

JUNE 2017

*Welcome* to the June issue of the GC Executive Committee Newsletter (ECN). This month, we have several items that we hope you, as a member of the Executive Committee, will find helpful and encouraging.

The feature article for this month addresses a very important question—Is there a connection between Church policy and Church unity? The article, adapted from a larger work, looks briefly at church history, biblical applications and fundamental beliefs, different types of policy documents, and effective tools for building unity within the Church.

In this issue, you will also find the latest report on the Life and Hope Center that was recently dedicated in the city of Nazareth, Israel. Already this Center is making a difference in the lives of 60 young people in the community who are attending various activities held there.

The mission story this month features a successful businesswoman in Jamaica who, once she accepted the Sabbath, was willing to risk losing her business rather than continue working on God's holy day.

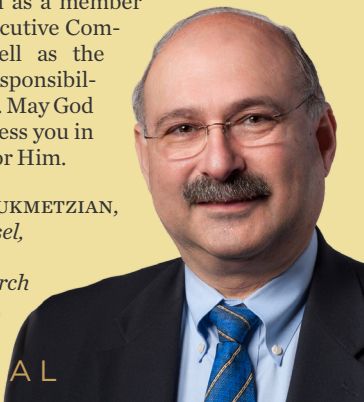
As always, the Did You Know? section brings you interesting notes from around the world, often including links for more information. You won't want to miss the pictures coming from Latvia where Adventists from across the country came together to participate in a unique outreach event!

In closing, just a reminder that this and all previous issues of the ECN are available to read and share from the GC Executive Committee website at <https://executivecommittee.adventist.org/newsletter/>.

The ECN team and GC Administration welcome your comments, questions, and other feedback on the newsletter. You may send them to [ECN@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ECN@gc.adventist.org).

Thank you for your service to the Church as a member of the GC Executive Committee, as well as the many other responsibilities you carry. May God continue to bless you in your service for Him.

—KARNIK DOUKMETZIAN,  
General Counsel,  
Seventh-day  
Adventist Church



EDITORIAL



## CHURCH UNITY AND CHURCH POLICY

IS THERE A CONNECTION?\*

\*NOTE: This article is adapted from "A Study of Church Governance and Unity," released by the General Conference Secretariat, based on research by the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research. For the full study, visit <https://www.adventistarchives.org/a-study-of-church-governance-and-unity.pdf>

Recently, there has been much discussion regarding Church unity and Church policy. Have you ever wondered what (if any) connection there is between the two?

As we consider this question, it is important to note that the present General Conference (GC) Working Policy is the fruit of 150 years of collegial, prayerful, and frequently prolonged discussions among church leaders from around the world chosen by church members to represent them. Measures became policy

only when a majority agreed on them, and usually only after a wider consensus was reached.

Although the GC Working Policy is set out in numbered and lettered paragraphs, its chief purpose is not to produce a perfect bureaucratic system but to foster unity and mission. Its role in promoting unity has assumed even greater importance as a result of developments since the 2015 GC Session, arising from its vote on ordination.

Ever since the Seventh-day Adventist



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*Seventh-day Adventists have always, throughout our history, stressed the doctrine of unity.*

Church first established criteria for the ordination of ministers at the 18th GC Session in 1879, the world Church has set such criteria. Since 1930, the GC Executive Committee has delegated to unions responsibility for selecting candidates for ordination, based on the criteria set by the world Church.<sup>1</sup> A few unions, however, in effect claim the right to set criteria for ordination, disregarding the 1990 GC Session action not to allow women to be ordained to gospel ministry, and the decisions of the 1995 and 2015 Sessions not to allow variances from this policy.<sup>2</sup> Other unions and conferences have diverged from GC Working Policy by only commissioning or licensing all pastors, including those previously ordained. Why do such departures from Church policy matter?



**BASED ON THE BIBLE**

One of the chief purposes of Church organization and governance is to enable the unity that is the New Testament ideal for the body of Christ.<sup>3</sup> Seventh-day Adventists have always, throughout our history, stressed the doctrine of unity. Two of the Fundamental



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*In the process of making policy, we work together, not independently of ‘the body of Christ’, of which each church entity is a part (1 Cor. 12:27).*

Beliefs are relevant here: #12, “The Church,” and #14, “Unity in the Body of Christ.”<sup>4</sup> We have a biblical duty to act to preserve unity and that has implications for implementing church policies.

