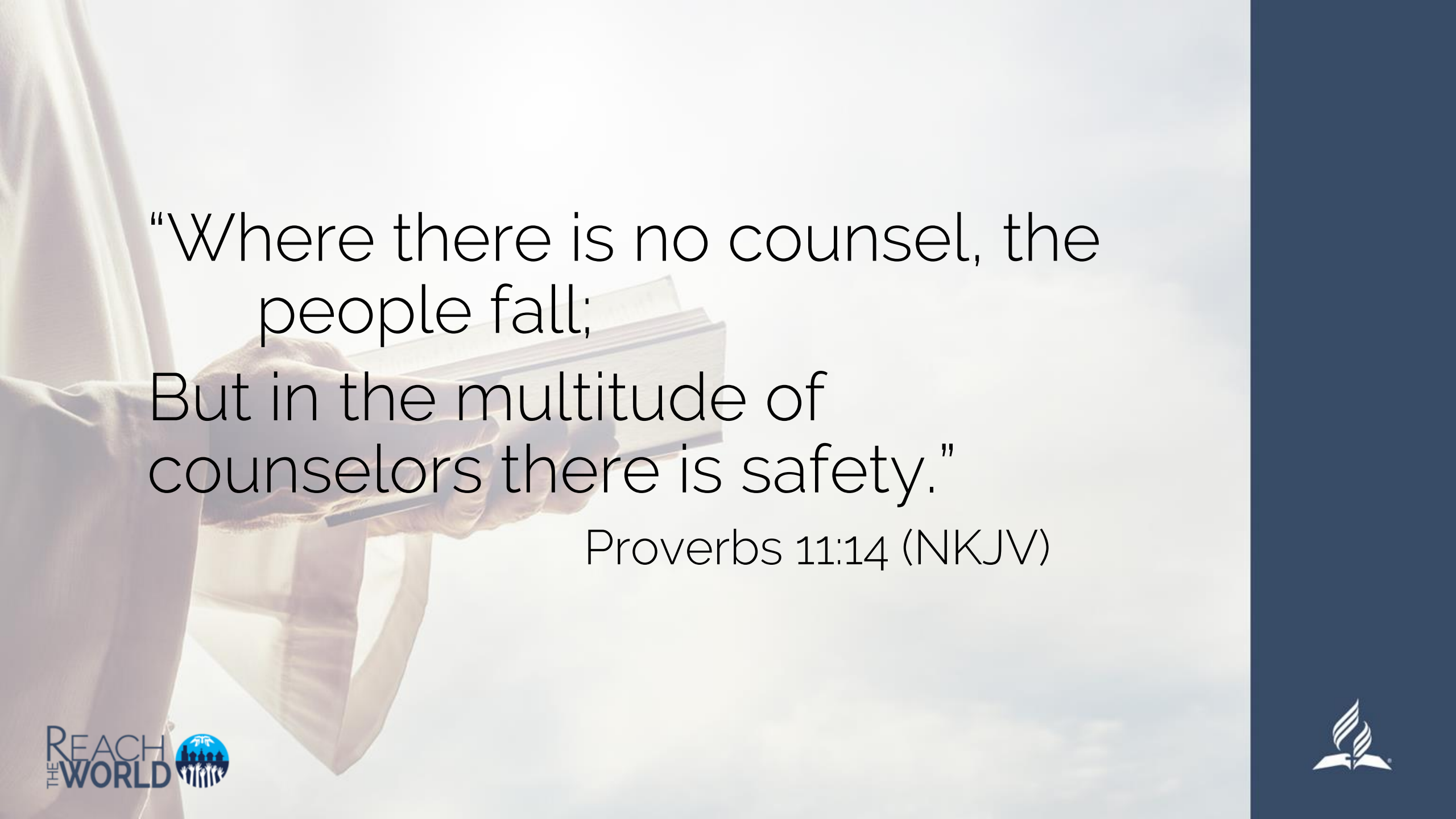


# Purpose and Overview of GC *Working Policy*

Myron Iseminger, Undersecretary  
2017 Annual Council





“Where there is no counsel, the  
people fall;  
But in the multitude of  
counselors there is safety.”

