

# **B** ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

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

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

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

2. The primary building blocks of global Seventh-day Adventist Church organization are the local church, the local conference/mission, the union conference/mission, and the General Conference. (Further definition of these units is found in B 10, Outline and definition of Denominational Organizations). Each of the organizational units described above has a defined membership, also known as a constituency. Being part of a constituency carries the privilege of participation in the deliberations and decision-making of that particular organizational unit. Additional units of denominational structure, known as divisions, have been established as regional offices of the General Conference serving a defined geographical area. Therefore divisions are not considered as constituency-based organizations. Various institutions, authorized and established in harmony with General Conference and/or division policies, also have defined constituencies. Institutions fulfill vital and specialized functions but are not considered as primary building blocks of denominational structure.

3. Organizational status is granted to a constituency as a trust. Official recognition as a local church, local conference/mission, or union conference/mission is not self-generated, automatic, or perpetual. It is the result of a formal decision by an executive committee or a constituency session at higher levels of denominational organization. Organizational membership and status are entrusted to entities that meet certain qualifications

including faithfulness to Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, compliance with denominational practices and policies, demonstration of adequate leadership and financial capacity, and responsiveness to mission challenges and opportunities. Membership and status can be reviewed, revised, amended, or withdrawn by the level of organization that granted it.

4. Decision-making is based on group processes that allow for member participation. Each individual member of a local church has the right of voice and vote (unless under discipline) in the business decisions of the local church. At other constituency levels participation is accomplished through the selection of representatives. For example, representatives chosen by each local church become delegates, authorized participants, in a local conference constituency meeting. Each unit of organization follows a regular pattern of constituency meetings (also called “sessions”) to transact official business. These meetings are conducted within the terms of bylaws or operating policies applicable to the level and status of the organization concerned. In a local church, the constituency or membership meeting is generally called a “church business meeting” and is conducted in harmony with the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. When the necessary quorum is present for a constituency/executive committee meeting, the opinion of the majority participating in a vote is regarded as the decision of the entire group unless bylaws or rules of order require approval by more than a simple majority.

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

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

Conference in session. Thus each level of organization exercises a realm of final authority and responsibility that may have implications for other levels of organization. In a similar manner, each organization is dependent to some extent on the realm of authority exercised by other levels of organization. No church organization or entity assumes responsibility for the liabilities, debts, acts, or omissions of any other church organization simply because of its church affiliation.

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

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

9. References in the General Conference *Working Policy* to higher level, higher organization, lower level, lower organization, or similar terms referring to Church structure, or references to levels of the Church are for descriptive purposes and are not meant to define a legal relationship or create liability unless otherwise specifically stated.