

AUGUST 2017

*Greetings* to all of you and welcome to the August *Executive Committee Newsletter*. Our lead article this month is written by Dr. David Trim, Director of the Office of Archives, Statistics and Research at the General Conference. Trim considers the topic of "Unions and the General Conference in Historical Perspective." It is a timely article addressing recent conversations about the history of Union Conferences, how they were formed and their relationship to the General Conference. As Trim points out, not all agree with all the decisions, but all the Unions are part of the decision making processes.

We believe you will be encouraged in reading exciting news out Haifa, Israel. We have established a Life and Hope Center there in the shadow of Mount Carmel, where people are being led to Jesus and baptism.

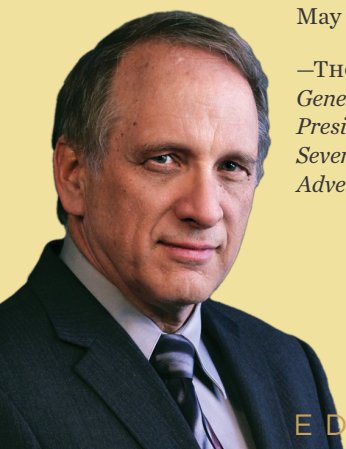
The "Did You Know" sidebar contains several items to share, while another section will point readers to some useful resources on spiritual leadership from the General Conference Ministerial Association.

Let me state, as have others who have written for this newsletter, how much your dedication means to this organization. As both leaders and members of the Executive Committee, your role of making sure we continually see the big picture and care for the entire family of Unions across our globe is vital to missional progress. I'm anticipating our connecting at Annual Council very soon.

As always, please send your comments and prayer requests to: [ECN@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ECN@gc.adventist.org).

May God bless you.

—THOMAS L. LEMON  
General Vice  
President,  
Seventh-day  
Adventist Church



EDITORIAL



Reporting staff at the 1901 General Conference held at Battle Creek  
R. E. Eldred, H. E. Rogers, C. C. Crisler, R. V. Ashley, W. E. Cornell

## UNIONS AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

BY DAVID TRIM, *Director of Archives, Statistics, and Research*

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the union connects the local or regional level to the overarching structure and thus is the pivot of the denomination: the central point on which the mechanism of our organization turns. To understand why unions were created, their role in our ecclesiastical polity, and the nature of their relationship with the larger whole, it is helpful to pose an obvious but rarely asked question: **What is the General Conference?**

### WHY A GENERAL CONFERENCE?

The "General Conference" is so familiar that many church leaders probably never think about why it has that title or what it means. Our pioneers used "conference" in two ways.

One was for a general meeting of believers. At a general conference in September 1860, Sabbatarian adventists agreed that all local congregations should organize themselves legally, and adopt a common name: Seventh-day Adventist. An October 1861 general conference encouraged these newly organized Seventh-day Adventist churches to form state-based associations, and churches in Michigan did so, creating what they called "the Michigan Conference." In the next 15 months, six "state conferences" were created. Then in May 1863, at Battle Creek, Michigan, delegates from these six conferences founded the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. More than a periodic general meeting, it was also a permanent association, with a constitution, a model constitution for state conferences,

## What is the General Conference a conference of?

an executive committee, and three officers.<sup>1</sup>

As these examples show, Adventists also used “conference” in a second sense, one used less commonly today: a permanent association, especially one that regulates the activities of its members. It was a familiar term to our pioneers because the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Mennonites called their regional organizations “conferences.”

In our church polity, a Conference thus was (and is) a conference of local churches. What, then, was the General Conference a conference of?

As established in May 1863, it was originally an association of state conferences—hence the creation of a model constitution, which all conferences had to adopt in order to become members of the General Conference. It was a conference of conferences until far-reaching organizational reforms at the 34th GC Session in 1901.<sup>2</sup> Since then, it has been a conference of unions. Things changed because of increasing size and organizational complexity.