Proverbs 11:14 (NKJV)

# Overview of Policy Review

1. Where did Adventist Church policy come from?
2. Why do we have policies?
3. What topics are covered in the current General Conference *Working Policy*?
4. How do we access Church policies?



# History of Working Policy

- Votes and actions were recorded in official minutes.
- Limited review of previous minutes.
- Voted policies and standard Adventist practices were chiefly perpetuated in collective administrative memory.





# History of Working Policy

- Memory no longer served effectively
- Diversity and inconsistency of practice crept in
- Need to collect, systematize and standardize the many policies and protocols voted by sessions and councils



# History of Working Policy

“It is essential for an efficient organization to have uniform regulations and a working policy for all its parts.”

Irwin H. Evans, “Important Resolutions for the Churches,” *The Church Officers’ Gazette*, March 1917, pg. 2.



# History of Working Policy

- 1922 GC Session:
- “Committee on Constitution and Working Policy”
- Made up of division officers and three world church administrators.
- The task proved greater than anticipated.



# History of Working Policy

“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, in which practically all these men who would be asked to give their concentrated study to such a document will be found.”

“Proceedings: Thirtieth Meeting,” *Review and Herald*, June 10, 1926, pg. 2.





# History of Working Policy

The intent of the process “is not to create new methods, but really to codify or gather together the actions we have taken regarding these things, and get them in workable form.”

“Proceedings: Thirtieth Meeting,” *Review and Herald*, June 10, 1926, pg. 2.



# History of Working Policy

Important actions 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.”

“Proceedings: Thirtieth Meeting,” *Review and Herald*, June 10, 1926, pg. 2.



# History of Working Policy

- The 1926 GC Session voted to refer the responsibility of producing a working policy to the GC Executive Committee.
- That delegation of responsibility to the GC Executive Committee has continued over most of the policy's history.



# History of 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...”

“Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee,”  
September 29-October 5, 1926, GC Archives, RG 1, LF 6375, pg. 20.





# History of Working Policy

“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.”

“Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee,”  
September 29-October 5, 1926, GC Archives, RG 1, LF 6375, pg. 20.



# History of Working Policy

- First *Working Policy*
- A 63-page digest of official actions taken by the General Conference Committee.
- Thereafter a revised, updated *Working Policy*, voted at Annual Council, was released once every two or three years, and from 1977 on, annually.



# History of Working Policy

“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.”

H.W. Cottrell, “The Growth of Denominational Organizations,”  
*Review and Herald*, March 24, 1931, pg. 1



# History of Working Policy

Publications:

*Manual for Ministers* (1925)

*Working Policy* (1926)

*Church Manual* (1932)





# History of Working Policy

## Policy Resources:

- 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 practice and committee actions
- maintain harmony across all levels of church structure



# History of Working Policy

1926 Working Policy:

“Little pocket pamphlet” of 63 pages

2016-2017 GC Working Policy:

790 pages

Constitution, By-Laws  
and Working Policy

Of the  
General Conference of  
Seventh-day Adventists

Adopted 1996

General Conference  
**WORKING  
POLICY**

**2017**



# Quiz

**Question:** What year was the first General Conference *Working Policy* published?

**Answer:** 1926



# Quiz

**Question:** How many pages were there in the first General Conference *Working Policy*?

**Answer:** 63



# Quiz

**Question:** What body authorized the contents of the first General Conference *Working Policy*?

**Answer:** The 1926 GC Session voted to refer the responsibility of producing a working policy to the **GC Executive Committee**. That practice has continued over most of the policy's history.



# Quiz

**Question:** What reasons were given for producing the first General Conference *Working Policy*?

**Answers:** They needed to collect, systematize and standardize the many policies and protocols voted by sessions and councils. Memory no longer served effectively. Diversity and inconsistency of practice had developed.

