

# Church Organization and Governance

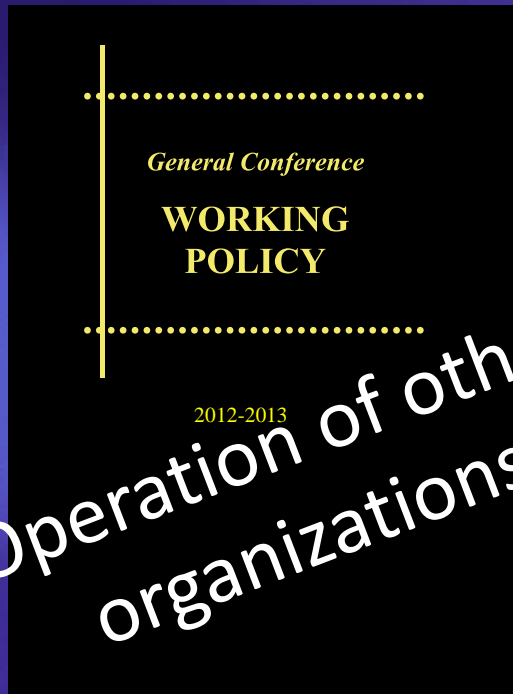
## Foundational Concepts

Franco-Belgian Union Leadership Seminar  
La Rochette, France, September 2014  
Presented by: Lowell C Cooper

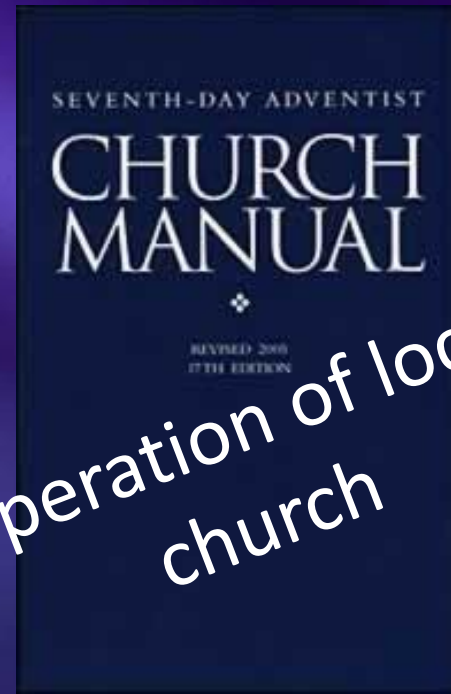
# Church governance documents

1. Statement of Fundamental Beliefs
2. General Conference *Working Policy* or the Division *Working Policy*
3. The *Church Manual*
4. Constitution and Bylaws: for conferences and institutions
5. Operating Policy: for units with 'mission' status

# Two policy books—different roles



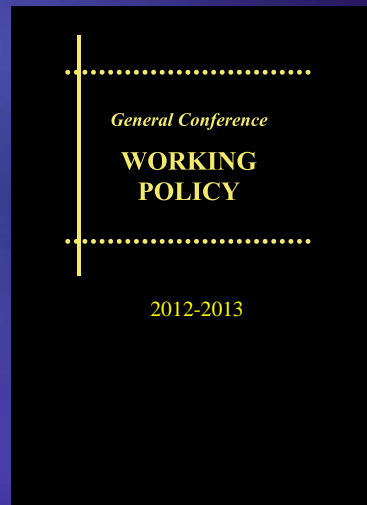
Operation of other organizations



Operation of local church

# GC *Working Policy*

Global leadership decisions regarding how entities live and work together. The 'family code of conduct.'



# Policy's purpose:

To protect the organization from:

- Autocratic and erratic leadership
- Merely reactive decision-making
- Widely differing patterns of action

# Policy's function:

1. Defines how we do our work
2. Represents a collective decision-making process (executive committee).
3. General Conference *Working Policy* is the policy framework for the world Church.
4. The *Church Manual* is the policy framework for the operations of local churches.
5. Is dynamic, can be amended.

