

40. THE CHURCH MANUAL-CHANGES FOR THE 2025 GENERAL CONFERENCE CONGRESS (Voted at the 2023 General Conference Annual Council)

1. MAKING CHANGES (WHY A *CHURCH MANUAL*?) *CHURCH MANUAL* AMENDMENT

RECOMMENDED, To amend the *Church Manual*, Chapter 1, Why a *Church Manual*?, pages 18 Making Changes, to read as follows:

Making Changes

The General Conference through the years voted important changes concerning the *Church Manual*. Realizing the importance of conducting the worldwide work of the Church “decently and in order,” the 1946 General Conference Session voted that “all changes or revisions of policy that are to be made in the Manual shall be authorized by the General Conference Session.”—*General Conference Report*, No. 8, p. 197 (June 14, 1946).

In 1948, recognizing that local conditions sometimes call for special actions, the General Conference Executive Committee voted that “~~each division, including the North American Division of the world field, prepare~~ each division of the world field “prepare a ‘Supplement’ to the new *Church Manual* not in any way modifying it but containing such additional matter as is applicable to the conditions and circumstances prevailing in the division; the manuscripts for these Supplements to be submitted to the General Conference Committee for endorsement before being printed.”—*Autumn Council Actions*, 1948, p. 19.

The 2000 General Conference Session authorized the reclassification of some existing *Church Manual* material into the Notes section as guidance and examples rather than mandatory ~~material~~, material and approved the process for making changes. Changes in the *Church Manual*, except for the notes and editorial changes, can be made only by action of a General Conference Session, where delegates of the world ~~church~~ Church have voice and vote. If a local church, conference, or union conference/mission wishes to propose a *Church Manual* revision, it should submit its proposal to the next constituent level for counsel and study. If that level approves the proposal, it submits the suggested revision to the next level for additional evaluation. If the various levels approve the proposal, it eventually comes before the General Conference *Church Manual* Committee, which considers all recommendations. If the *Church Manual* Committee approves a revision, it prepares it for presentation at an Annual Council and/or General Conference Session.

Revision of a note follows the same procedure. The General Conference Executive Committee may approve changes to the notes at any Annual Council.

The *Church Manual* Committee reports proposed nonsubstantive editorial changes to the main content of the *Church Manual* to an Annual Council of the General Conference Executive

Committee, which may give final approval. However, in the event the Annual Council determines by one-third vote that an editorial change substantively alters the meaning of a passage, the proposed change must go to the General Conference Session.

At the final Annual Council of a quinquennium, the General Conference Executive Committee reviews all changes to the notes and coordinates the changes with any proposed amendments to the main content of the *Church Manual*.

A new edition of the *Church Manual* is published after every General Conference Session. The most recent edition should always be used. This edition incorporates amendments made at the postponed 2020 General Conference Session, which took place in 2022.

2. A DIVINELY APPOINTED MINISTRY - *CHURCH MANUAL* AMENDMENT

RATIONALE: This amendment expresses how important it is for pastors to focus on training the local church leadership in the mission and work of the church.

RECOMMENDED, To amend the *Church Manual*, Chapter 4, Pastors and Other Church Employees, pages 32 to 35, A Divinely Appointed Ministry, to read as follows:

A Divinely Appointed Ministry

Seventh-day Adventist ministers bear the God-given responsibility of proclaiming the everlasting gospel, making disciples, and equipping the saints according to their spiritual gifts in order to equip them for service (Eph. 4:11, 12; 2 Tim. 4:2). As Ellen G. White stated: “It was at the very beginning of His ministry that Christ began to gather in His helpers. This is a lesson to all ministers. They should constantly be looking for and training those who they think could help them in their work. They should not stand alone, trying to do by themselves all that needs to be done” (Letter 53, 1905). In addition, pastors are commanded to do the work of an evangelist, reading God’s word publicly and teaching obedience to it (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; 4:2, 5). They are to encourage and exhort the believers (1 Tim. 5:1, 2; 6:2), and rebuke sinners (1 Tim. 5:20); ordain elders (1 Tim. 5:22; Titus 1:5); uphold the truth and take a firm stance against false doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3, 4; 4:7; 6:20, 21; Titus 1:9). They should be examples to the believers in all matters of faith and practice (1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Peter 5:3). Another important part of the pastoral work is the visitation ministry. Ellen G. White stated: “Remember that a minister’s work does not consist merely in preaching. He is to visit families in their homes, to pray with them, and to open to them the Scriptures. He who does faithful work outside the pulpit will accomplish tenfold more than He who confines his labors to the desk” (9T 124).

