

# Pacific Union Considers Greater Lay Representation

by Bonnie Dwyer

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When the Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee commissioned a study of church structure in 1981, it was interested in finding ways to make the church more efficient. Now the union executive committee faces the challenge of whether to accept sweeping changes recommended by the study, changes that would dramatically increase lay representation in both the constituency of the Pacific Union and in the executive committee itself. The Phase II report of the union's church structure committee recommends that "more than 50 percent" of the union constituency and "at least 50 percent" of the 46 member union conference executive committee be laypeople. Furthermore, one-half of the 50 percent non-laypeople in the constituency committee should be active pastors. Before a union constituency meeting, a nominating committee would meet to compile a list of nominees for posts on the executive committee and in the union administration.

Presently, the Pacific Union Executive Committee is composed of 49 members, 16 of whom are officers or department directors in the union conference. There are 10 (about 20 percent) laypeople on the committee. The number of laypeople would therefore increase by 13, and these people would take the place of the union departmental directors who currently serve on the committee. The union conference personnel

would be limited to the three administrative officers and three ethnic minority ministry directors.

The laypeople on the committee would be named in numbers proportionate to the size of their conference. For example, the Arizona Conference would have two laypeople and the Southeastern California Conference would have five on the committee.

Although the 100 pages in the structure committee's latest report contain recommendations for local congregations and conferences, it is the union that would be most affected. That is a change from the Phase I report. That earlier document recommended completely phasing out the unions in North America. The present report explains that "the Pacific Union Conference Church Structure Committee/Phase I reported considerable constituent antagonism to the union conference. Emotions ran strong among persons interviewed or who completed questionnaires: they openly called for the elimination of the union conference level of church organization. However, this committee, having spent many additional hours in discussion and research on the issue . . . believes that the union conference is the most logical and economical place to accomplish these tasks—the most important being executive-management functions involving coordination and oversight."

The Phase II report suggests that what is now a publishing department and a Home Health Education Service be consolidated at the division level and eliminated from the unions. The committee also wants to see Sabbath school, personal ministries, com-

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munity service, inner-city services, health, stewardship, and youth departments phased out at the union level and replaced by a "church-ministries function" to operate a speakers' bureau and engage in planning development. Public affairs and communications would be merged into one, as would the treasury and the association of the union. Staff for special ministries for minority ethnic groups would continue at the union level. A board of education and an information-systems function would be established.

The conferences would organize conventional departments into two functioning groups known as "nurture" and "out-reach." At the congregational level, the committee recommends appointment of a church administrator, "salaried, full- or part-time or volunteer," responsible to the pastor and church board for the fiscal and physical business of the church.

But the Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee can hardly expect other levels of the organization to accept the report's recommendations if the executive committee does not accept them, including changing the executive committee. It will be hard to ignore the report. The union authorized \$100,000 to support its creation, set up hearings in 26 churches across the union, and compiled the results of questionnaires distributed at each of those meetings. Dr. Bieber, the chairman of the church structure committee, says that the hearings and questionnaires caused the Phase II committee to

make some changes in their recommendations. The Phase I report recommended a presidential system of administration, while the Phase II report does not. Before the hearings, the committee had not addressed the topics of elections or communication. In the Phase II report, the committee recommends that "all meetings of the Executive Committees and standing subcommittees and all meetings of other conference and union-conference boards be open to attendance by any constituent on a space-available basis."

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When the Phase II report was presented to the Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee in September, 1984, the committee acknowledged only that they had received the document. It voted to pass the report on to the General Conference for consideration at Annual Council along with the Pacific Union Executive Committee's notes of concern. The Pacific Union committee planned to thoroughly review the recommendations in November, 1984, once it was clear what the General Conference voted on the recommendations from its Role and Function Committee. The next regularly scheduled constituency meeting of the Pacific Union is in March, 1986.