In making policy, we apply biblical principles and patterns to the Church visible in an attempt to make it conform as closely as possible to what Christ would have His Church be. Because the Church is human, we never succeed perfectly, and thus policy is a process: we are constantly striving to harmonize our common policies, as well as

our personal lives, with God’s will. But in this process, we work together, not independently of ‘the body of Christ’, of which each church entity, as the Apostle Paul indicates, is a part (1 Cor. 12:27).

Inspired writings, our history, and denominational policy all plainly indicate that unions and conferences should not unilaterally depart from what has been agreed by the world Church.<sup>5</sup> God’s message to His people in biblical times and His remnant church at the end of time, conveyed by the pens of inspiration, is that we are to work collaboratively and unitedly, rather than unilaterally. Only when we are united will we succeed in making disciples and building up the Church. Even more profoundly, our unity is the litmus test of our claim to faithfully follow Jesus Christ, as He Himself declared (John 17:23).

**WHAT IS “POLICY”?**

The governing documents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have all been approved by either a GC Session or the GC Ex-

(Continued on page 3 ...)

1. See “Unions and Ordination,” GC Secretariat Statement (Aug. 2015), available at <https://www.adventistarchives.org/unions-and-ordination-statement.pdf>.

2. Fifty-fifth Session, July 11, 1990, Session minutes in GCC Minutes, 1990: 1039–40 (available at <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1990-07.pdf>); Fifty-sixth Session, July 5, 1995, minutes in *Adventist Review* 172/33 (July 11, 1995): 30 (cited in n. 3); Sixtieth Session, July 8, 2015, transcript at <https://www.adventistarchives.org/general-conference-business-session-transcript-wednesday-pm,-july-8,-2015.pdf>: 72–73.

3. See “A Study of Church Governance and Unity” (<https://www.adventistarchives.org/a-study-of-church-governance-and-unity.pdf>), 2–4.

4. In *Seventh-day Adventist Church Yearbook* 2016, 6–9; also available at <https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-Web.pdf>.

5. See “A Study of Church Governance and Unity”, 2–7, 29–34.

ecutive Committee. A common shorthand for these documents is “policy,” but they include more than the General Conference’s Working Policy and Mission Statement, which were created by the GC Executive Committee, can be amended only by that body meeting in an Annual Council (or by a GC Session), and are published in an annually updated one-volume edition as *General Conference Working Policy*.

Other policy documents include the GC Constitution and Bylaws (included in the published Working Policy), which originated with and can only be changed by a GC Session; the constitutions and bylaws, or operating policies, of the GC’s member unions and their respective conferences and missions; the “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” and the Church Manual (both of which also can only be amended by a GC Session). Finally, statements or other actions approved by a GC Session or the GC Executive Committee are also considered an expression of Church policy.<sup>6</sup>

### DIFFERENT SPHERES

The different documents apply to different spheres: The Fundamental Beliefs are solely doctrinal; the *Church Manual* governs procedures and policies at the level of the local church (though sometimes with implications for broader policy and other levels of structure); the GC Constitution, Bylaws, and Working Policy deal with policies and procedures at the regional and global levels, and with the interrelationship of different levels of structure.<sup>7</sup>