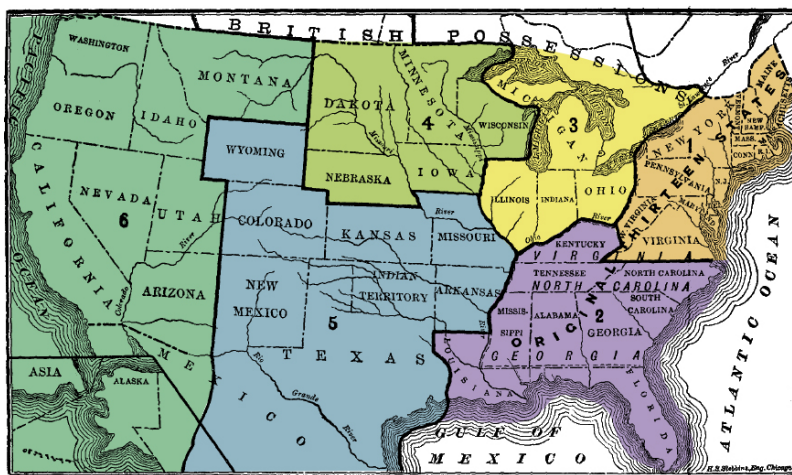
### GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

For the first 38 years of our history, there were three levels of denominational organization: local (the congregation); provincial (the conference); and whole-church (the General Conference). This worked well for a small sect in the Northeast and Midwest of the United States. But as a result of the General Conference’s emphasis on mission, the denomination expanded both geographically and numerically. The first overseas conference was admitted in 1880, when the 19th GC Session voted: “That the conference in Denmark be received into the General Conference.”<sup>3</sup>

At the end of 1866 (the first year for which we have statistics), the General Conference was made up of seven conferences, plus one mission (functionally equivalent to the conference but with less autonomy), comprising 4,320 church members. By the controversial 1888 GC Session, there were 32 conferences, five outside the United States, plus six missions, with a total membership of 26,112 on four continents plus the islands of the Pacific. By the epochal 1901 Session, the General Conference had 87 member conferences and

missions comprising 75,767 church members drawn from every inhabited continent.

Rapid and widespread growth generated a need for a level of organization between the conferences and General Conference. As an American missionary leader overseas later recalled, “we [felt] the need of something more in the way of organization to expedite our work.”<sup>4</sup> The 1882 GC Session approved a “European Council” to coordinate mission across the continent. The 1899 GC Session demarcated six “districts” in North America, shown in this map from the 1890 Yearbook.



At the 1893 GC Session, Australasia and Europe were designated, respectively, Districts 7 and 8.<sup>5</sup> A district, however, lacked a constituency and permanent headquarters, and GC leaders were unwilling to delegate much authority to district superintendents.

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE UNION

Outside North America, mission leaders were frustrated by the fact that “all matters outside of the conference must be referred to headquarters.” From Australia, as future GC president Arthur Daniells later recalled, it often took “three or four months before we could get any reply to our questions.” Sometimes it took “six or nine months” to “get the matter settled.” Ellen G. White and her son, Willie, both serving as missionaries in Australia, like Daniells, felt that a new body was needed to handle “South Pacific Ocean questions, Australasian problems, so that any conference might get this word from a center of authority right there.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1894, the Australasian Union Conference was created and Daniells elected first president. The terminology “union conference” indicated that, unlike a district, it

was a union of conferences—it was, indeed, a conference of conferences, like the General Conference, but subordinate to it. Ellen White enthusiastically endorsed the move, so leaders in Battle Creek had to accept it. For the next seven years, however, they opposed adoption of the union model elsewhere. In 1898, Europe’s nine conferences and missions formed the “European Union Conference”; but no unions were formed in North America before 1901.