# Policy: the big picture

Organizational Structure

Operating Principles

Procedures and Practices

# GC *Working Policy* Section B

Organization and Administration





# Eight key concepts to know:



1. Membership basis of organization
2. Conferred status
3. Representative and constituency-based
4. Authority rooted in God, distributed to whole
5. Committee system (decisions made by groups)
6. Shared administration, not presidential
7. Unity of entities (mission, purpose, belief create bond of fellowship)
8. Separate but not independent organizations

# Eight key concepts to know:

1. Membership basis of organization



# 1. Membership basis:





- Membership only in one place at a time
- Membership required for participation in the business meetings or to hold office
- Boards and committees also have defined memberships (What about invitees role?)



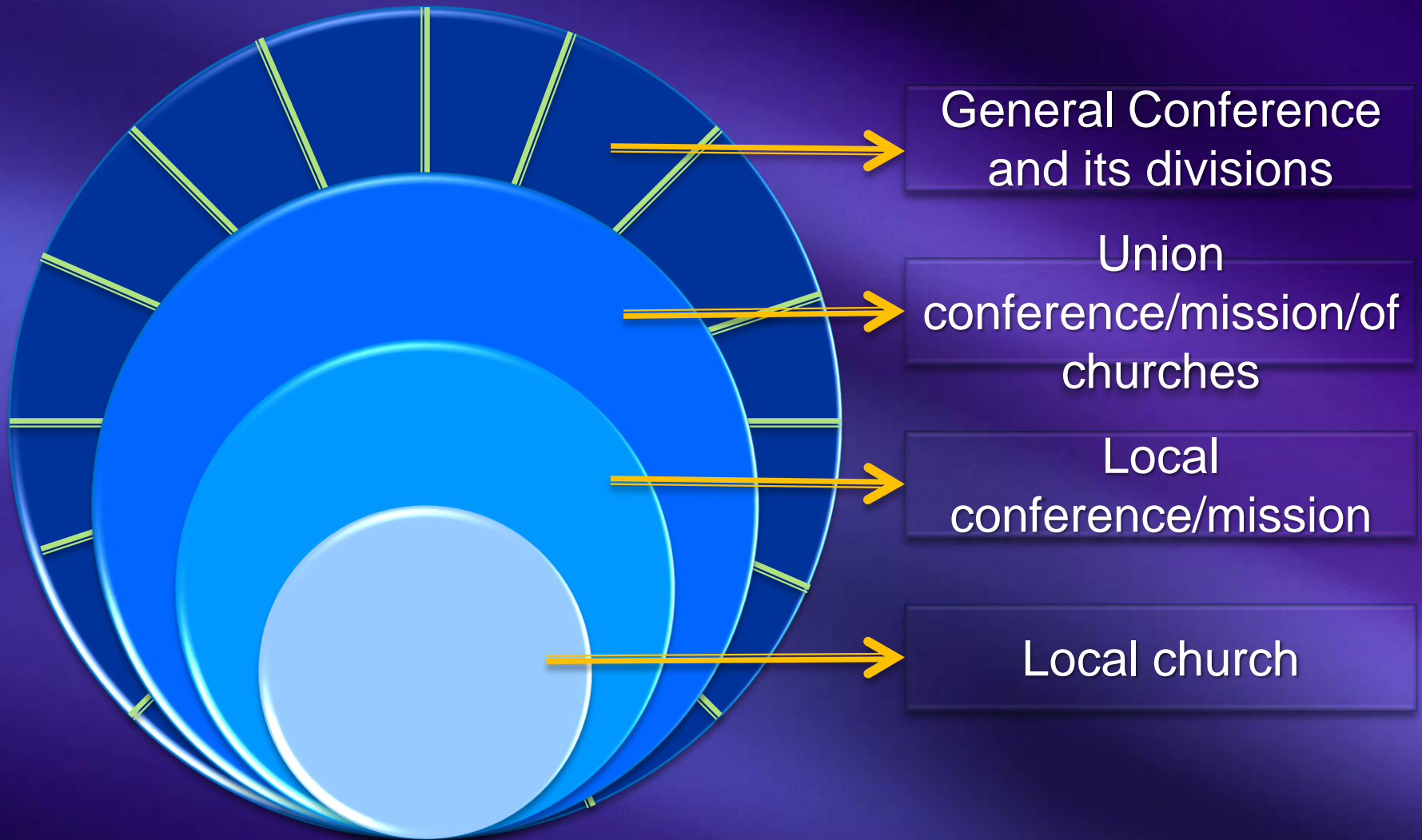
# The pattern of membership

## Organization

## Members

- Local church  Persons
- Local conference/mission  Local churches
- Union conference/mission  Local conferences/missions
- General Conference  Union conf/missions

# Primary building blocks



# Divisions:

- Not constituency-based units
- “Divisions” of the General Conference

# Divisions:

To facilitate its worldwide activity, the General Conference has established regional offices, known as divisions of the General Conference, which have been assigned...general administrative and supervisory responsibilities for designated groups of unions and other church units within specific geographic areas. (...The division executive committee acts for the General Conference Executive Committee in the territory of the respective division.)



# Divisions:

**B 40 20 Divisions a Part of General Conference—**  
The larger and more extensive the work of these divisions, and the less dependent any may become upon help from other divisions...the greater the necessity of holding closely together in mutual counsel and fellowship. It is ever to be held in mind that each division is a part of the General Conference.

# Divisions:

In the church of Christ, which is His body, there can be no such thing as one part or member independent of the whole. No division, therefore, is free to pursue a course of action contrary to the will of the whole, or to appropriate to itself the authority of the General Conference in defense of such action. Between sessions of the General Conference, the General Conference Executive Committee is constitutionally the final authority throughout the world field.

# Eight key concepts to know:

1. Membership basis of organization