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3).

All believers have the privilege of being part of “a royal priesthood” that proclaims “the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:5-9). To support and guide this work God “gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13).

The New Testament describes how the leadership of the church was established. During His ministry on Earth, Jesus appointed twelve apostles to accompany Him on His travels and sent them out to preach the Gospel and heal the sick (Mark 3:14, 15; Luke 6:13). He also sent out a larger group of seventy (Luke 10:1-23). This indicates that the organization of the church was initiated by Jesus Christ Himself in order to fulfill the mission of making disciples and teaching Bible truth (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8).

Soon after Christ's ascension, the apostles faced increasing demands with the fast-growing church in Jerusalem. To cope with these challenges, they divided the leadership responsibilities in the local church into different areas. Seven men were chosen to "serve tables," caring mainly for the practical and material needs of the church, while the apostles confined themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:2, 4). Both leadership groups were involved in serving or ministering, but the manner of their involvement differed significantly. These avenues of ministry reflect the offices of deacon and elder/overseer described in Paul's writings (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9). While most elders and deacons ministered in local settings, some elders, such as Timothy and Titus, were itinerant and supervised greater territory with multiple congregations (1 Tim. 1:3, 4; Titus 1:5).

In harmony with the leadership model of the Jerusalem church, the apostles appointed elders as spiritual leaders in every church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). This practice explains why apostles, when they left Jerusalem to preach the Gospel, did not leave a leadership vacuum in this major center of the early church. Several years later, Barnabas and Saul delivered to the elders the relief contributions they had collected from far-flung churches for the needy believers in Judea (Acts 11:29, 30). As Ellen G. White indicates, the "organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the Gospel."—AA 91.

These New Testament principles of church organization guided Seventh-day Adventists in the years prior to and the decades following its official organization as a church in 1863. During this time, ministers were employed by the various conferences as administrators and evangelists, raising up churches, and visiting established churches that needed counsel. Following the model of ministry of Timothy and Titus, Conference-employed ministers almost never functioned as resident or "settled" pastors of a local church, in contrast to the practice in most Protestant churches then and now. In this regard, Ellen G. White wrote: "Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth, let the members of the churches say to these laborers: 'Go work for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the services of the church. We will keep up the meetings, and, by abiding in Christ, will maintain spiritual life. We will work for souls that are about us, and we will send our prayers and our gifts to sustain the laborers in more needy and destitute fields.'"—6T 30. "As a general rule, the conference laborers should go out from the churches into new fields, using their God-given ability to a purpose in seeking and saving the lost."—Ev 382.

As a divinely appointed ministry, ministers are "to sow the seeds of truth. Place after place is to be visited; church after church is to be raised up. Those who take their stand for the truth are to be organized into churches, and then the minister is to pass on to other equally important fields."—7T 20 "Just as soon as a church is organized, let the minister set the members at work. They will need to be taught how to labor successfully. Let the minister devote more of his time to educating than to preaching. Let him teach the people how to give to others the knowledge they have received. While the new converts should be taught to ask counsel from those more experienced in the work, they should also be taught not to put the minister in the place of God. Ministers are but human beings, men compassed with infirmities. Christ is the One to Whom we are to look for guidance."— 7T 20. "Our ministers should plan wisely, as faithful

stewards. They should feel that it is not their duty to hover over the churches already raised up, but that they should be doing aggressive evangelistic work, preaching the Word and doing house-to-house work in places that have not yet heard the truth. . . . They will find that nothing is so encouraging as doing evangelistic work in new fields.”—Ev 382.

These inspired counsels remain just as relevant today. Our ministers have the solemn responsibility of leading their congregations in the mission of reaching others for Christ. As Ellen G. White stated, “The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.”—9T 117. And “when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 1:4).

~~“God has a church, and she has a divinely appointed ministry. ‘And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. . . .’~~

~~“Men appointed of God have been chosen to watch with jealous care, with vigilant perseverance, that the church may not be overthrown by the evil devices of Satan, but that she shall stand in the world to promote the glory of God among men.”—TM 52, 53.~~

Conference President—The conference president should be an - No change

Conference Departmental Directors—Conference departmental directors - No change

Ordained Pastors—Ordained pastors appointed by the conference committee - No change

Licensed Pastors—To give individuals an opportunity to demonstrate their - No change

Bible Instructors—The conference may employ Bible instructors and assign - No change

Conference Directs Church Employees—The conference president in - No change

3. CREDENTIALS AND LICENSES - *CHURCH MANUAL* AMENDMENT

RECOMMENDED, To amend the *Church Manual*, Chapter 4, Pastor and Other Church Employees, pages 35 and 36, Credentials and Licenses, to read as follows:

Credentials and Licenses

God's work is to be jealously safeguarded by responsible leaders from the local church to the General Conference. Official credentials and licenses are issued to all authorized ~~full-time~~ Church employees and are granted by controlling committees for limited periods.