### 1901 AND THE NEED FOR REFORM

By 1901, Adventist organization had become sclerotic. Today, the largest division, the Inter-American, interacts with 22 unions in a

relatively limited area. In an era before instant communications or jet travel, the Adventist world headquarters was trying to administer 87 subordinate bodies, dispersed globally. Its insistence that *all* decisions above the conference level be referred back to Battle Creek frustrated more than foreign missionaries. From the US South, Edson White wrote to his mother in Australia, irate that the denomination’s administrative arteries were so hardened that “the General Conference . . . cannot or will not

do anything”, and wondering “why [they do] not stand aside & let those who will help do something?”

On the eve of the 34th Session in 1901, Ellen White told church leaders that “there must be a change . . . with the General Conference . . . We want to know what can be done right here, what can be done right now.”<sup>8</sup> The die was cast.

It is notable that the principal advocates of organizational reform, including Ellen and Willie White, Arthur Daniells (elected GC President in 1901), and William Spicer



W. C. White, 1890s

(Continued on page 3...)





Arthur G. Daniells

(elected secretary of the Foreign Mission Board), had all recently “returned from extended periods of foreign missionary service,” and they sought reorganization to enable further church growth around the globe.<sup>9</sup> The most consequential reform was that unions were formed in the rest of the world; in fact, most North American Unions were formally organized during the Session’s breaks.<sup>10</sup>



William A. Spicer

### THE UNIONS AND THE GC SINCE 1901

The General Conference became a conference of unions. It remains so. The world divisions are sub-divisions of the General Conference and its branch offices—not its constituency.

Along with unions replacing conferences as the members of the General Conference, there was a change in approach. After 1901, no longer were all major decisions referred back to the world headquarters. Unions were given a considerable degree of operational autonomy, as leaders around the world had sought for a decade.

But there was another formal change in ecclesiastical polity, too. Prior to 1901, conferences were represented at General Conference Sessions, but not on the GC Executive Committee, even though it had increased immensely in importance. In 1901, its membership numbered just 13; 11 were



Ellen G. White addresses 1901 GC delegates.

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*The decisions of GC Sessions are not the expression of something other than the unions; they are the collective voice of its members, all of whom have contributed to the decisions.*

from North America. It emphatically was “not a representative body for a worldwide church.”<sup>11</sup> One of the 1901 reforms made each union president *ex officio* a member of the Executive Committee. This made the committee far more representative. But it also bound the General Conference far more closely together. None of the member unions could ever after say that its views had not been heard.

Furthermore, the GC Executive Committee’s authority was increased, for the 34th Session voted that it should “take the place of all the present general boards and committees.”<sup>12</sup> Completely independent associations became departments, under the authority of the Executive Committee. As a result, the Unions henceforth had a say in the oversight of departments at the General Conference level, not just the union and

conference levels.

In sum, the 1901 reforms resulted in a more flexible form of organization and a more interdependent system of governance. They devolved operational authority downwards, as well as assigning it upwards, particularly on matters of wide concern.

### CONCLUSION

As we have seen, unions are not merely *components* of the General Conference; they *constitute* the General Conference. This is why their constitutions, by laws, and working policies must harmonize with those of the General Conference. The General Conference, as an organization, is more than the permanent headquarters: it is the sum of its constituent parts. When the General Conference makes a decision, it is not something unions can *depart from* (though some church members or church leaders

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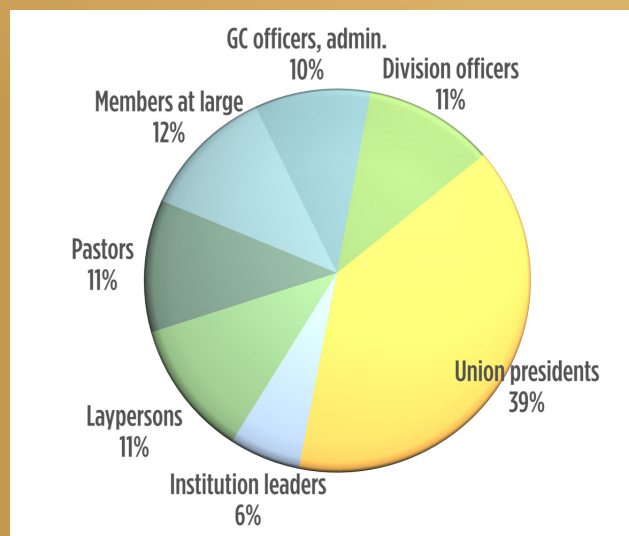
*When the General Conference makes a decision, it is not something unions can depart from.*