2. Conferred status



## 2. Conferred status:

- Membership is always a privilege granted by a **group** (e.g. no one can baptize himself/herself)
- Organizational status is never self-proclaimed nor self-derived nor automatically perpetual
- Membership is not a right
- Membership can be withdrawn by the same group that granted it

# Eight key concepts to know:



1. Membership basis of organization
2. Conferred status
3. Representative and constituency-based

### 3. Representative democracy:

- In a direct democracy every member can vote on each decision—particularly in the choice of leaders
- Representative democracy involves the selection of representatives who then vote in the decision-making process
- Representatives are chosen by defined group processes



# Eight key concepts to know:



1. Membership basis of organization
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4. Authority rooted in God, distributed to whole

## 4. Authority distributed:

- Authority of the Bible with respect to organization



Both James White and Joseph Bates initially claimed that organizational design should be patterned after the “perfect system of order, set forth in the New Testament.” (RH, Jan 23, 1855, 164).

However, by 1859 White argued that “we should *not be afraid of that system which is not opposed by the Bible, and is approved by sound sense.*” (RH, July 21, 1859, 68 emphasis supplied).

# Distribution of authority:

- Authority of the Bible re: organization
- Authority distributed throughout organization
- Different types of authority at local church, conference, union, division, General Conference
- Distribution of authority helps to unite the church—no one part complete in itself

# Eight key concepts to know:



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5. Committee system (decisions made by groups)

## 5. Committee system:

- Most important decisions made by groups
- Authority ascends to a group
- Every elected/appointed leader is accountable to a group
- No group or committee has authority equal to or greater than the group that appointed it

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6. Shared administration, not presidential

## 6. Shared administration

- Officer team arrangement—not presidential
- 3-officer team—avoids kingly power, decreases potential for conflict, provides specialization
- President reports to Exec Comm in consultation with co-officers
- Secretary reports to Executive Committee after consultation with the President
- Treasurer reports to Executive Committee after consultation with the President



