committee, which conducts the work of the Episcopal Confer-

ence between plenary sessions, meets four times a year. Its members are the officers, the chairmen of its standing committees, chairmen and elected members of the United States Catholic Conference committees, and representatives of the 12 geographical regions of the Episcopal Conference committees. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops committees, all of whose members are bishops, prepare proposals for action by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and review the activities of departments in the corresponding United States Catholic Conference. Chairmen of the standing committees are elected by the body of bishops; chairmen of the *ad hoc* committees are appointed by the president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops is the parent body of the United States Catholic Conference, hereafter referred to as the "Catholic Conference," and is the organization through which it carries out its programs. The officers of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops are the officers of the Catholic Conference; the same general secretary is responsible for administering both organizations. The Catholic Conference has an administrative board identical in membership to the administrative committee of the Episcopal Conference. Its executive committee is composed of the officers of both organizations. The General Secretariat coordinates both. The Episcopal and Catholic conferences are served by the United States Bishops' Advisory Council, a 60-member national body of bishops, clergy, religious, and laity who meet twice each year to discuss issues, to review activities, and to make recommendations. The National Council of Catholic Laity and various social service groups work in close association with the Catholic Conference.

The purpose of the Catholic Conference is defined as "to unify, coordinate, promote, and carry on all Catholic activities in the United States" in areas where voluntary

collective action is considered desirable; specifically, "to organize and conduct religious, charitable, and social welfare work at home and abroad; to aid in education; to care for immigrants; and generally to enter into and promote by education, publication, and direction the objects of its being." It is organized around committees and departments concerned with communication, education, social development, and world peace. These committees are composed of bishops, clergy, religious, and laity. Their chairmen are bishops elected by the Episcopal Conference, who also elect two other episcopal members of each committee. These committees formulate and recommend policy to the administrative board and to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Seventh-day Adventist Church

Structure. At the local conference level the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a representative form of government. Above that level the polity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is hierarchical: authority flows downward and members in local congregations have virtually no voice. Above that level, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a closed, self-operating, and self-perpetuating system similar to the Roman Catholic Church, in which those in authority are not responsible to lower echelons. Above the local conference level, those in authority are not elected by, representative of, or administratively accountable to, local congregations or the membership at large.

In North America there are 622,961 Seventh-day Adventists in 4,043 congregations, which makes an average of 154 to a congregation. These congregations are associated together in 58 conferences, with about 70 congregations to a conference. Conferences are grouped in nine union conferences, approximately six conferences to a union. There are 3,454 ordained

ministers, or approximately one to every 180 members.

There is a nominal North American Division operated by General Conference personnel at General Conference headquarters. The highest legislative/governing body of the church in North America is the General Conference Committee, which exercises this authority through a subcommittee, the North American Division Committee on Administration. There is no constituency just for the North American Division. Between sessions of the General Conference, designated members of the General Conference headquarters staff supervise the church in North America. The North American Division has no designated president; the president of the General Conference functions *ex officio* in this capacity, and a vice president of the General Conference supervises North America for the General Conference.

A policy revision authorized by the 1983 Annual Council reinforces this hierarchical structure above the local conference level. The divisions are considered to be "sections" of the General Conference itself. Union conferences "are responsible to the respective division section (of the General Conference) of which they are part, and are administered in harmony with the operating policies of the General Confer-

ence and of the division." Local conferences are responsible to the union conference of which they are part, and "are administered in harmony with the policies which govern the union." The executive committee of each conference is elected by delegates representing the local congregations and is "vested with the delegated authority of the churches within the conference."

Each division committee is a section of the General Conference Committee, and available members of the General Conference Committee are automatically members of any division committee. Whereas union conferences and missions outside of North America "are expected to maintain close counsel with their respective division offices," union conferences in North America "shall maintain close counsel directly with the General Conference."

The General Conference is the highest organization in the administration of our worldwide work (and) all subordinate organizations and institutions throughout the world will recognize the General Conference in session, and the executive committee between sessions, as the highest authority, under God, among us. *Adventist Review*, 160:1181-1182, November 24, 1983.