# WHO MAKES UP THE GENERAL CONFERENCE?

## GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

*about 350 people  
meets every year at Annual Council  
(with additional meetings as needed)*

- 3 executive officers of the GC
- 18 other officers of the GC
- 14 various GC department heads
- 39 division executive officers from the 13 divisions (president, secretary, treasurer)
- 135 union presidents worldwide
- 20 leaders of various entities & institutions
- 39 laypersons from each division (3 from each)
- 13 division pastors (1 from each)
- 26 pastors/front-line employees (1 for every 500,000 members above the first 500,000 in each division)
- 40 members at large

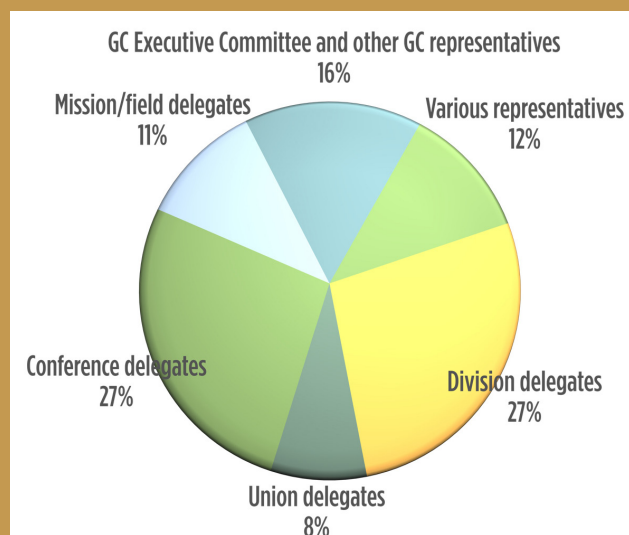


**347 TOTAL**

## GENERAL CONFERENCE IN SESSION

*about 2,600 people  
meets every five years at General Conference Session*

- 347 GC Executive Committee members
- 37 GC associate directors
- 20 delegates appointed by GC staff
- 300 various representatives of the GC, division institutions, field secretaries, laypersons, & pastors
- 260 division delegates (20 from each)
- 385 additional division delegates based on membership\*
- 56 division institution delegates
- 202 union delegates (1 to 2 from each union)\*
- 690 conference delegates (2 from each conference)\*
- 282 mission/field delegates (1 from each mission/field)\*



**2,579 TOTAL** (figures provided by GC Secretariat)

\*must be made up of > 25% laypersons

sometimes *disagree* with those decisions), because the General Conference, in a real sense, is not distinct from the unions. The decisions of GC Sessions, or, in constitutionally delegated areas, of the GC Executive Committee, are not the expression of something other than the unions; they are the collective voice of its members, all of whom have contributed to the decisions.

The answer to the question, “What is the General Conference a conference of?” is crucial to a complete understanding of the collaborative and interdependent nature of our ecclesiastical polity, which is one of the greatest strengths of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

1. See D. J. B. Trim, “The spirit of ‘63”, *Adventist Review: General Conference Bulletin*, no. 1 (5 July 2015): available at <http://www.adventistreview.org/1514-8>
2. On organizational problems in the late 1890s, the 1901 Session, its reforms, and associated controversies, see the authoritative study of Barry D. Oliver, *SDA organizational structure: Past, Present and Future* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989).
3. Nineteenth GC Session, 3rd meeting, Oct. 12, 1880, “Seventh-day Adventist General Conference Records,” Vol. 2 (GC Archives, box 6873). The terminology of “state conference” was gradually dropped as the denomination spread beyond the United States.
4. A. G. Daniells, speech at 38th GC Session, 13th meeting, May 22, 1913, *General Conference Bulletin* [GCB] 7 (1913): 108.