# Eight key concepts to know:



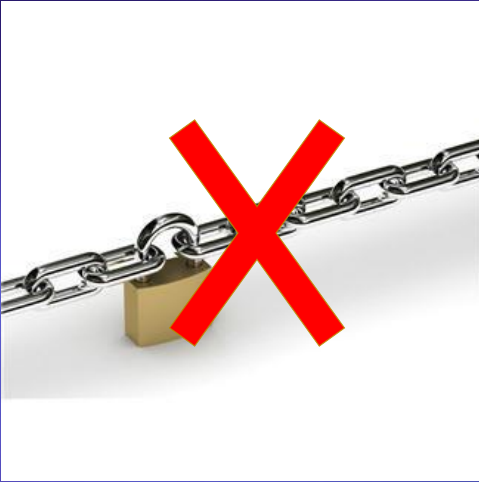
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7. Unity of entities (mission, purpose, belief create bond of fellowship)

# What holds the church together?





# What holds the church together?



# What holds the church together?

- Our submission to the Holy Spirit
- Commitment to worldwide mission
- Respect for the Church as a 'body'
- Willingness to keep striving for togetherness



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

Growth in any organization will tend towards fragmentation.

“Together we can do more.”

# Organizational tension

Centralization vs decentralization

# The Church needs both

The purpose of centralization is more for coordination than for control.

The purpose of decentralization is more for responsiveness to mission in local situations than for independence.

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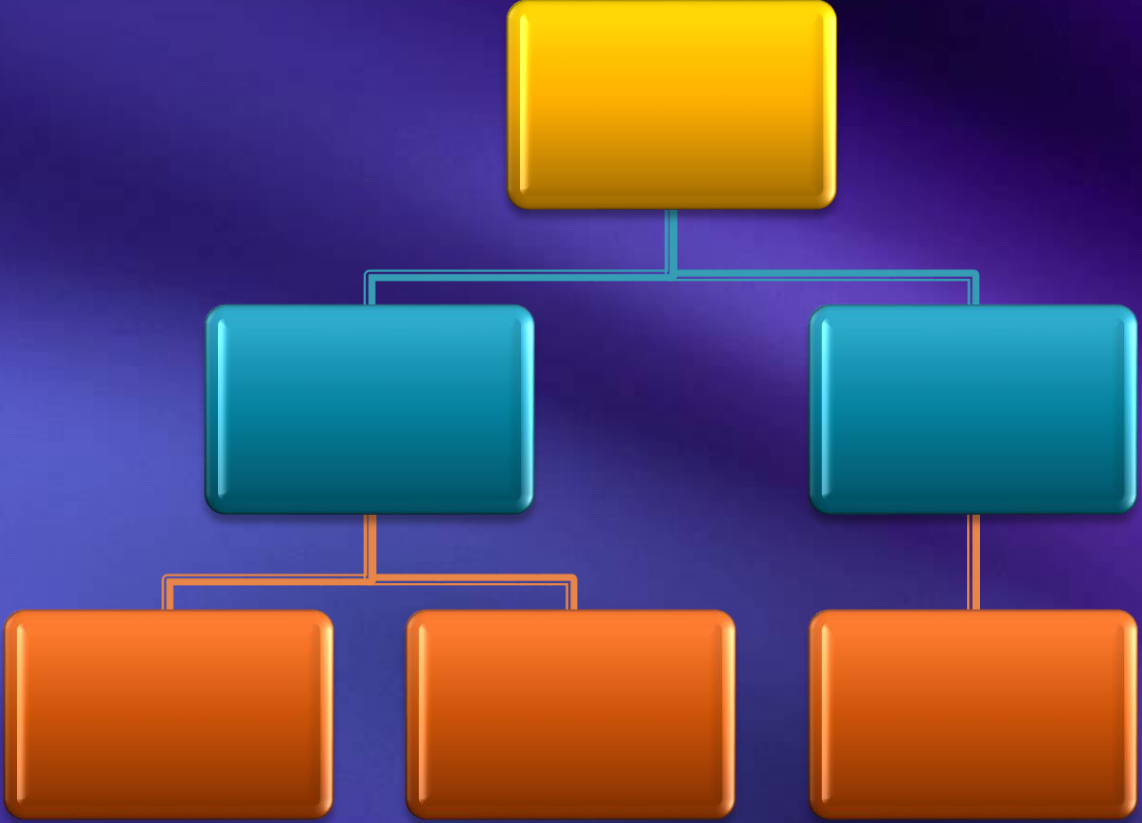