# The Purpose of Policy

- Provides a framework for making sound decisions by the world leadership with respect to organizational procedures.
- Ensures that the organization is administered consistently.





Policy allows us to save time by avoiding repeated decision-making on reoccurring situations.

*General Conference*

**WORKING  
POLICY**

2016-2017

# The Purpose of Policy

- Protects the organization from autocratic and erratic leadership.
- Enables fair and equal treatment of people.
- Helps in the orientation and education of employees and volunteers.



# The Purpose of Policy

- Safeguards against fraud and other ethical failures by outlining appropriate procedures.
- Shields employees or volunteers from making serious mistakes.
- Protects an organization legally by demonstrating the proper intended practice.



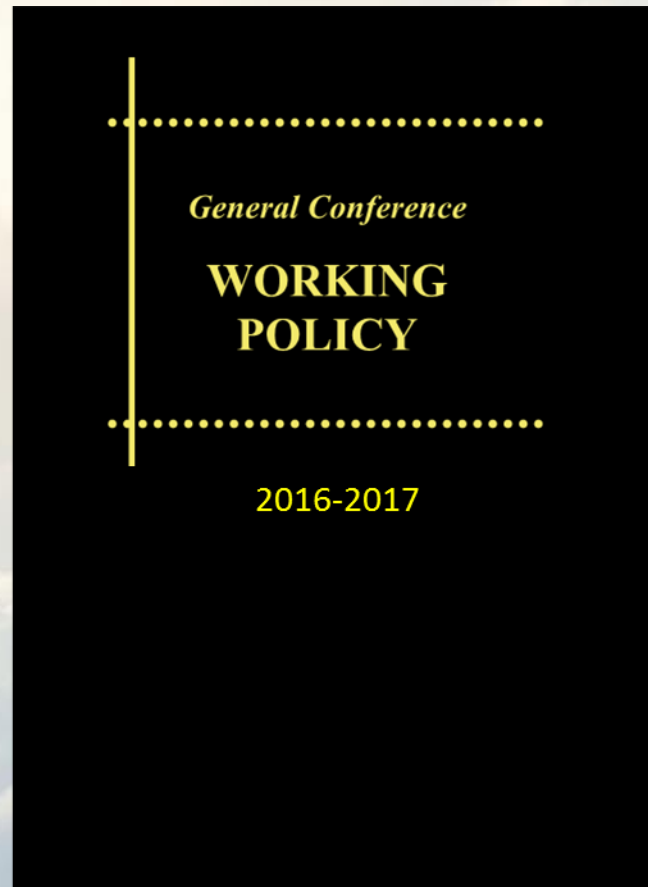
# What Policy is Meant to Be

- Policy is used to maximize our collective wisdom through input from the world Church.
- Policy operates on the basis of mutual agreement of how the church should be run and operated.
- Policy promotes harmony and order.





Policy is the result of unity,  
not the cause of it!



# What Policy is Meant to Be

- Policy is approved by world leaders who are accountable to their constituencies that elect them.
- Policy is the exercise of authority with accountability.
- Some policy has wiggle room, but not those in the Constitutions and Bylaws sections of the GC *Working Policy*.



# Reasons for Changing Policy

- Goals, terminology, or procedures change.
- Challenges arise and new policies are needed to address those needs.
- Changes are requested so an organization will not be out of compliance.



# S 34 Financial Oversight Committees

S 34 05 Audit Committee (formerly referred to as Financial Audit Review Committee)—The controlling board or executive committee of each organization shall establish a subcommittee known as the Audit Committee...

1. *Composition*—The Audit Committee shall consist of a minimum of three persons who are **members of the** controlling board or **executive committee**. In unusual circumstances, these persons do not have to be members of the controlling board or executive committee, provided the reasons are documented by action of the controlling board or executive committee...





# The Process for Changing Policy

Suggested changes go from your entity's board through the organizational levels (conference/mission, union, division) to the General Conference Policy Review and Development Committee.



