



# General Conference Executive Committee Newsletter

An informative publication for members of the General Conference Executive Committee as a service through the office of the Chair

APRIL - JUNE 2025

*On May 20, 1863, 20 delegates*

representing six U.S. States met in Battle Creek, Michigan, to formally organize the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It was the first General Conference Session.

Today, we are on the doorstep of the 62nd Session, with 2,809 voting delegates representing all corners of the globe. Thousands more of our brothers and sisters from around the world will be present, watching the business sessions, fellowshiping, and worshipping together as one worldwide family.

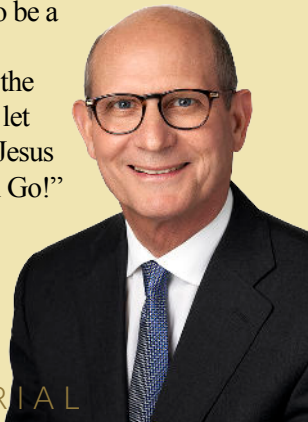
While there have always been challenges, God has blessed this movement tremendously and we praise His name.

As a delegate, you have been given a special opportunity for God to work through you as a representative from your area of the world, guiding you through the Holy Spirit in advancing God's mission. I invite you to spend time with God in prayer, asking for His will to be done in His Church.

In this newsletter, you will find helpful information regarding GC Sessions, and an important article explaining the Biblical basis for church governance and authority. May you find it to be a blessing.

As we look to the future with hope, let us all proclaim, "Jesus is Coming! I Will Go!"

TED N.C. WILSON  
PRESIDENT  
GENERAL  
CONFERENCE



EDITORIAL



## A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CHURCH GOVERNANCE AND AUTHORITY BUILT ON A SOLID FOUNDATION

BY ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, PH.D.  
DIRECTOR, BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Church governance and authority have become a hot topic as the values of individual freedom and authenticity drive some contemporary ideological agendas. As we reflect on this, we should let Scripture inform our understanding and perception of the church.

A close look at the creation account shows how meticulously God brought the world into existence and that by naming, organizing, and structuring the world He enabled it to function according to His purpose. As the climax of His creation work, God created humanity to care

for Creation. Created in God's image, the edenic couple were to model God's own leadership and organizational style in their dealings with the created spheres placed under their responsibility. Looking at creation, we see structure, organization, and leadership.

### ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the covenant with Israel established at Sinai, detailed attention is given to the organization and structuring of the people around God's presence

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Jesus  
entrusted 12  
apostles with  
authority  
to lead His  
people in  
preaching the  
good news.



in the sanctuary. A sizable portion of the Pentateuch deals with the building of the sanctuary along with laws intended to nurture the relationship between God and His people. An institutional priesthood was put in place to administer the ritual services and instruct the people. Even the order and position of the tribes around the tabernacle were prescribed in detail.

While Aaron and his sons were established as the priesthood, the tribe of Levi was entrusted with specific functions related to the care, operation, and transportation of the tabernacle. Such detailed instructions conveyed a strong sense of God’s holiness and the importance of organization for Israel’s journey to the promised Land.

Such organization caught the attention of the surrounding nations. As they beheld that former band of slaves camping, marching, and battling through the wilderness, they could not but recognize the work of a powerful God. The words of Rahab to the Israelite spies exemplifies what the ancient nations may have felt as they attempted to come to grips with the reality of an organized people marching toward Canaan: “And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone

because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Josh 2:11).<sup>1</sup>

Admittedly, no one would advocate such an earthly priesthood or military mission for God’s people living this side of the cross. However, we must recognize the validity of the principle that lies behind the Old Testament account of God’s dealings with Israel. So, in the New Testament, God’s people also operate within a kind of structure or order.

## ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus entrusted 12 apostles with authority to lead His people in preaching the good news (Matt 9:1–6). The number 12 shows that the New Testament church stands in continuity with the 12 tribes of Israel. On another occasion, Jesus commissioned 70 disciples to go in pairs to certain places (Luke 10:1–16). In choosing the 70 the Lord was establishing a plan for carrying on the gospel mission in an organized way. Interestingly, Moses had a similar number of elders to rely on as he led God’s people to the promised land (Num 11:16–17, 25; see also Ex 24:1, 9–14).

Jesus’ selection of the 12 and the 70 indicates that

some kind of organized leadership was necessary to conduct the mission. Some people claim that Jesus never intended to form an institutional organization (i.e., the church). But a close look at the gospel narratives shows that Jesus organized a group of apostles and disciples to carry out missionary work.

After Christ ascended to heaven, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and rapid growth of the church, the apostles were led toward further organization (see Acts 6). When controversy arose between Jewish and Gentile Christians, a council was convened in Jerusalem (Acts 15). A consensus was reached, a decision was made, the congregations accepted the decision, and the early church continued to focus on the mission of proclaiming Jesus to the world.

Thanks to that organized procedure of gathering, discussing, deciding, and abiding by the decision they had made, the apostolic church could move forward. As the church spread to different regions of the Greco-Roman world, a more formal kind of church governance was established with some offices and functions more clearly delineated in order to foster doctrinal and mission-based unity.

A few aspects become clear as we examine the New Testament. Each congregation had an established leadership composed of elders who were assisted by deacons (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil 1:1). The elders administered the Lord's supper, exercised discipline, resolved disputes, and gave instruction in sound doctrine (Titus 1:9).

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Church officers were elected by the members of the congregation (e.g. Acts 6:5-6) and examined and confirmed by the elders (Acts 6:6; 13:1-3; 1 Tim 4:14). So the apostolic church soon understood that to remain a cohesive and effective body of believers they needed some kind of governance. In choosing a system consisting of elders and deacons, they were guided by the Spirit to apply principles already contained in the Old Testament and exemplified by Jesus.

### CHURCH AUTHORITY: A RELIC?

At this point, the question emerges whether church structure and governance is still something to be taken seriously. Some might argue that church authority is a relic of a medieval past that needs to be discarded. The current zeitgeist frowns upon notions of authority and power since they may be regarded as driven by oppressive ideologies. However, as we look upon this issue from a biblical perspective, a couple of points stand out clearly.

First, the Bible does not portray organization and systems of authority as bad in themselves. Although the Scriptures often show that systems of power and authority have been distorted by sin, it also demonstrates that when properly exercised power and authority can be a blessing, as we have seen in the examples from the Old and New Testaments.

### AUTHORITY DERIVED FROM JESUS

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Mat 28:18). And it was on the basis of this authority that Jesus granted the church the authority to carry out the mission. Therefore, the authority of the church is derived from Jesus (Matt 16:19; Matt 18:18; John 20:21-22) and is to be exercised in harmony with God's word.

Based on this conviction, the apostolic church established a system of church governance—including that of ordaining leaders as Christ had ordained His twelve disciples—in order to advance the mission entrusted to them by the risen Lord.<sup>2</sup>

A system of church authority and governance is required in order to maintain doctrinal unity and to implement the mission of the church. Thus, compliance with decisions made by the legitimate representatives of the church organization is not optional. Although the Holy Spirit may be invoked to justify divergent practices by some individual segments of the church, the Spirit works in and through the body of believers as a whole and the

leadership established by them. That the decision made by the Jerusalem Council became normative for the church at large becomes clear from the statement that as the apostles “went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4). Also, because “God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor 14:33), Paul instructed the church at Corinth to do things “decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40).

### ULTIMATE SOURCE OF AUTHORITY AND POWER

When pondering these issues, we should always bear in mind that authority and power ultimately derive from and originate in God because He is the Creator and Savior. Therefore, human authority is always limited and relative and is to be exercised according to the model established by Christ. Whether we exercise authority as church officers or members, we should always remember the overriding principle that the greatest is the one who serves (Luke 22:26–27) and the most powerful is the one who takes the towel and washes the other’s feet (John 13:13–15).