The Electoral Process. At a conference constituency meeting, delegates elected by the constituent congregations elect the conference officers and departmental directors. Each local conference executive committee appoints delegates to a union

STATISTICS

Churches	Members (Millions)	Congregations (Thousands)	Ordained Clergy (Thousands)
Roman Catholic	51.2	24.3	58.5
Seventh-day Adventist	0.6	3.8	4.5
Episcopal	2.8	7.2	12.9
Nazarene	0.5	4.9	7.9
Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod	2.6	5.7	7.4
American Lutheran	2.3	4.9	7.1
Lutheran Church in America	2.9	5.8	8.1
United Presbyterian	2.4	8.9	14.7
United Methodist	9.7	38.6	36.1
Assemblies of God	1.8	9.9	23.9
Southern Baptist	13.8	36.0	61.4
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	1.2	4.3	6.6
Congregational	0.1	0.4	0.7

Statistics are from the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, 1983*, by Constant H. Jacquet. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983. The 1983 *Yearbook* does not provide statistics for the United Methodist church; those given are from the 1982 *Yearbook*. Dashes indicate information not applicable or available.

conference session, which elects the union conference officers and departmental directors. The union conferences in North America appoint delegates to a General Conference session. There they caucus, and recommend officers to be elected by the General Conference session to serve the General Conference for North America. At every level, nominating committees appointed by each session recommend one name for each position to be filled.

The Legislative Process. Delegates to a local conference constituency meeting are elected by the local congregations. The pastor may, or may not, be elected to serve as a delegate, but is usually a delegate *ex officio*. Local conference executive committees select delegates for the union conference constituency meeting. Conference officers serve *ex officio*. There is no distinct constituency for the North American Division. The agenda of each local and union conference constituency meeting is prepared by the incumbent administrative staff.

At the 1981 Pacific Union Conference session, 170 of 457 delegates were laypeople appointed by the constituent conference executive committees. At the 1983 Southeastern California Conference constituency meeting, 420 of the 650 delegates were laypeople elected by their congregations. In addition, there were 85 youth observers selected by the conferences and their educational institutions. No tally was kept of laypeople among the 1,335 delegates to the 1980 General Conference session; the General Conference had recommended that 10 percent of each division delegation be laypeople.

Administration. At each level of organization, interim business is conducted by a president and officer staff. The officers, along with the directors of the various departments, representatives of specified institutions, and some laypeople, constitute its executive committee. As already noted, however, working policy provides that the conference conform to union policy. Nine of

the 21 members of the Southeastern California Conference executive committee are laypeople, as are 10 of the 50 members of the Pacific Union Conference executive committee. On the General Conference level, there are 11 general departments and 18 service boards, corporations, and other organizations.

Adjudication. Otherwise irreconcilable differences of opinion on constitutional and administrative matters are usually decided by the conference or union conference committee. *Ad hoc* adjudicatory committees appointed by each conference committee function as needed, and report to their respective conference executive committees.

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

Structure. The Lutheran Church - Missouri

Synod has a representative form of government, but assigns the clergy a dominant role along with major provision for lay participation. The 2,623,181 members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod meet in 5,689 congregations, which makes an average of 461 per congregation. The 5,689 congregations are grouped in "circuits" consisting of seven to 10 congregations each. The Synod, as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod commonly refers to itself, has divided the United States into five districts, each of which is considered to be the Synod itself performing the functions of the Synod within its designated territory. There are 7,211 ordained clergy, or one to every 364 members. The chief administrative officer is known as president. The "Delegate Convention of the Synod," the highest legislative/governing authority in Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, meets triennially. Between sessions of the Synod, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is administered by a board of directors through the five districts and 17 "program boards" and commissions responsible for various aspects of the life and work of the church.

The Electoral Process. An elaborate pre-convention nominating procedure involving the entire church assembles a roster of candidates for each position to be filled at a synodical convention. Twelve months in advance, the secretary of the Synod solicits from every congregation, district director, circuit counselor, board, and from other sources the names of potential candidates for the various offices and boards of the Synod, with a statement on the qualifications of each proposed candidate. A permanent Commission on Convention Nominations, half of whose members are laypeople, begins to function Sept. 1 of the year immediately preceding a convention. Each district elects one person to serve on the commission. Following a specified procedure, the commission draws a roster of candidates from the nominations it receives. This roster, which contains biographical information on each candidate, is published at least five months before the convention.