5. Twenty-Eighth Session, 1889: 1st meeting, Oct. 18, 8th meeting, Oct. 25, 20th meeting, Nov. 5, *Daily Bulletin of the General Conference 3* (1889): 8, 90, 155.
6. Daniells speech (cited n. 4), GCB 7 (1913): 108.
7. J. E. White to E. G. White, June 18, 1899.
8. Ellen G. White, MS 43, 1901.
9. Oliver, *SDA organizational structure*, 291-92.
10. Thirty-Fourth Session, remarks made in the 30th meeting (April 23, 1901) by the chairman (George Irwin); and see “Organization of Southern Union,” “Constitution and By-laws of the Southwestern Union,” and “Constitution[s]” of the Lake, North West and Eastern Unions: GCB 4 (1901): 442, 447, 449, 475-77.
11. GC Secretariat, *A Study of Church Governance and Unity* (Sept. 2017), 22.
12. Summary of 34th Session actions, GCB 4 (1901): 501.



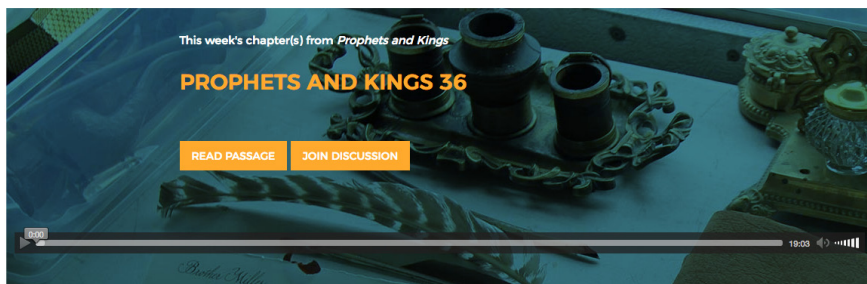


## HELPFUL SPIRITUAL AND LEADERSHIP RESOURCES AVAILABLE

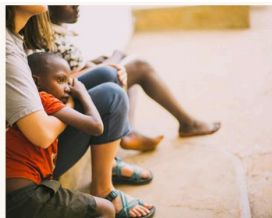
As a member of the General Conference Executive Committee, we hope that you are familiar with the excellent inspirational material available on the Revival and Reformation website [www.revivalandreformation.org](http://www.revivalandreformation.org). We encourage you, if you haven't yet done so, to subscribe to the daily Bible and Spirit of Prophecy reading plan at [www.revivalandreformation.org/bhp/subscribe](http://www.revivalandreformation.org/bhp/subscribe). You will be blessed!

You may also find helpful the many other resources available on this site, including leadership videos and articles, testimonies from around the world, tools for Bible study and witnessing, discipleship videos, healthy lifestyle articles and videos, and much more at [www.revivalandreformation.org/resources/](http://www.revivalandreformation.org/resources/).