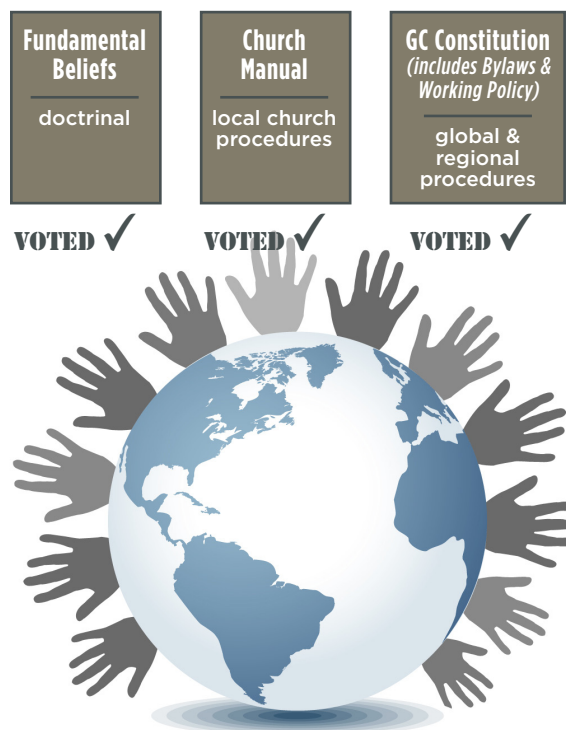
The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s governing documents have always been subject to revision, which reflects that they are imperfect, as any attempt to apply heavenly principles to the earthly Church visible is bound to be. Nevertheless, policies provide a clear record of what representatives of the world Church have discussed and agreed is essential for the global body

of believers to engage effectively in mission and ministry.

### AN IMPORTANT ROLE

In addition to its general role in regulating the administration of a worldwide movement, GC Working Policy has a particularly important role to play in building unity and community among Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

Unity is about relationships: the believer’s with Christ and with other church members; and those of church organizations and institutions to each other, and to the wider whole. Policies cannot fully do justice to human emotions and so policies, alone, will not produce unity. An important part of the role of church leadership is to facilitate the living out of our commitment to Christ, and the fashioning of that unity among us for which the Son petitioned the Father (John 17:21-23). But the decisions made with those goals in mind become policy, which thus has a role to play in building unity in the Church.



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*Upholding provisions of denominational policy does not denote legalism; rather, it reflects a desire to draw closer to God and to each other, and to most efficiently lift up Jesus Christ before the world.*

### EARLY ROLE OF POLICY IN UNITY

From the movement’s earliest days, Seventh-day Adventist leaders have been keenly aware of the need for unity, and denominational policy has always been one of the means to achieve it.

In the 1850s and 1860s, as Seventh-day Adventists gradually coalesced into a distinct denomination, the other sects and denominations that emerged from Millerism were constantly fragmenting, their witness to the Second Advent undermined by their tendency towards heated disagreement and self-destruction. Their example had to be avoided.<sup>8</sup>

Geographical dispersion was another challenge; seventh-day Sabbath-keeping Adventists were scattered across the Northeast and Midwest of the United States. All these factors made our founders keenly aware of the need to take steps to preserve unity, which was one of their reasons for founding the General Conference in 1863.<sup>9</sup>

Initially, GC Sessions were held every year, but as the Church began to spread around the world, the interval between sessions inevitably increased. Leaders therefore eventually expanded the membership of the Executive Committee and made it representative of the world Church, and began to reserve certain business to “councils,” which would be attended by committee members from outside the GC headquarters.

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6. See the Executive Committee’s effective definition when it decided to create a separate published Working Policy [hereafter WP] in 1926: a “careful digest” of all previous “General Conference actions voted in . . . sessions and Councils,” which was to “constitute a working policy”: *Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee* (1926), 20 (GC Archives, Leaflet 6375). Cf. W. A. Spicer, “Proceedings of the General Conference,” *Review and Herald* 103/30 (June 10, 1926): 2, an article explaining to church members why *Working Policy* was being created.

7. Cf. Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2015–2016 edition), B 05, 8.

8. See Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (1923), 26; *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:534.

9. From “Constitution of the General Conference”, in “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists”, *Review and Herald* 21/26 (May 26, 1868): 204–5: “For the purpose of securing unity and efficiency in labor, and promoting the general interests of the cause of present truth, and of perfecting the organization of the Seventh-day Adventists, we, the delegates from the several State Conferences, hereby proceed to organize a General Conference.”



As the denomination grew further and the first two generations passed away, longstanding practices were codified in the *Church Manual* and *GC Working Policy*, and our Fundamental Beliefs were formulated. The Constitution and Working Policy have been continually tweaked to reflect changing realities and the Executive Committee repeatedly enlarged to ensure wide representation.