Four months before the Synod convention opens, a special procedure solicits from each voting congregation the names of two clergymen as nominees for Synod president and two for first vice president. From the

roster of nominees thus compiled, the five receiving the highest number of votes for each office become candidates at the Synod convention. Each voting delegate may nominate as many people as there are other vice presidents to be elected. From these nominations a ballot, with three times the number of candidates as there are offices to be filled, is drawn up for the delegates to vote on. At least two names must appear on the ballot for each of the positions to be filled.

The Legislative Process. Congregations, ministers, and teachers constitute the membership of the Synod. Voting delegates to a synodical convention consist of one "visitation circuit," or of two adjacent visitation circuits, as may be necessary for each pair of delegates to represent at least seven and not more than 20 congregations. Each electoral circuit elects its pair of delegates not later than nine months before the convention. Delegates thus elected serve a three-year term beginning with the convention. During this time they not only represent the congregations of the circuit at the convention, but report its actions to the congregations of the circuit, serve as members of the

STRUCTURE

Churches	International/ National	Form of Government	Equal Lay Participation At All Levels
Roman Catholic	I	H	No
Seventh-day Adventist	I	H	No
Episcopal	N	R	Yes
Nazarene	N	R	Yes
Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod	N	R	Yes
American Lutheran	N	R	Yes
Lutheran Church in America	N	R	Yes
United Presbyterian	N	R	Yes
United Methodist	N	R	Yes
Assemblies of God	N	R	Yes
Southern Baptist	N	C	Yes
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	N	C	Yes
Congregational	—	C	—

H = hierarchical, with the locus of authority at the top and authority flowing downward. R = representative, with delegates, chosen by the various congregations, participating in the decision-making process at all levels. In a hierarchy, the leaders rule the church; in a representative polity, they serve the church. In most representative polities, laypeople participate in equal numbers with the clergy as convention delegates, and in the electoral process at all levels. C = congregational, with each congregation autonomous and not responsible to any higher authority. Cooperation with other congregations is voluntary.

circuit forum and as resource persons in the circuit, and assist in implementing synodical resolutions within the circuit. Not later than 10 weeks before the convention, the delegates receive a copy of a convention manual which contains information pertaining to all of the business on the agenda.

The principal business of a synodical convention is to (1) elect officers of the Synod board of directors and all other Synod boards, and (2) consider "overtures" (recommendations). These overtures may originate with any congregation, circuit, district, board, institution, faculty, or pastoral conference, and must be submitted to the Synod president not less than 16 weeks in advance of the session. Those he approves are published in the official convention manual and appear on the agenda.

Administration. Between conventions of the Synod, a board of directors elected by the Synod and accountable to it administers Synod business. The board is required to meet at least four times each year. Eight of its 15 voting members are laypeople. Seventeen program boards and commissions are responsible for various aspects of the life and work of the church. Nearly half of their members are laypeople.

A council of presidents composed of the synodical president and first vice president, and the presidents of the five districts, meets three times each year. A council of administrators reviews and supervises the plans, programs, and budget of the Synod.

Each district president represents the Synod in his district. The relationship of a congregation to a district is the same as it is to the Synod. Like the Synod, each district has a delegate assembly which establishes and evaluates policies, and provides direction for the district. A district likewise has a board of directors. The nomination and election of the officers and boards of a district is similar to that for the Synod.

Each district is divided into circuits consisting of between seven and 20 congregations. The principal administrative officer of a circuit is called a circuit counselor.

Within his own circuit, each counselor serves as an assistant to the district president. A Circuit Forum consists of the pastors of each congregation. It meets at least twice a year to plan missionary outreach and to develop programs and services to meet the needs of its congregations, pastors, and teachers.

Adjudication. There is a synodical Commission on Adjudication, and a District Commission on Adjudication for each district. Each commission is elected by the constituency it serves. There is also a Commission on Appeals. Each district commission consists of four clergymen and three laypeople, at least two of whom must be lawyers. The synodical commission consists of five clergymen and four laypeople, at least two of whom must be lawyers.

