

Compliance Review Committee System Set Up at the General Conference | BY BONNIE DWYER



ment "Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions" was approved to be placed on the agenda for Annual Council in October. In August, ADCOM specified the topics for the five committees that they created and then populated them with the names of over forty GC employees who will serve on the committees. While a couple of lay people are included on the committees, no pastors or officials from other levels of the church, such as union or conference presidents, are included.

In the surveys and conversations that the GC has held in the past year, documents and proce-

What began as a single Unity Oversight Committee at the General Conference has blossomed into a network of five compliance-review committees, each with a different topic to oversee. Compliance Review Committees have been created for 1) General Conference Core Policies; 2) Doctrines, Policies, Statements, and Guidelines for Church Organizations and Institutions Teaching Creation/Origins; 3) Doctrines, Policies, Statements, and Guidelines Regarding Homosexuality; 4) Distinctive Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; and 5) Doctrines, Policies, Statements and Guidelines Regarding Issues of Ordination.

The committees' terms of reference were voted in July at a meeting of the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) at the same time that the docu-

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dures have been discussed. But this entire new layer of oversight committees has simply been created by ADCOM, without review from entities outside of the General

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Each of the committees was given eight similar terms of reference and power to act. The committees are to:

1) Be comprehensively knowledgeable and accept as authoritative the existing officially voted beliefs, policies, statements, and guidelines of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists germane to the committee of assignment.

2) Develop and recommend to the General Conference Executive Committee (GCC) Guidelines that explicitly describe the conduct and behavior of denominational employees as well as any individuals representing the Church germane to the committee of assignment.

3) Examine non-compliant entities as identified and recommended by the Administrative Committee (ADCOM) of a conference and/or union [*sic*] and/or division and/or General Conference.

4) Advise and serve as a resource for the organization unit(s) addressing issues of non-compliance.

5) Periodically receive progress reports from the ADCOM of a conference and/or union and/or division and/or General Conference developing and implementing compliance plans and periodically report plans and progress through the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and General Conference and Division Officers (GCDO) and the General Conference Executive Committee (GCC).

6) Exercise overview, and with divi-

sions, work with germane-committee-specific non-compliance issues that primarily are the administrative duty of unions.

7) After evaluating the results of the implementation of the document "Regard for and Practices of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions," recommend to the GCC through the ADCOM and GCDO, the voted compliance plan of the non-compliant units(s) or after much prayer and consideration, recommend to the GCC through the ADCOM, and GCDO, consequences identified in the document [named above].

8) Process appeals received from non-compliant unit(s) which do not agree with the recommendations of the appropriate Administrative Committee.

This newly created review/judicial system within Adventism began with the document on "Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions" that outlines a system of public reprimands to be meted out on the officers of entities not deemed in compliance with GC actions. While initially organizations are expected to self-report issues of non-compliance, if they do not do so, it becomes the responsibility of the next-higher organization and quickly moves to the General Conference

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Compliance Review Committees, which may make discipline recommendations. This is also the committee that hears any appeals.

With this new review committee system, the General Conference tasks itself with being both the legislative

Compliance Review Committee System

The individuals named to serve on the five committees are:

General Conference Compliance Review Committee with General Conference Core Policies

J. Raymond Wahlen, II, chair

Daisy J. F. Orion, secretary

Guillermo E. Biaggi

Claude J. Richli

Two additional members to be named

Invitees: Paul H Douglas; GCAS Associate from region under review

Legal Advisor: Josue Pierre

Ex Officio: Ted N.C. Wilson, G.T. Ng, Juan R. Prestol-Puesan

GC Compliance Review Committee with Doctrine, Policies, Statements & Guidelines for Church Organizations and Institutions Teaching Creation/Origins

Artur A. Stele, chair

James L. Gibson, secretary

Kwabena Donkor

Chantal Klingbiel

Ronald Nalin

Suzanne Phillips

Karen J. Porter

Michael L. Ryan

Timothy G. Standish

John H. Thomas

Randall W. Younker

Legal Advisor: Jennifer Woods

Ex-Officio: Ted N.C. Wilson, G.T. Ng, Juan R. Prestol-Puesan

GC Compliance Review Committee with Doctrine, Policies, Statements and Guidelines for Church Organizations and Institutions Regarding Homosexuality