No power or authority within the church can claim independent or unilateral legitimacy in view of this model of interdependence established by the Chief Shepherd. Church officers at all levels, in order to be “examples to the flock,” will be ready to carry forward the mission of the church and also to submit to the collective wisdom of the body on matters about which some may not fully agree in order to move forward together. Then, “when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:4).

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/consensus-statement-on-a-seventh-day-adventist-theology-of-ordination/>



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# GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

1905 GC Session, Takoma Park, Maryland



## WHAT IS SESSION?

The General Conference Session is the forum for electing world church officers and voting changes to the church's Constitution. Delegates also hear reports from each of the 13 administrative regions of the church. Voting delegates for Session represent world regions both by church population and the self-sustainability of administrative regions. The Constitution states that at least 50 percent of delegates shall be laypersons, pastors, teachers, and non-administrative employees, of both genders, and representing a range of age groups

and nationalities. Church members also have the opportunity to reconnect with friends from around the world.

## TRANSFORMATION OVER TIME

While Sessions are now held in football stadiums, pictures from early Sessions show delegates lined along the entrance to a small church. Back then, the movement's leaders came to Session in the U.S. state of Michigan mostly from the Midwest and Northeastern United States by train or by horse and buggy. Today, about one-third of the movement's membership now resides in Africa, with another third residing

in Central America and South America. Brazil now has more Adventists than any other country—1.8 million.

## SESSION BEGINNINGS

Seventh-day Adventist leaders met in Battle Creek, Michigan in 1863 "for the purpose of organizing a General Conference," the minutes from that meeting say. The meeting began on the evening of May 20, during which delegates chose a chairman and a secretary. During the Session, delegates drafted a constitution and bylaws. They also established leadership of the Conference comprised of

a president, secretary and treasurer. Today, the same officer structure remains at all levels of church administration.

Battle Creek was the site of 26 of the first 31 GC Sessions. The first Session held west of the Mississippi River was in November of 1887 in Oakland, California. Session has been held outside the U.S. three times: in Austria in 1975, the Netherlands in 1995 and in Canada in 2000. St. Louis 2025 will be the 62nd Session.

## FREQUENCY

The time between Sessions has lengthened over the years. Session was held every year until



1954 GC Session, San Francisco, California

ADVENTIST ARCHIVES



2005 GC Session, St. Louis, Missouri

ADVENTIST ARCHIVES

1891. Session was then held every other year until 1905. Session then took a four-year break followed by another hiatus during World War I before meeting again in 1918. Afterward, Session was held every four years until the Great Depression—Session was held in 1930, but then not again until 1936 and then in 1941. Since 1970, Session has been held every five years, as is mandated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church Constitution with the exception of the 2022 Session, which was delayed two years due to the COVID pandemic.

## MEETING VENUES

Recent General Conference Sessions have been held in baseball and football stadiums in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. Few other venues in the world offer the necessary amenities for such an event: seating for 70,000-plus attendees, venue support staff who speak English (the official business language of the church), reliable and cost-effective transportation, and food safety for a large group.

*From the General Conference Session website at [gcsession.org/history](https://gcsession.org/history)*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Why does the Adventist Church hold a business session every five years? What is the purpose of the GC Session?**

General Conference Session is a global spiritual gathering and a constitutionally required business meeting that has been held every five years since 1970. Its purpose is to vote on global leadership, set the direction of the Church for the next five years, and vote changes to the Constitution and Bylaws, Fundamental Beliefs, and Church Manual.