United Presbyterian Church

Structure. The United Presbyterian Church has a fully developed form of representative church government. The 2,477,364 members of the United Presbyterian Church worship together in 8,633 congregations of approximately 287 members each. Twelve or more congregations constitute a "presbytery," and at least three presbyteries a "synod," of which there are 15. The General Assembly, the highest legislative/governing authority in the church, meets at least once each year. A "judicatory" is a session of the local church board, a presbytery, a synod, or the General Assembly. There are 14,092 ordained clergy, or one to every 276 members. The ranking officer is known as the moderator.

Decentralization of authority and administration is a basic principle of Presbyterian organization. So also is representation, with each judicatory represented in the next higher judicatory. Each judicatory is responsible for planning and administration within its own geographical area, but is interdependent with the others.

ELECTORAL PROCESS

Churches	Congregations May Nominate	Permanent Nominating Committee	Multiple Names On Ballot For Each Office
Roman Catholic	—	—	—
Seventh-day Adventist	No	No	No
Episcopal	Yes	Yes	—
Nazarene	—	No	—
Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod	Yes	Yes	Yes
American Lutheran	Yes	—	—
Lutheran Church in America	No	No	Yes
United Presbyterian	Yes	Yes	Yes
United Methodist	No	No	Yes
Assemblies of God	Yes	No	—
Southern Baptist	Yes	No	—
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	No	No	—
Congregational	Yes	No	—

In some churches, every congregation has the right to nominate candidates for election at all levels. Some churches provide a permanent nominating committee, its purpose being wider participation in the selection of candidates. The electoral process is conducted in the open, and a more informed choice among the candidates is possible on the basis of their records and their announced policies.

The Electoral Process. The General Assembly has a permanent nominating committee consisting of 15 members, to nominate members of the various councils, commissions, and boards of the church. This committee is appointed by the moderators of the General Assembly: three committee members are selected by each moderator for staggered terms of five years. The committee represents fairly the various interests and geographical areas of the church, including men, women, young adults, disabled people, and minority and ethnic representatives. This committee nominates candidates to serve on the various councils, commissions, and boards of the church. Incumbent members of these organizations are not eligible to serve on the committee. No person may be reappointed to serve until four years have passed since the expiration of his previous term of appointment. The moderator of the General Assembly and the stated clerk (the chief executive officer) are elected at each session of the assembly. When elected by their respective congregations to serve as commissioners to higher judicatories of the church, both men and women become eligible for election to church office at all levels.

The Legislative Process. A presbytery is a group of at least 12 congregations in a particular geographical area. The members of a presbytery are its ministers and an equal number of ruling elders, or commissioners, elected by the member congregations for a term of one year. A regularly organized congregation without a pastor is represented by a ruling elder. Each presbytery has charge of its ministers, serves the congregations in its area, and appoints commissioners to the synod and the general assembly.

A synod consists of the ministers and ruling elders of not fewer than three presbyteries within a specified geographic region. Its membership consists of commissioners elected by the presbyteries, each delegation being composed equally of ministers and ruling elders. Meeting at least biennially, it oversees and promotes all aspects of the life and work of the church within its territory, reviews and approves the records of its presbyteries, promotes the prosperity and enlargement of the church, and assists and guides its presbyteries in their ministries.

The General Assembly, highest judicatory of the church, meets at least once each year. It consists of an equal number of

ministers and ruling elders appointed by their respective presbyteries. Before being enrolled as members of the General Assembly, the commissioners are required to present a statement signed by the moderator of their presbytery to the effect that they have been fully oriented with respect to their duties and privileges, and to the organization, procedures, and documents of the General Assembly. The General Assembly has jurisdiction over all doctrinal and constitutional questions, and general oversight of the church as a whole.

Administration. A council on administration appointed by the General Assembly, coordinates the administrative functions of the church on the various levels of organization. Each presbytery has an executive in charge of administering the presbytery, and each synod a synod executive, each with a staff.