**The Policy Review and Development Committee meets.**

**Sometimes questions or issues are identified, so the policy originator is contacted to resolve it or the wording is changed.**

The same process is repeated at:

- General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM)
- Presidents, Secretaries, and Treasurer's Councils
- General Conference & Division Officer's Council (GCDO)
- Finally to arrive at Annual Council!



# Quiz

**Question:** What is the purpose of General Conference *Working Policy*?

**Answer:** To protect the organization from erratic decisions and processes.

To indicate decisions that world Church leadership has made with respect to organizational procedures and relationships.





# Quiz

**Question:** What committee at the General Conference first discusses changes to the *Working Policy*?

**Answer:** The Policy Review and Development Committee.

# Quiz

**Question:** Which publication holds more authority: The *Church Manual* or the General Conference *Working Policy*?

**Answer:** Each publication serves a different purpose and is authoritative for its purpose. The Church Manual deals with the operations of the Local Church and its relationship to the Conference. The GC Working Policy addresses the working relationships and practices organizations other than the Local Church.



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

- Fundamental Beliefs
- Constitution and Bylaws



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## Section A

- Mission
- Vision
- Values



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## Section B:

Organization and  
Administration

## Foundation and Structure

- How the Church is designed
- How it operates



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## Section BA

- Annual Council, *Church Manual*, Adult Bible Study Guides
- Trademark policies
- Institutions—Composition of constituencies and boards
- Human relations (Treating people with fairness and equality—with an exception clause)
- Records management



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## SECTION C

- Division territories
- Division councils and policy
- Union and local conference sessions
- Training of employees
- Polygamy

# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## SECTION D

- Model governance documents (constitutions and operating policies)



# Why so much bold print?

“Those sections of the model bylaws that appear in bold print are essential to the unity of the Church worldwide, and shall be included in the bylaws as adopted by each union conference. Other sections of the model bylaws may be modified as set out in Bylaw Article XII, provided they continue to be in full harmony with the provisions of this model.”

(D 10 05)



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## SECTION E

- Denominational employees—Credentials and licenses
- Employee identifiers: base division, citizenship, independent transfers
- Calls for international service
- Employee service record
- Conflict of interest and/or commitment



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## DEPARTMENTS, AGENCIES, MINISTRIES, ETC.

Up until 1901, there were no departments. Today we have departments, agencies, associations, services (Bylaws, Article X), all governed by a group of policies enumerated from F through K.

- FA–FY: Departments
- GE: White Estate
- HA–HD: Important agencies
- K: Supporting Ministries



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## SECTION F: DEPARTMENTS

- FA: Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries
- FB: Children's Ministries
- FC: Communication
- FE: Education
- FF: Family Ministries
- FH: Health Ministries
- FL: Public Affairs and Religious Liberty





# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## SECTION F: DEPARTMENTS

- FP: Publishing Ministries
- FR: Sabbath School and Personal Ministries
- FS: Stewardship Ministries
- FT: Legal Association and Trust Services
- FW: Women's Ministries
- FY: Youth Ministries



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## MINISTRIES

- Nine departments have the title “Ministries”
  - Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, Children's Ministries, Family Ministries, Health Ministries, Publishing Ministries, Sabbath School and Personal Ministries, Stewardship Ministries, Women's Ministries, and Youth Ministries
- The departments of Communication, Education, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, and Planned Giving and Trust Services perform a ministry but are not given that label.



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES

- Thirteen (13) are authorized by the Bylaws (Article X).
- But there are 14 listed under General Conference departments in the *Yearbook*.

# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## THE MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION

- The 14th is the Ministerial Association.
- It functions like a department and is listed with them in the *Yearbook*, but it is not officially a department.
- It is integrally associated with the pastorate so it is not dealt with under the F group of policies.
- There is a special set of policies relating to pastors, section L.





# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## **SECTIONS G-K: AGENCIES, CORPORATIONS, AND SERVICES**

- GE: Ellen G White Estate
- HA: Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
- HB: Adventist World Radio (AWR)
- HC: Adventist Mission
- HD: Hope Channel and Hope Channel, Inc.
- K: Supporting Ministries

# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

## Adventist Mission

- Adventist Mission: “It is not a department, but works with all departments.” (HC 05)
- It oversees church planting initiatives but they then operate under local entities (HC 10, paragraph 1; HC 15 10)
- Provides resources rather than administers them (HC 15 10; HC 15 20)
- “The Mission Awareness function of Adventist Mission is a communication function, not an administrative one.” (HC 20)



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

- **Section M:** International Service Policies (brief overview)
- **Sections N-Q:** Relate to international service employees (ISEs) and were removed in 2014.
- All International Service Policies are now found in the **ISE *Working Policy*** available from International Personnel and Resource Services (IPRS).



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

- Section R: Adventist Volunteer Service
- Section S: General Financial Policies
- Section SA: Auditing Policies
- Section T: Division Financial Policies



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

- Section U: Institutional Financial Policies
- Section V: The Tithe and Offerings
- Section W: World Mission Funds  
(incorporated into section V in 2012)



# Sections of the GC *Working Policy*

- Section X: Ingathering
- Section Y: Remuneration
- Section Z: Retirement



# Quiz

**Question:** If compliance with GC Working Policy would result in a violation of civil laws what should leadership do?

**Answer:** Obey the law of the land—provided there has been consultation with GC officers and provided compliance with local law is not a violation of conscience.



# Quiz

**Question:** Which section of GCWP contains the model governance documents for organizations (constitutions and operating policies)

**Answer:** Section D



# Quiz

**Question:** When did Associations become the denomination's general departments?

**Answer:** 1901 – extra credit for “1901 GC Session”

# Quiz

**Question:** How many departments are authorized by the Bylaws?

**Answer:** 13 – “14” is not quite correct because Ministerial Association though it functions as a department is not included as a department.

# Quiz

**Question:** Is the Office of Adventist Mission a denominational department?

**Answer:** No – extra credit “But it works with all departments.”



# Division Working Policy

- “Each division committee shall prepare and publish a working policy for the division, its departments, and the organizations and institutions within its territory, in harmony with the Constitution and *Working Policy* of the General Conference.” (C 10 05)
- Division Policies fill in the details for the territory.
- Union and local policy books





# History of Working Policy

“It is essential for an efficient organization to have uniform regulations and a working policy for all its parts.”

Irwin H. Evans, “Important Resolutions for the Churches,”  
*The Church Officers' Gazette*, March 1917, pg. 2.



# Knowledge of Policies

- Every leader has an obligation to become acquainted with the policies that pertain to his area of responsibility.
- A leader should also have a general acquaintance with policies in general.



# Accessing Documents

- Fundamental Beliefs:  
<https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs>
- *Church Manual*:  
<https://www.adventist.org/en/information/church-manual>
- *GC Working Policy*.  
Available on GC Executive Committee or ISE website only.



# Working Policy

Working Policy 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.





# Working Policy

Policies have contributed to unity and effectiveness in our mission of sharing the Good News with the world in preparation for God's soon return.



# Working Policy

Working Policy is one of the Holy Spirit's anchors that...

- stabilizes church structure
- unifies action
- creates harmonious working relationships
- facilitates mission.



Constitution, By-Laws  
and Working Policy

Of the  
General Conference of  
Seventh-day Adventists

Adopted 1996

General Conference  
**WORKING  
POLICY**

**2017**



# Questions?





# Case Study #1

A local conference administration has asked their Constitution and Bylaws Committee to prepare a policy change that conflicts with the bold print in the model constitution and bylaws.



# Case Study #2

A few conference and union leaders have decided not to embrace the spiritual initiatives voted by the division even after discussion with division officers.



# Case Study #3

An educational institution, during its constituency meeting, is contemplating electing individuals to its executive committee who are very influential in the community and also who are very wealthy but who are not Seventh-day Adventists.