

MARCH 2017

*Welcome* to the third issue of the *Executive Committee*

*Newsletter*. This month in our lead article, Myron Iseminger, undersecretary for the world church, explains how working policy has developed within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and its important role in keeping us unitedly focused on mission.

In the early years of this movement, no written policies existed and business was conducted on a case-by-case basis. But as the church grew, it became clear that written policy would be helpful in guiding the mission in a consistent, orderly way.

Today, with such a diverse, worldwide movement that has just topped 20 million members in more than 200 countries, collective agreements in the form of working policies are an important contributor to keeping us together in the way we conduct God's business, enabling our focus to be on how to move forward in our God-given mission.

In addition to the informative article on the history and development of policy, you'll also find an inspiring story of how the determination of one woman, along with the ministry of Speranta TV (Hope TV in Romania), helped establish a group of believers in a very challenging situation.

We also have the popular Did You Know? sidebar, featuring several fast facts describing how mission is moving around the world.

Finally, you will find a special column listing some of the items that will be discussed and voted on at our upcoming Spring Meetings.

Please feel free to email your comments or suggestions regarding the *Executive Committee Newsletter*, or prayer requests to share in the newsletter to [ECN@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ECN@gc.adventist.org). While this newsletter is especially for you, members of the General Conference Executive Committee, we encourage you to share it with those in your circle of influence. This newsletter (along with previous issues) is now available online at <https://executivecommittee.adventist.org/newsletter/>

We look forward to seeing those of you who will soon be attending the Spring Meetings here at the world headquarters in Maryland.

May the Lord bless you in your mission for Him!

—RAY WAHLEN,  
UNDERTREASURER  
*Seventh-day  
Adventist Church*

EDITORIAL



Background image: 1936 GC Session  
Foreground image: 1926 GC Session

## HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST POLICY

BY MYRON ISEMINGER, *Undersecretary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*

What first comes to your mind when you think of “Working Policy”? For some, these words are synonymous with bureaucracy or administrative trivia. For others, they speak of unity, evenhandedness and mission.

What if the church didn't have policies? What would govern the fair distribution of tithe and offerings? How would the church care for employee's salaries and the retirement of its workers? Who would own our church buildings and what would ensure that our missionaries were treated equitably?

The policies of the church are mutual agreements made by representative leadership based on Biblical principles. They promote fairness and facilitate mission.

It may surprise some that during the 19th century the Seventh-day Adventist Church didn't have a manual for work-

ing policy. The growing church operated largely on the collective memory of its leaders. Decisions were made by committees and then applied to church employees and organizations. As the church grew and became a worldwide organization, written policies became essential for the smooth functioning of the movement.

### THE ROLE OF POLICY

When William A. Spicer was elected President of the General Conference (GC), he opened his address to the GC Session delegates on May 24, 1922 by expressing praise for the constitution that had been adopted during the session. He stated, “It is really more than a Constitution, it is a working policy. That is what we have needed, so that instead of having to decide things by committee action, we have the great principles laid down in the Con-

# QUICK FACTS ABOUT WORKING POLICY

**First adopted:** 1926

**First title:** Constitution, By-Laws and Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

**Latest title:** General Conference Working Policy

**First edition number of pages:** 63 (1926)

**Latest edition number of pages:** 790 (2016-2017)

**Date first issued:** 1926

**Rate of issue:** Initially biennially (with exceptions), then annually from 1977

**First dual year edition:** 1985-1986

**Total editions:** 59

**Cover color:** varies; black since the 1980s

**Producers:** General Conference Executive Committee

**Types of Working Policy:** General Conference and Divisional

**Contents of GC Working Policy:** The contents of the policy book can be divided roughly into seven categories:

1. GC Constitution and Bylaws
2. Mission Statement (and general vision documents)
3. General Administrative Policies
4. Model Constitutions and Bylaws
5. Departmental Policies
6. Financial Policies
7. Retirement Plan Policies

**Other official GC handbooks:** *Church Manual, International Service Employee Handbook, Manual for Ministers*

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stitution itself.”<sup>1</sup>

Elder Spicer affirmed that the corporate policies of the church united it in its evangelistic mission to the world, and that is still true today. Therefore, it is fitting that our Church allow our corporate policies to unify us at a time when some are questioning the authority and relationship between the General Conference and the world field.

The early Adventist leaders never equated church policy with the authority of scripture. But they did see policy as a unifying factor in a worldwide church to facilitate mission. Let’s consider how these policies were developed and the role they should play in our 21st Century church.

## HOW DID POLICY BEGIN?

From our earliest history as a church body, votes and actions by GC Sessions and the GC Committee were recorded in the official

minutes. However, as younger leaders came into leadership positions, evidently there was a limited review of the minutes from previous committees. Consequently, voted policies and standard Adventist practices were chiefly preserved in collective administrative memory.

This worked well when the church was small, but as the church became a worldwide organization

the need for more comprehensive, codified policies developed. When the first two generations of Adventists passed away, memory no longer served effectively and inconsistency of practice crept in. Church leaders recognized the need to collect, systematize and standardize the policies and protocols voted by sessions and councils.