Quinquennial GC Sessions and regular meetings of a large and representative Executive Committee; the GC Constitution and Bylaws; GC Working Policy; the Fundamental Beliefs; and the Church Manual—all have multiple purposes, including organizational efficiency. But more importantly, they are tools to help achieve unity.



## EFFECTIVE TOOLS

In the end, it is the power of the Holy Spirit that holds us together, but the Holy Spirit works through human instrumentalities and avenues. Policy is one of several factors that promote unity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are united by our:

- Commitment to Christ
- Common biblical beliefs
- Shared passion for mission to the world
- Joint weekly study of the Sabbath School Bible Study Guide
- Interdependent worldwide organizational structure
- Mutually agreed practices and policies

What binds Seventh-day Adventists together, ultimately, are our shared beliefs and our common mission “to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting gospel embraced by the three angels’ messages, and to prepare the world for Christ’s soon return.”<sup>10</sup>

Church policies strengthen all the other unifying factors. They are tools to enable every member to become ever more effective in fulfilling our prophetic mission and to become ever more united in “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:14).

Upholding the provisions of denominational policy does not, then, denote legalism (with all the negative connotations that holds); rather, it reflects a desire to draw closer to God and to each other, and to most efficiently lift up Jesus Christ before the world. —



## DID YOU KNOW?

- In Latvia (TED), Adventists from across the country participated in the Lattelecom Riga Marathon as a special outreach project. The Adventist team wore light blue shirts with the words, “Don’t Follow Me, Follow Jesus,” along with the Riga First Seventh-day Adventist church’s website url, emblazoned on the back. The oldest participating Adventist was 93 years old, the youngest, just 4. For pictures of the event, visit: <http://adventisti.lv/lv/foto/75-Maratons-Neseko-man-seko-Jezum>
- The first World Church Affirmation Sabbath was held on May 20, 2017, in two regions of the Upper Columbia Conference (NAD) and attended by more than 600 constituents from 55 churches in the UCC. Organized by lay members, the special Sabbath uplifted Christ and supported the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist Church. Fourteen UCC lay speakers from a dozen churches brought messages of unity, hope, and encouragement. For more, visit: [www.affirmationsabbath.org](http://www.affirmationsabbath.org)
- Tentmakers of all professions are very much needed to work in MENA. If you believe God may be calling you to this special ministry, or if you would like more information visit: <https://te.adventistmission.org/>
- Recently, Kim YoHan, president of the church in Mongolia, and Munkh-Orgil Lkhagvaa, newly appointed Youth Ministries Director in Mongolia, led out in an Adventist Youth Conference for the Adventist youth leaders scattered throughout the country. More than 200 youth leaders, AY members, and Pathfinders gathered at the Ulaanbaatar Central Church for worship, fellowship, and various activities. Fitting in with the conference’s theme, “Use Me, Lord,” Total Member Involvement was emphasized, encouraging all to be good influences in their communities and to live their lives like the heroes found in the Bible.
- More than 2,000 women attended the 2017 biannual Adventist Women’s Congress at Valley View University in Accra, Ghana (WAD), last month. Participants were encouraged to become involved in all aspects of evangelism through Total Member Involvement. As part of the event’s outreach, participants distributed 5,000 copies of the Story of Hope missionary book.



10. “Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” WPA 05.05.





## LIFE AND HOPE CENTER DEDICATED IN NAZARETH

On Sabbath afternoon, May 20, a newly renovated Life and Hope Center was dedicated in downtown Nazareth, Israel.

Pastor Roger Robertsen, Israel Field president, says the goal of this center is to be an influence in the community, helping young Arabs build and live better lives, stay off the streets, find employment and, most important, find true meaning in life.

Pastor Wisam Ali, and his wife, Adri, are directing this urban center. Executive Committee members may remember this couple, who shared their testimony during Annual Council in October, 2016. Pastor Ali is an Arab who grew up in Nazareth and knows the city and people well. In fact, his extended family—who are not Adventists—donated time, skills, and materials to the center refurbishment.

Guests from the local community at the opening of the Nazareth center of influence included Muslims, other Christians, and Adventists, including pastors and Israel Field and General Conference leaders.