The General Assembly Mission Council is charged with cultivating and promoting the spiritual welfare of the whole church. It engages in church-wide planning of objectives and priorities, prepares the budget for the General Assembly Mission Council, and conducts its work through a number of agencies.

Adjudication. The General Assembly, each

synod, and each presbytery elects from the ministers and ruling elders subject to its jurisdiction, in equal numbers, a permanent judicial commission of 15, 11, and seven members, respectively. They serve in staggered classes for terms of six years each and are not eligible for re-election. No incumbent member of any commission, committee, or agency of the General Assembly is eligible to serve.

United Methodist Church

Structure. The United Methodist Church has a fully developed representative form of church government. The 9,653,388 United Methodists are members of 38,567 congregations, with an average of 250 to each congregation. Each congregation or cluster of smaller adjacent congregations is a "charge." These congregations are associated together in 73 "annual conferences" of approximately 528 congregations each. The annual conference is the basic structural unit of the United Methodist Church. The annual conferences are grouped together in five jurisdictions of some 15 conferences each. The supreme legislative/governing body of the United Methodist Church is its

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Churches	Years Between Highest Level Sessions	Congregations Affect Agenda All Levels	Congregations Elect Delegates All Levels
Roman Catholic	—	—	—
Seventh-day Adventist	5	No	No
Episcopal	3	—	Yes
Nazarene	4	—	Yes
Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod	2	Yes	Yes
American Lutheran	2	Yes	Yes
Lutheran Church in America	2	Yes	Yes
United Presbyterian	1	No	Yes
United Methodist Assemblies of God	4	Yes	Yes
Southern Baptist	2	—	Yes
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	1	Yes	Yes
Congregational	2	Yes	Yes
	1	Yes	Yes

A shorter period between sessions brings administrators into a closer, more responsible relationship with the church at large. In most churches, congregations elect delegates to represent them at every level, in equal numbers with the clergy, or they elect delegates who, in turn, elect representatives to the national delegate session.

General Conference, which meets quadrennially. Between sessions of the General Conference, the affairs of the church are administered by bishops serving as "general superintendents," their staffs, and various councils, boards, commissions, and committees. There are 36,066 ordained ministers, or one to every 268 members. The chief United Methodist Church administrative officer is its president.

The Electoral Process. Bishops of the United Methodist Church are elected by their jurisdictional conferences. Officers of the General Conference other than bishops, and of its boards, councils, and commissions, are elected by the General Conference in session; the various boards, councils, and commissions elect their own executive staff members. Members of the jurisdictional conferences are elected by the annual conferences, delegates to which are in turn elected by the congregations composing an annual conference. Delegates to the General Conference are elected by the annual conferences.

The Legislative Process. The highest legislative authority of the United Methodist Church is its General Conference, to which clergy and laity elected by the annual conferences serve as delegates, in equal numbers. There are no appointive or *ex officio* members. The ministers of each annual conference elect their ministerial delegates, and laypeople their lay delegates. Bishops of the church preside over its General Conference sessions, but are not members of the General Conference and do not vote. The ministerial and lay delegates vote as one body. Any organization, agency, minister, or layperson may petition its legislative bodies, and such petitions become a part of the agenda.

The General Conference enacts laws, and defines the powers of subsidiary administrative units. It plans and directs the various enterprises of the church. It has sweeping powers to enact legislation it may deem necessary, subject to the constitution. It does not elect bishops or change the Articles of

Religion, the Confession of Faith, doctrinal standards, or the general rules of the church. It may recommend changes in the constitution of the church, which require the consent of two-thirds of the members of the annual conferences.

Within two months after each General Conference session, the same delegates meet in their respective jurisdictional conferences, together with a proportionate number of additional ministers and laypeople. The jurisdictional conference elects its bishop and members of most of the boards and general agencies within the jurisdiction, and lays plans for the following four years. The jurisdictional conferences meet simultaneously. They propose changes in the constitution, which are considered by the next General Conference and, if approved, are referred to the annual conferences for approval.