### **Do you have to be a delegate to attend the Session? How many delegates are there? How are the delegates chosen? What is their job?**

GC Session is an open meeting—anyone can attend—but only delegates can speak and vote. For this



MARK FROELICH/ADVENTIST REVIEW

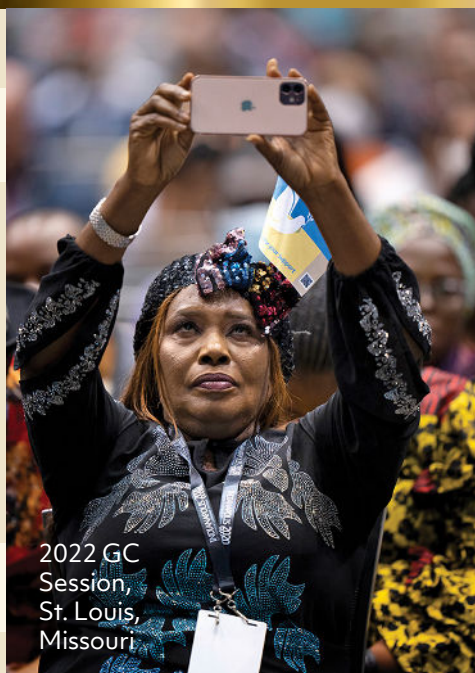
62nd GC Session, 2,809 voting delegates are expected to attend. Each union nominates delegates to represent its field. In addition, delegates representing major church institutions are selected.

## How can members benefit from attending the Session?

While delegates can only participate in person, attendees worldwide can join us to better understand the world church and how it operates. Those unable to make the trip to St. Louis to attend in person are encouraged to participate online, as all the meetings will be live-streamed in multiple languages.

## Describe a typical day at GC Session from beginning to end.

For those working behind the scenes, the day starts with a Steering Committee to determine the agenda items for the day. The first public meeting is morning worship, followed by a business session that lasts until lunch. There is another business session



2022 GC Session, St. Louis, Missouri

## How does the process of electing church officers work? What offices are filled at GC Session? At what point in the Session is the GC president elected?

A nominating committee is formed to nominate General Conference officers, departmental directors and associate directors, and division officers. The president is elected first and joins the Nominating Committee to offer recommendations on all the other nominations, which the committee may choose to accept or reject.

## How can church members get updates on the proceedings and voted actions at Session?

Adventist News Network (ANN) and *Adventist Review* will be covering the event online, with articles and interviews onsite. We encourage our world church members to download the GC Session App and receive instant news and official communications from this inspiring event. In addition, the proceedings will be live-streamed on the ANN YouTube Channel @ [AdventistNewsNetwork](https://www.adventistnewsnetwork.org).

From the General Conference Session website at [gcsession.org/questions/](https://gcsession.org/questions/)

in the afternoon. In the evenings, world regions have a chance to showcase mission, challenges, and opportunities, all presented with the color and flair of national dress and music.



2022 GC Session, St. Louis, Missouri

## HOW ELECTIONS WORK AT A GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

The process of electing leaders and directors is transparent and secure.

By Shawn Boonstra, associate editor, *Adventist Review*

The election process at the General Conference (GC) Session can be shrouded in mystery for a lot of people watching from afar. During the Session, more than one hundred positions are filled. As the new officers are presented each day, many people wonder: How were they chosen? Does a shadowy cabal make decisions in the background? Is the election a foregone conclusion?



2022 GC Session, St. Louis, Missouri

Not at all. If you've participated in filling positions at your local church, you likely already know how the process works. Usually, once a year, a local church congregation selects a nominating committee that meets to discuss and vet names for the various offices of the church, ranging from elders and deacons to Sabbath school teachers and the various department heads. Once the nominating committee has prayed over the names and discussed the best choice for each position, they bring the results of their deliberations back to the congregation, which then votes on their candidates. Once all the names are approved by popular vote, the candidates assume their new offices.

It works the same way at all levels of the church, Claude Richli of the General Conference Secretariat explains.