Artur A. Stele, chair

Elias Brazil de Souza, secretary

Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy

Gary T. Blanchard

Peter N. Landless

Ekkehardt F.R. Mueller

Neil Nedley

Elaine Oliver

Willie Oliver

Kathryn Proffitt

Gerson P. Santos

Lori T. Yingling

Legal Advisor: Thomas E. Wetmore

Ex Officio: Ted N.C. Wilson, G.T. Ng, Juan R. Prestol-Puesan

General Conference Compliance Review Committee with the Distinctive Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for Church Organizations and Institutions

Elias Brasil de Souza, chair

Clinton L. Wahlen, secretary

Raquel Arrais

Mark A. Finley

Pavel Goia

Hensley M. Mooroven

Jerry N. Page

Heather-Dawn Small

Ella S. Simmons

Brad Thorp

Alberto R. Timm

Legal Advisor: Todd R. McFarland

Ex-Officio: Ted N.C. Wilson, G.T. Ng, Juan R. Prestol-Puesan

General Conference Compliance Review Committee with Doctrines, Policies, Statements and Guidelines for Church Organizations and Institutions Regarding Issues of Ordination

Guillermo E. Biaggi, chair

Hensley M. Mooroven, secretary

Abner De los Santos

Mark A. Finley

Frank M. Hasel

Janet Page

Jerry N. Page

Michael L. Ryan

Galina Stele

Legal Advisor: Karnik Doukmetzian

Ex-Officio: Ted N.C. Wilson, G.T. Ng, Juan R. Prestol-Puesan

body that makes the rules and the judicial body that determines whether church administrative units and church employees are “in compliance.” With one sweeping action, it pulls all power to the top of the organization, thereby changing the current democratic nature of the church organization, ignoring the policies and procedures already in place.

When the document on “Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions” was released on the official church website in July, all of the commenters to the proposal were opposed to the action. The first person to comment said:

This document has an initial assumption that needs to be verified. The document assumes that our church has a pyramidal, hierarchical structure. This assumption is in an open contradiction with the history and foundation of our church. Even more, this was the reason, the founders of the Seventh Day Adventist Church

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were so opposed to organize a denomination, as you can verify in any denominational history book. Our church has a representative system of governing. To respect that principle the only corps that have the authority to vote a document like this is the General Conference Session, not the officials of the General Conference. If this document is accepted, we are accepting a pyramidal hierarchical structure de facto. I call to the leaders to reconsider this procedure because the consequences will be so dangerous for the church.

The second person to comment wrote:

Representatives at the annual council are there to represent their constituent members, not their own opinions. Punishing leaders who speak for their constituents is a direct attack on our churches [sic] bottom-up structure and is a move to top down authority. This document is man’s doing, not God’s. It is against the principals of Scripture and is the product of those who seek power and control. What did the Apostles recommend when the Gentiles had differences in the book of Acts? When did God ever force the conscience of anyone? I will not surrender my conscience to any Papal edict, whether it is in Rome or Silver Spring.

On other websites, writers have criticized the proposed method for shaming officers of non-compliant organizations and its use of simple majority votes for disciplining entities rather than a two-thirds vote that is usual for controversial issues.

In October, the proposed document will be on the Annual Council agenda of the General Conference Executive Committee for consideration, but the committee structure is already voted into place. Annual Council meetings of the General Conference Executive Committee for the past two years have seen proposals from the General Conference leadership for some kind of disciplinary action. Each of those proposals was sent back to committee, only to be replaced by something new and significantly different. This creation of a review committee system before the new document has been considered is a move that seemingly circumvents the General Conference Executive Committee itself. Whether or not the document is approved, the review committees are in place and can begin interpreting church policies with or without the document that has been proposed. And denominational employees as well as institutions can be targeted by the committees.

BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.