The annual conference, the basic legislative unit of the United Methodist Church, is composed of the pastors of its congregations and an equal number of laypeople elected by the constituent congregations. It determines the eligibility of the ministers who serve as pastors within its territory, authorizes their ordination, and locates them. It votes approval or disapproval of constitutional amendments proposed by the General Conference. It has jurisdiction over all matters not specifically assigned to the General Conference and the jurisdictional conferences.

At its own discretion, an annual conference may convene district conferences once a year, delegates to which are the ministers of the conference and an equal number of laypeople. The district superintendent (bishop) presides over the conference. A conference administers the district, informs the superintendent with respect to the progress of the churches in the district in terms of plans and objectives, and reviews the state of church property and institutions.

Each charge has its charge conference and its administrative board, with the same people serving on both but performing

different functions. The charge conference is a congregation's governing authority; the administrative board, which technically derives its authority from the charge conference, is its administrative arm. The charge conference must meet at least once a year; the administrative board meets monthly. It elects church officers for the following year and determines its minister's salary. The administrative board serves as the connecting link between the local congregation and Methodism as a whole. It has important executive powers, including jurisdiction over all church property. The primary duty of the administrative board is overall supervision of a church.

At all levels above the local congregation, ministers and laypeople of the United Methodist Church participate in equal numbers in the election of officers and in the formulation of policy.

Administration. There is a Bishops' Council whose decisions are advisory. The ranking administrative officers at all levels of the United Methodist Church are its bishop "superintendents." The secretary and other officers of the General Conference may be either ministers or laypeople. The activities of the church are conducted by various councils, boards, commissions, and committees. All subsidiary organizations and

agencies of the church sustain an "accountable relationship" to the General Conference and report to it for review of their operations. There are 15 general boards, councils, and commissions. Of the two general councils, one deals with matters of finance and administration and the other with ministries. A general board is a continuing body accountable to the General Conference for specified programs, administration, or service foundations. A commission is assigned a specific function, either on a continuing basis or for a specified length of time.

Adjudication. There is a Judicial Council whose nine members are elected by the General Conference from a panel of candidates nominated by the Council of Bishops and from candidates nominated from the floor. Ministers and laypeople are represented in approximately equal numbers, with either at any particular time constituting a majority of one. As the supreme court of the United Methodist Church, it is concerned primarily with constitutional questions, which may come to it from any entity or agency of the church, or from individual clergymen or laypeople. The Judicial Council is independent of all other church organizations and agencies, and its decisions are final. It responds to

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS

Churches	Levels Between Congregation & Highest Level	Accountability To Congregations	Most Offices Open to Laity
Roman Catholic	1	No	No
Seventh-day Adventist	3	No	No
Episcopal	1	No	Yes
Nazarene	2	—	—
Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod	2	Yes	Yes
American Lutheran	2	Yes	Yes
Lutheran Church in America	1	Yes	Yes
United Presbyterian	2	No	Yes
United Methodist	2	No	Yes
Assemblies of God	1	No	No
Southern Baptist	2	Yes	Yes
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	1	Yes	Yes
Congregational	—	—	—

Many administrative levels makes a system cumbersome and tends to isolate congregations from the decision-making process. Some churches require elected officers to report to their delegate sessions, and answer questions.

ADJUDICATORY PROCESS

Churches	Clearly Defined	Permanent	Independent
Roman Catholic	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seventh-day Adventist	No	No	No
Episcopal	No	No	No
Nazarene	Yes	Yes	—
Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod	Yes	Yes	Yes
American Lutheran	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lutheran Church in America	Yes	Yes	Yes
United Presbyterian	Yes	Yes	Yes
United Methodist	Yes	Yes	Yes
Assemblies of God	No	No	No
Southern Baptist	—	—	—
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	—	—	—
Congregational	—	—	—

A permanent, independent, adjudicatory commission at each level or organization provides an orderly way to resolve differences resulting from administrative decisions, and encourages confidence in authority.

requests for declaratory opinions as well as to appeals.