As early as 1917, Irwin H. Evans, vice president for the North American Division, wrote: “It is essential for an efficient organization to have uniform regulations and a working policy for all its parts.”<sup>2</sup>

At the 1922 GC session, Evans,

*The policies of the church are mutual agreements made by representative leadership based on Biblical principles. They promote fairness and facilitate mission.*

## LEADING THE WAY

*During Annual Council 2016 GC Executive Committee members voted to authorize the GC Education Department, in collaboration with the world divisions, to develop a guiding philosophy and a worldwide, regionally responsive plan for Seventh-day Adventist education.*

As a part of that plan, four LEAD (Leadership Education and Development) conferences on Adventist education are set to take place this year worldwide, culminating with a report and recommendations to Annual Council in October 2017.

The Pan-African LEAD Conference, the first of these meetings was held Feb. 15-19, 2017 in Kigali, Rwanda, with 239 Adventist educators from across the African continent and adjacent Indian Ocean islands attending. The participants, who came from ECD, SID, and WAD, represent 45 percent of the 8,208 Seventh-day Adventist schools worldwide, 39 percent of its 102,779 teachers, and 52 percent of its nearly 2 million students.

“The Pan-African LEAD Conference was a great success,” says Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, director of the GC Education Department. “The remaining conferences will be even better as ideas from one conference are passed on to the next. The



group work in which plans are taken to the level of practice was especially valued.”

According to Beardsley-Hardy, more than half of the participants were Division and Union officers, which facilitated productive discussion and further collaboration between educators, schools, and church leadership.

“Educators valued the discussion across different Divisions and the participation of Division officers,” she said.

The next LEAD regional conference is set to take place from May 30-June 4 in Slovenia.

To watch a short video clip of the Pan-African LEAD Conference go to: <https://vimeo.com/205378849>

who was now president of the Far Eastern Division, shared what had been done in the Division over the previous four years. He then expressed the need for a world church working policy, the problematic nature of collective memory, and an increasing propensity at the local level to act unilaterally by stating:

“The union and local missions adopted a working policy in harmony with the General Conference constitution...This policy is a safeguard in mission fields where there is a continual agitation among some for independence of administration, and especially since many workers are young in experience or newly come into the faith.”<sup>3</sup>

Elder Evans’ point is well taken. Without adherence to a mutually agreed upon working policy, independent action is fostered and organizational unity is fractured. Working policy promotes organizational unity and unified action.

While the 1922 GC Session agreed that there was a great need for working policy by appointing a “Committee on Constitution and Working Policy” made up of division officers and three world church administrators, the task proved greater than anticipated. The committee chair, GC general vice president C. H. Watson, reported to the 1926 Session: “It was intended that this committee should function during the four years, and report its work at this session.” However, ‘under the pressure of business here at the General session, it has been found almost impossible to give that report concentrated study such as its importance demands. Therefore, it is recommended to refer the report to the Executive Committee . . .’<sup>4</sup>

To this recommendation, President Spicer responded that the summative document church leaders had in mind “will make quite a complicated statement . . . it will doubtless have to be adopted at some Autumn Council. It is not to create new methods, but really to codify or gather together the actions we have taken . . . and get them in workable form.”<sup>5</sup>

At that 1926 GC Session, Spicer emphasized the importance of the task by commenting on how the church had voted various policies “concerning Sustentation . . . [and] holding church property”, and had adopted “something recommending this or that about transferring church membership or about calling workers for the mission fields, or about methods of transferring workers within the North American Division. But these items are scattered all through our minutes. The

idea of a working policy is to collect these actions, state them briefly and concisely, and have them in a little pocket pamphlet, so that we can turn to it and see what the working policy is.”<sup>6</sup>

As a wise leader, Spicer saw the need of taking miscellaneous actions of various committees and placing them together in a systematic fashion for all church leaders to have the benefit of the collective knowledge of these representative committees.

### A WORKING POLICY PRODUCED

A vote was taken to refer the responsibility of producing a working policy to the GC Executive Committee. This practice continues today. Some months later, the Executive Committee at the 1926 Annual Council finally approved the working policy:

“The General Conference officers, taking advantage of the presence of nearly all the division presidents, spent two days preceding the Council in a careful study of General Conference actions voted in former sessions and Councils. A careful

digest of these actions was prepared and will be brought out in a leaflet form for the use of executives and workers.

This summary of General Conference actions will constitute a working policy, providing valuable information to our leaders in every part of the world field.”<sup>7</sup>

Weeks later, the published *Working Policy* first appeared, a 63-page digest of official actions taken by the General Conference Committee. Church leaders had finally acted on the realization that, with the emergence of a larger and more complex organization, there was greater need of organizational efficiency than during the denomination’s earlier years, and a need for administrative measures to be in harmony at different levels of structure. Thereafter a revised, updated *Working Policy*, voted at Annual Council, was released once every two or three years, and beginning in 1977, annually.