"It's basically the same process throughout the whole system.... When the conference constituency takes place, every church is apportioned a certain number of delegates, based on the size of the church, to be sent as constituent members. When they get to the constituency meeting, they are recognized as delegates, and some of them will be selected to be on the nominating committee by the organizing committee—meaning there are two committees that do their work, so that it reduces the risk of political interference. This process takes place in the same way at the union level and at the division."

## THE WORK OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating Committee faced a considerable task during the 61st Session. Their first discussion lasted nearly five hours before the committee brought back the name of incumbent Ted Wilson for General Conference president. That is just one of many positions to nominate, which means that the committee will be very busy throughout the course of the week.

The process is expedited considerably by using online technology. In the past, paper ballots were cast and manually counted, which could slow down the voting process considerably. In St. Louis, delegates will use ElectionBuddy, a digital voting system that enables delegates to vote by using their personal devices and is known to be secure.

How are General Conference officers chosen? Essentially, you choose them. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has always been a grassroots, bottom-up organization, and the highest authority of the church is the assembly of delegates at the General Conference Session. When the newly elected officers appear on the platform each day, they are there because of a process that started with you.

*Adapted from an article with the same title in Adventist Review, June 8, 2022, <https://bit.ly/HowElectionsWork>. Original article includes two explanatory videos.*

# COURAGE IN THE LORD

*Selection is from Ellen White's second message to the General Conference Session in 1913, read to the Session by the president, A.G. Daniells, on Tuesday morning, May 27.*

I have words of encouragement for you, my brethren. We are to move forward in faith and hope, expecting large things from God.

The enemy will seek in every way to hinder the efforts that are being made to advance the truth, but in the strength of the Lord you may gain success. Let no discouraging words be spoken, but only such words as will tend to strengthen and sustain your fellow workers. . . .

I pray earnestly that the work we do at this time shall impress itself deeply on heart and mind and soul. Perplexities will increase; but let us, as believers in God, encourage one another. Let us not lower the standard, but keep it lifted high, looking to Him who is the Author and Finisher of our faith. . . .

## ADVANCE UNITEDLY

The Lord desires to see the work of proclaiming the third angel's message carried forward with increasing efficiency. As He has worked in all ages to give victories to His people, so in this age He longs to carry to a triumphant fulfillment His purposes for His church. He bids His believing saints to advance unitedly, going from strength to greater strength, from faith to increased assurance and confidence in the truth and righteousness of His cause.

We are to stand firm as a rock



1913 GC Session Leadership, Takoma Park, Maryland

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

to the principles of the Word of God, remembering that God is with us to give us strength to meet each new experience. Let us ever maintain in our lives the principles of righteousness, that we may go forward from strength to strength in the name of the Lord. . . .

The enemy is seeking to becloud the discernment of God's people, and to weaken their efficiency, but if they will labor as the Spirit of God shall direct, He will open doors of opportunity before them. . . .

## FINAL TRIUMPH

The work that lies before us is one that will put to the stretch every power of the human being. It will call for the exercise of strong faith and constant vigilance. At times the difficulties that we shall

meet will be most disheartening. The very greatness of the task will appall us. And yet, with God's help, His servants will finally triumph. "Wherefore," my brethren, "I desire that ye faint not" (Ephesians 3:13) because of the trying experiences that are before you. Jesus will be with you; He will go before you by His Holy Spirit, preparing the way; and He will be your helper in every emergency. . . .

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:14-21).

—From *The General Conference Bulletin*, May 28, 1913, pp. 164, 165.

With the responsibilities of being a delegate, along with navigating through the crowds of many thousands of attendees expected at the 2025 General Conference Session, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Here are 10 practical ways to stay refreshed and focused:

### 1 START WITH PRAYER

Begin each day with quiet time in God's presence. A calm spirit helps you handle anything the day brings.

### 2 GET YOUR STEPS IN

Walk between venues when possible. Gentle movement reduces tension and boosts mood.

### 3 PACK SMART SNACKS

Bring water, nuts, or fruit to avoid long concession lines and keep your energy steady.