### DAILY BIBLE AND SPIRIT OF PROPHECY READING



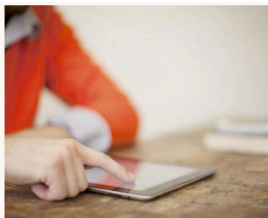
#### WITNESSING



#### LEADERSHIP TOOLS



#### MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Last month a group of teens from across Lebanon ran a 6-station health expo at the Bouchrieh Adventist Secondary School, near the Middle East University in Beirut (MENAUE). In preparation, the teens learned how to take blood pressure, test blood sugar, explain sound nutrition principles, and talk about the importance of sunlight and exercise. More than 50 people went through the expo; most were brought in by the enthusiastic teenagers standing by the road handing flyers through open car windows and to curious passersby.
- A prestigious Romanian university conferred an honorary doctorate on Seventh-day Adventist Church president Ted N.C. Wilson in recognition of the church's influence and respect in this East European country. Mihnea Costoiu, rector of University Politehnica of Bucharest, the oldest and largest engineering institute in Romania, presented Wilson with the large, framed certificate during a 45-minute ceremony on July 11. Wilson told Costoiu, "I do not accept this as an honor for me but as an honor for my colleagues and the church, for what they are doing to build up society." In addition to this honorary doctorate, Wilson has an earned Ph.D. in religious education from New York University. Read more at: <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2017-07-31/prestigious-university-recognizes-adventist-role-in-romania/>
- More than 1,700 Adventist laypeople gathered in Houston, Texas, for the 2017 International Adventist Laymen's Services and Industries (ASI) Convention. ASI celebrates its 70th anniversary this year and includes committed Adventist entrepreneurs of all ages who are intent on using their businesses and ministries to share the good news about Jesus and His soon coming with their customers, clients, and colleagues. Members gathered at the convention to share their expertise, promote their products, projects, and ministries and network with other like-minded professionals. For more information about ASI, visit: [www.asiministries.org](http://www.asiministries.org).



# CENTER BRINGS LIFE AND HOPE



## DID YOU KNOW?

- The “Cheon Ae Garden,” a safe place for women and children who are in need to live, recently opened in Chungju, Korea (NSD). The Hiranuma & Hayashi Foundation, a supporting ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that focuses on mission work, welfare and cultural work, opened the center on June 3. The foundation’s goal is to heal people and help them search for the true value of life. Chang Soo Huh, president of the Adventist church in the Middle West Korea territory, preached the dedication sermon at the service. Adventist Church leaders, along with community leaders, expressed gratefulness that the center will meet a great need in the area. For more, see: [www.nsdadventist.org/news/news\\_1\\_read.html?no=780](http://www.nsdadventist.org/news/news_1_read.html?no=780)
- Adventism is the “secret ingredient” in Kellogg’s Corn Flakes, as stated in a July 28 article posted on the Smithsonian Magazine’s official website. The Smithsonian is the world’s largest museum, education, and research complex. The piece highlighted the history, not only how the cereal was created, but also shared John Harvey Kellogg’s Adventist background. For the article see: [www.smithsonian-mag.com/history/secret-ingredient-kelloggs-corn-flakes-seventh-day-adventism-180964247/](http://www.smithsonian-mag.com/history/secret-ingredient-kelloggs-corn-flakes-seventh-day-adventism-180964247/)



Fruit is already being seen from a new Life and Hope Center planted last year in the city of Haifa, Israel. So far, five people have joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church through baptism since the beginning of 2017, and more are currently preparing for baptism. The new members joined the church as a direct result of attending activities at the Life and Hope Center.

“Currently, we offer a weekly Bible study group, Pathfinder Club, special programs for families and children, worship services on Shabbat, and monthly health and cooking classes” says Pastor Sergey Gregorev, north district pastor in the Israel Field, and the director of the Life and Hope Center.

In September, the Center will offer a Hebrew language course for new immigrants to Israel. The course will be available for 60 students, divided into four groups.

“Thirteen church members are involved in this new initiative of serving people by improving their Hebrew language skills,” says Gregorev, “and we hope that through this ac-

tivity we can help them to know Jesus.”

Programs and courses offered at the Haifa Life and Hope Center are advertised using Facebook, local newspapers, and through personal contacts of church members.



Looking ahead, members of the Adventist congregation in Haifa are planning a special exhibition at the Life and Hope Center, titled, “Book of Life and Hope,” to be open to the public daily. The exhibition will feature the Bible and real-life stories of how this special Book brought life and hope into the lives of various individuals.

“Our prayer is that through this exhibition people in Haifa will know more about the Bible,

God, and Seventh-day Adventists,” Gregorev says.

Commenting on the work in Israel, Pastor Julio Mendez, Secretary-Treasurer for the Israel Field, said in an email to the *ECN*, “We are facing a great challenge in this mission field and we need the involvement of the world church.” Please keep this special work in your prayers.



The “Cheon Ae Garden” welfare center for women and children in need, Korea.