The *Working Policy* was well received. Five years after it first appeared, an article in the church’s flagship paper declared: “The operation of a well-defined working policy in harmony with organization has been one strong factor in binding and cementing the personnel of the body of Seventh-day Adventists together as one in purpose in Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

The span of just one decade saw the codification of common practice and committee actions in the publication of the

*Working policy promotes organizational unity and unified action.*



## DID YOU KNOW?

- We are a global church with 20 million members, 924 languages, in 208 countries and territories.
- Church members are so enthusiastic about TMI (Total Member Involvement) that they have created several subcategories—TCI (Total Children Involvement), TSI (Total Sabbath School Involvement), THI (Total Health Involvement), TYI (Total Youth Involvement), TWI (Total Women Involvement, and TPI (Total Pastors Involvement).
- The church in Kenya has the goal of involving all its 866,000 members in TMI this year. More than 4,000 evangelistic meetings are being held there. Members are involved in community work and preaching. Their goal is to baptize more than 400,000 this year.
- Adventist-owned Andrews Memorial Hospital (AMH) in Kingston, Jamaica, was the site of a first-in-the-world surgery. On Jan. 30, world-renown orthopedic spinal surgeon, Kingsley R. Chin led a team performing a 4-level viscoelastic cervical disc replacement procedure.
- During the past two years, baptisms in eastern Ukraine have more than doubled as members have made mission their priority. Many of those who were baptized sought Bible studies after seeing Adventists reach out to their communities with food, children’s events, and other assistance during the recent political conflict.



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# TMI — IT JUST TAKES ONE

A small Romanian town with just one Adventist baffled church leaders.

The Inter-European Division (EUD), whose territory includes Romania, had just established an Office of Adventist Mission, and their first project was the town, Maçin, located 140 miles (230 kilometers) east of Bucharest.

A pastor was specially hired to work in the town of 8,000 people. But try as he might, he could not find a way to nurture church growth beyond the one member. After 18 months, he gave up.

But the town's single church member refused to quit. She told church leaders that she watched Speranta TV, the Romanian affiliate of Hope Channel, at home and proposed carrying out a survey to find out whether townspeople were familiar with the channel.

The survey results surprised church leaders. A total of 28 percent of the population said they watched the Adventist channel. Then the church member suggested a sec-



ond survey on whether townspeople had any special requests about the channel's programming.

After that survey, 21 people began attending prayer services regularly in the local Adventist church. After a year, 19 of them were baptized.

Speranta TV has a broad reach in this East European country of 20 million people. About 65,000 people watch the channel during prime time, and most viewers are not church members, channel managers said.

Ninety percent of Romania's population has access to the channel. "Cable networks are carrying our programming for free," said Derek Morris, president of Hope Channel. "It's a huge miracle."

Maçin is a miracle, too, added Paulo Benini, Adventist Mission coordinator and director of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries for EUD. The town now has about 40 church members compared to just one person in 2012. This serves as a reminder that



the Adventist Church must do more than sow through initiatives such as television programs, Benini said.

"We produce, produce, and produce but don't harvest," he said. "It's time to harvest."

—ANDREW MCCHESENEY  
Mission Quarterly editor

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*Manual for Ministers* (1925), *Working Policy* (1926), and the *Church Manual* (1932). These resources continue to bring unity to church practice around the world, serve as an educational tool for new or inexperienced leaders, contribute to efficiency by conveniently organizing best practices and committee actions, and maintain harmony across all levels of church structure.

*General Conference Working Policy* has grown from that first "little pocket pamphlet" of 63 pages into a comprehensive book more than 10 times that size. However, as a church now more than 70 times larger in membership with 20 million members spread across the globe, the need for a document that organizes and summarizes the policies voted by the General Conference Executive Committee is more important than ever.

Working Policy is one of the Holy Spirit's anchors that stabilizes church structure, unifies action, creates harmonious working relationships, and facilitates mission. It is not infallible. It can be changed. But it is

a valuable tool based on biblical principles that in the hands of wise church leaders gives the church direction in its administrative decisions.

We can thank those early leaders for their inspired foresight in pulling together those policies that have contributed to unity and effectiveness in our mission of sharing the Good News with the world in preparation for Christ's soon return.

1. William A. Spicer, "A Working Policy: Consecration, Co-operation, Autonomy," *Review and Herald*, June 5, 1922, pg. 3.
2. I. H. Evans, "Important Resolutions for the Churches," *The Church Officers' Gazette*, March 1917, pg. 2.
3. I. H. Evans, "The Far Eastern Division of the General Conference," *Review and Herald*, May 25, 1922, pg. 6.
4. "Proceedings: Thirtieth Meeting," *Review and Herald*, June 10, 1926, pg. 2.
5. Ibid.
6. "Proceedings of the General Conference," "Thirtieth Meeting," *Review and Herald*, June 10, 1926, pg. 2.
7. "Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee," September 29-October 5, 1926, GC Archives, RG 1, LF 6375, pg. 20.
8. H.W. Cottrell, "The Growth of Denominational Organizations," *Review and Herald*, March 24, 1931, pg. 1.

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