Southern Baptist Convention

Structure. Churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention are congregational in their form of government, but voluntarily cooperate in many ways for the common good. The 13,789,580 Southern Baptists are members of 36,079 autonomous congregations that fellowship together voluntarily in 1,209 district associations and 34 state conventions. On the average, there are 382 members to each congregation, 30 congregations to a district, and 19 districts to a state convention. Each church, district association, state convention, and agency is independent and sovereign within its own sphere. There is no Southern Baptist Church as such, but only Southern Baptist churches, each of which is an autonomous member of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The local church is preeminent. It chooses its own pastor, administers its own property, controls its own finances, and makes voluntary contributions to Baptist associations and institutions. Southern Baptist churches are strictly congregational, but at the same time cooperate effectively with other Baptist churches and agencies in wide

range of matters of mutual interest and concern, for the good of all. Baptist confessions or declarations of faith are likewise voluntary expressions. No general council, synod, or other organization requires uniformity, and no congregation is bound to observe any action of any other Baptist organization. There are 56,200 ordained ministers, or one to every 245 members. The ranking administrative officer of the Southern Baptist Convention is its president.

The Southern Baptist Convention meets annually. Each local church is entitled to at least one messenger, or delegate, plus an additional messenger for every \$250 it contributes to the Southern Baptist Convention, or for each 250 members in its congregation up to a limit of 10 messengers from one church. At each national convention approximately 18,000 messengers are present. Actions of the Southern Baptist Convention are binding on the national Southern Baptist Convention officers and agencies, but advisory with respect to individual churches and other associates and agencies. Like all other Southern Baptist entities, the Southern Baptist Convention is independent and sovereign in its own sphere. Its authority is derived from the churches whose messengers make up the corporate body of the annual session.

The Southern Baptist Convention pro-

vides Southern Baptists with a sense of community and fellowship, and a wide variety of services in education, music, publishing, and foreign missions which would not be feasible for local churches to attempt. The Southern Baptist Convention exists to assist the local churches in their mission, and serves as their fiscal agent in accomplishing their mutual projects. With an executive committee of 67 members to act for the Convention between sessions, the Southern Baptist Convention conducts its work through twenty boards, commissions, councils, agencies, and offices. It acts in an advisory capacity on all questions of cooperation between and among Southern Baptist agencies.

A tangible evidence of the value and effectiveness of the Southern Baptist Convention form of government, and of the dedication of its component congregations and their members, is the fact that the Convention conducts the largest Protestant foreign mission program in existence. In 1981 its foreign mission board was supporting 3,139 missionaries in 95 countries, with an additional 4,709 volunteer missionaries in 63 countries.

Each of the 34 state organizations operates its own colleges, hospitals, children's homes, and other institutions. The Southern Baptist Convention has no jurisdiction over their policies or their operation, but works with all of them and makes recommendations to them. The 1,209 local or district associations are likewise voluntary and independent. They provide close fellowship of the churches in their respective areas, and opportunity to work together in their special ministries.

National Association of Congregational Churches

Each Congregational Christian Church is independent and autonomous. However,

approximately 400 congregations voluntarily associate together in the National Association of Congregational Churches for fellowship, for a measure of unity and community, and in order to consult together on matters of common interest and concern. The stated objective of the denomination is to continue the congregational way of faith and order in church life. Many congregational churches are not members of the National Association of Congregational Churches. Statistics are not available for either the total number of congregations or their membership.

Congregational churches are included in this study because of their historic role in the United States, and in order to complete the spectrum of church polity with which this study is concerned. Their independence does not reflect non-recognition of other Christian bodies as valid witnesses to the gospel, for they "seek and extend . . . fellowship and cooperation with other churches." They simply prefer the congregational way of church life.

The National Association of Congregational Churches meets annually. It has an executive committee of 12 members who are "directors of the corporation." It serves association members through seven commissions, four divisions, and three standing committees. The executive committee, which elects its own chairman, acts for the association between the annual meetings, and its operation is subject to review and ratification at the next annual meeting of the association. It is "the association ad interim."

One of the standing committees is a nominating committee that submits a list of nominees to the member churches 30 days before the annual meeting. Its principal divisions are concerned with missions, finances, theological studies, and new churches.

Each Congregational Church functions as a complete church as well as a complete congregation. It has its own constitution, legal corporation, and officers and their

duties. It establishes a church council and the various boards and committees through

which the church conducts its various activities.

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