“This center is in a wonderful location,” says Magdiel Perez Schulz, Chair of the Is-

rael Field Oversight Committee and assistant to the General Conference president. Perez Schulz, who participated in the dedication service, adds, “It’s in a major, bustling street in the center of the city, and perfectly placed to serve the Arab community.”

Surrounded by stores, restaurants, and falafel stands, the center is located on Paulus VI Street and is only a five-minute walk to one of the city’s major tourist attractions, the Church of the Annunciation. Each year hundreds of thousands of tourists visit the site which, according to Catholic tradition, is where the angel Gabriel visited Mary in her childhood cave home.

The Alis currently have 60 young people involved in the Life and Hope Center. Before these young people are accepted for center activities, their parents are required to sign a document that says, among other things, that they are happy for their children to be taught principles from the Bible. Current activities include English language studies,

health programs, Bible studies, and computer skills. Pastor Ali is concerned about the influence of the Internet on the lives of young people in Nazareth, and is focused on teaching them values-based skills for navigating it.

To make way for the establishment of the Life and Hope Center in downtown Nazareth, a Russian-speaking Adventist congregation moved out of that building into a new church home in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood in upper Nazareth, or Nazareth Illit. A special worship was held here on the morning of the Life and Hope Center dedication in downtown Nazareth, and they are also making plans for this new building to be a center of influence in their new community.

— GARY KRAUSE  
*Associate Secretary of the General Conference, and Director of the Office of Adventist Mission*



# STANDING FOR JESUS IN JAMAICA



*Mavis Spencer, 66, is the owner of a high-end tailoring business in Jamaica. She prays with her staff each morning, asking God to bless the customers and to give the staff strength and love for one another.*

Mavis Burrell Spencer wasn't sure what to do with her family's high-end tailoring business when her husband died a decade ago. He had established three, flourishing tailor shops in Jamaica, including a main outlet with 25 employees in a shopping center in the island's capital, Kingston.

Mavis ultimately decided to run the business by herself. Ten years later, she wanted to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Saturday was her busiest day for business. She prayed earnestly about what to do.

Mavis first heard about the seventh-day Sabbath from an Adventist friend who had prayed regularly with her husband before he died. Mavis had turned down his invitations to attend church, but then he invited her to small-group Bible studies.

"Everything began to open up to me in the Bible," Mavis said. "The more that was explained to me, the more I wanted to hear!"

But she continued to operate her tailor shops on Sabbath. Then one evening as she drove home from the Bible study, she felt like a voice was telling her, "You can run, but you can't hide." Mavis began to pray earnestly about the Sabbath. "I wasn't fully accepting what I was learning," she said.

In December 2016, she made her decision. She posted a notice on the doors of her three shops: "Effective Jan. 7, Spencer's Tailoring Establishment will be closed on Saturdays." Instead, the shops would be open on Sundays.

Mavis was baptized on Jan. 7.

Although Saturday had been her busiest day of the week, her shops began to prosper.

"My sales are going up," Mavis said. "A lot of people who came during the week or on Saturday have found it more convenient to come on Sunday. They like not having to wrestle for parking."

Even more important, Mavis said, is the reality that she has gained a new family at church. "I can't believe that people are so loving and kind," she said. "I've never been so happy in all my life."

Mavis, 66, prays with her staff each morning. She asks God to bless the customers and to give the staff strength and love for one another. She said her employees used to argue and compete, but now a sense of calm and unity has covered her business. She also has invited employees to attend the small-group Bible studies, and one of them is preparing for baptism.

Asked what advice she has for business owners thinking about keeping the Sabbath, she said, "You have nothing to lose. You only have to gain when you give it all to the Lord."

Her favorite Bible verse is Philippians 4:13, which says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

— ANDREW MCCHESENEY  
Editor, *Adventist Mission*  
[www.adventistmission.org](http://www.adventistmission.org)

## MAVIS' NEW STOREFRONT SIGN

### CLOSING NOTICE

To our Valued Customers,  
Please note that effective  
January 7, 2017,

Spencer's Tailoring  
Establishment will be:

closed on  
**SATURDAYS**

and open on  
**SUNDAYS**  
10:00am - 4pm