### 4 ARRIVE EARLY

Give yourself buffer time to find seats, check in, or navigate crowds without rushing.

### 5 TAKE SCREEN BREAKS

Step away from devices between sessions. Resting your eyes helps clear your mind.

### 6 USE QUIET ZONES

Seek out prayer rooms or low-traffic areas for quick moments of solitude and reset.

### 7 PRACTICE DEEP BREATHING

A few slow, deep breaths can do wonders to ease anxiety in crowded spaces.

### 8 SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

You can't attend everything. Choose your activities prayerfully and pace yourself.

### 9 STAY CONNECTED—WISELY

Spend time with encouraging friends, but also give yourself moments alone to recharge.

### 10 SLEEP ON SCHEDULE

Late nights are tempting, but aim for consistent rest so you can stay present and refreshed.

Remember, the GC Session is not only a business session; it's a spiritual celebration—take care of yourself so you can fully enjoy it!

MARK FROELICH/ADVENTIST REVIEW



2022 GC Session, St.  
Louis, Missouri



## THE BACK PAGE

**Directions:** For more information on an item, click on the corresponding number on the map.

**1** The 62nd General Conference Session is meeting at the America's Center Convention Complex in **St. Louis, Missouri, USA**, from July 3-12, 2025. This year, 2,809 delegates have been approved to attend, vote on business matters, and elect leaders for the General Conference and its 13 global divisions for the next five years. In addition to the delegates, an estimated 100,000 global attendees are expected to visit St. Louis throughout the 10-day session to observe the proceedings, explore the exhibit hall, and worship with fellow members from around the world.

**2** *Casa Publicadora Brasileira* (Brazil Publishing House, CPB), the official publishing house of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brazil, located in **Tatuí, São Paulo**, celebrated its 125th anniversary with a commemorative program on May 26, 2025. The event highlighted the life-changing

impact of literature and colporteur ministry, with testimonies from readers whose lives were transformed by Adventist books.

**3** Seventh-day Adventists celebrated the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Adventist Church in Portugal with the largest national assembly of Adventists ever held in that country. Nearly 4,000 members gathered at the Expo-Centro in **Pombal, Portugal**, on Sabbath, May 17, to enjoy a spiritually rich and interculturally diverse worship experience focused on mission.

**4** A groundbreaking training program equipping new web radio station managers and producers was successfully held in **Accra, Ghana**. The initiative, organized by the West-Central Africa Division, brought together 18 participants from seven African nations to enhance their digital broadcasting skills and prepare for the

launch of Internet radio stations in their respective languages. Facilitated by Gideon Pelser, digital media expert of Adventist World Radio (AWR) from South Africa, the three-day training focused on the future of radio in the digital age.

**5** In the capital city of **Tirana, Albania**, members of the Tirana East Seventh-day Adventist Church are embracing print evangelism with 4,000 invitation cards, blending faith, literature, and personal connection. The goal was simple—invite people to join prayer groups and Bible studies. Already the strategy is beginning to bear fruit, piquing the interest of many.

**6** The Middle East North Africa Union (MENA) is celebrating positive results from two recent evangelistic programs, including a short series in **Beirut, Lebanon**, led by John Bradshaw from *It Is Written*, and a musical

portrayal of the last week of Christ's life. Both programs were held at the newly renovated Arise Beirut Center. Hundreds of visitors attended the programs, and now pastors, Bible workers, and Global Mission pioneers are following up with those wanting to study the Bible.

**7** More than 600 children, youth, and leaders gathered from May 14–18, 2025, for a Pathfinder and Children's Camporee in **Kampong Thom Province, Cambodia**. The five-day event emphasized discipleship, leadership development, and character-building. Cambodia is home to approximately 2,300 Adventist young people. Situated within the 10/40 Window, the Cambodian mission field presents a unique opportunity to raise a generation of Christ-centered leaders who can serve with purpose, courage, and compassion.