In a local conference, the committee confers authority upon individuals to represent the Church as pastors and gospel workers. This authority is represented by the granting of credentials and licenses, which are written commissions, properly dated and signed by the officers of the conference. The authority thus conveyed is not personal or inherent in the individual but is inherent in the granting body, which may recall the credentials for cause at any time. Credentials and licenses granted employees are not their personal property and must be returned when employment is terminated or at the request of the organization that issued them.

~~No one should be allowed to speak to any congregation unless he/she has been invited by the church in harmony with guidelines given by the conference. It is recognized, however, that there are times when congregations may be addressed by government officials or civic leaders; but all unauthorized persons shall not be given access to the pulpit. (See pp. 126-127.)~~

Expired Credentials and Licenses—Credentials and licenses are granted - No change

Retired Employees—Retired employees deserve honor and consideration - No change

Former Pastors Without Credentials—Individuals previously ordained as - No change

4. SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS - *CHURCH MANUAL* AMENDMENT

RECOMMENDED, To amend the *Church Manual*, Chapter 11, Services and Other Meetings, page 139, School Board Meetings, to read as follows:

School Board Meetings

The church school is usually supervised by a church school board. The church elects a chairperson to preside over meetings and a secretary to keep records of meetings and actions. The principal of the school generally is appointed secretary of the board. This board should meet at regular times. Special meetings may be called by the chairperson. Some churches prefer to have the church board, or a subcommittee of the church board, also serve as the school board. (See also pp. 97-98.)

5. HOW TITHE IS TO BE USED - *CHURCH MANUAL* EDITORIAL AMENDMENT

RECOMMENDED, To amend the *Church Manual*, Chapter 12, Finance, page 143, How Tithe Is to Be Used, to read as follows:

How Tithe Is to Be Used—Tithe is held sacred for the work of the ministry, for Bible teaching, and for the support of conference administration in the care of the churches and of field outreach (missionary) endeavors. Tithe shall not be spent on other work, on paying church or institutional debts, or on building programs, except as approved under General Conference *Working Policy*. For more information on the use of tithe, review Stewardship Ministries Resources, see Notes, #1, p. 190-191.

“A very plain, definite message has been given to me for our people. I am bidden to tell them that they are making a mistake in applying the tithe to various objects which, though good in themselves, are not the object to which the Lord has said that the tithe should be applied. Those who make this use of the tithe are departing from the Lord’s arrangement. God will judge for these things.”—9T 248.

6. REGULATION OF SOLICITING FUNDS - *CHURCH MANUAL* AMENDMENT

RECOMMENDED. To amend the *Church Manual*, Chapter 12, Finance, pages 145-146, Regulation of Soliciting Funds, to read as follows:

Regulation of Soliciting Funds—The following are regulations for soliciting funds:

1. No conference, church, or institution, without special counsel and arrangement, shall plan work requiring solicitation of funds from outside its territory. Any solicitation within its territory shall be in harmony with local, union, division, and General Conference policies. No authority is granted to denominational employees representing special interests in one part of the field to solicit help in any other part of the field or in any other conference without arrangement with and written authorization from conference officers where the fund-raising would take place.
2. The following principles protect churches from unauthorized, fraudulent, and undenominational solicitation:
 - a. Pastors and officers shall not grant the privilege of the pulpit to persons for fund-raising who have not been recognized or recommended by the conference. (See pp. 126-127.) No permission shall be granted to solicit funds either publicly or privately without such recognition.
 - b. All funds contributed for any cause in response to appeals shall be passed through regular church channels.
 - c. Conference and church officers shall take such steps as may be necessary to prevent unauthorized or illegal public solicitation.
3. No campaign other than the Annual Appeal (Ingathering or equivalent appeal), which involves using Appeal literature and containers with authorized Appeal labels, shall be conducted for the solicitation of money for either home or overseas mission work. Unions and conferences should prevent violations of this regulation.
4. ~~Interdivision employees visiting their home churches or otherwise communicating with their home bases are asked to solicit funds only for enterprises included in the budget of appropriations, working in cooperation with churches and conferences to raise the funds required to meet the appropriations on which our world mission work depends. All such funds shall be passed through regular channels.~~