## 8. Separate but not independent:

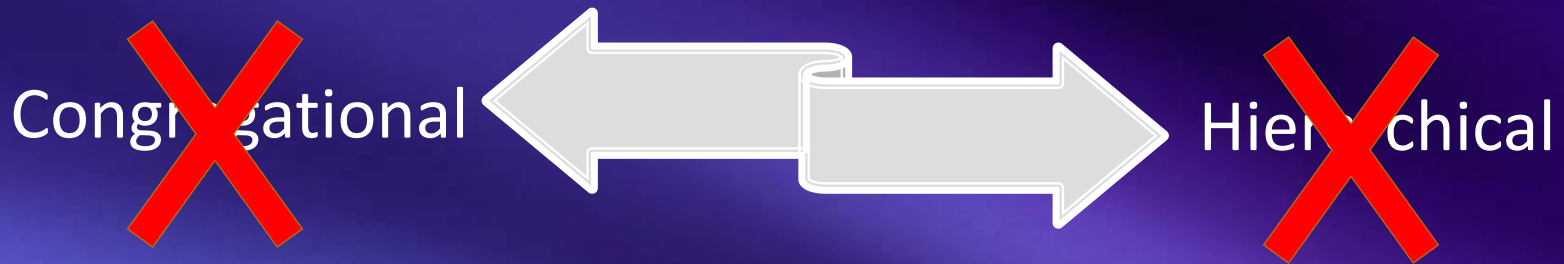
...each level of organization exercises a realm of final authority and responsibility that may have implications for other levels of organization. In a similar manner, each organization is dependent to some extent on the realm of authority exercised by other levels of organization.

(B 05 cl. 6)

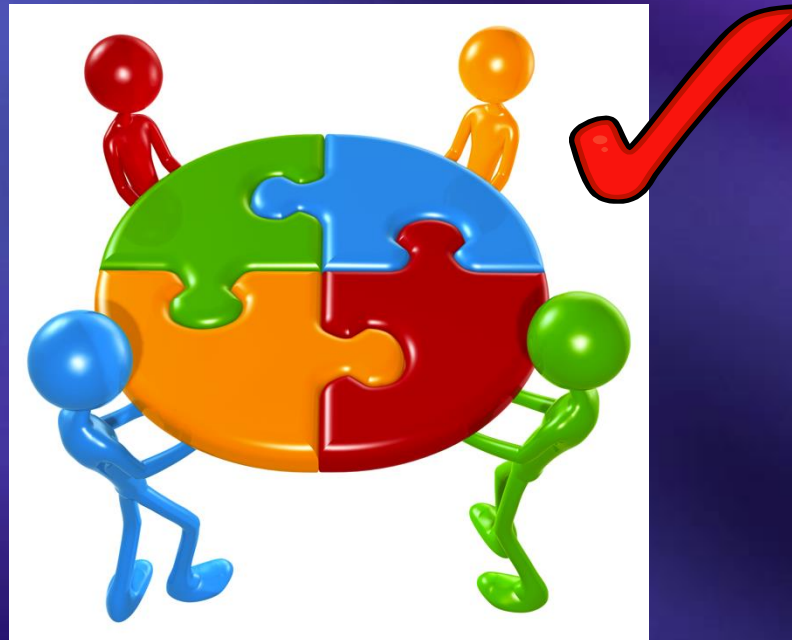


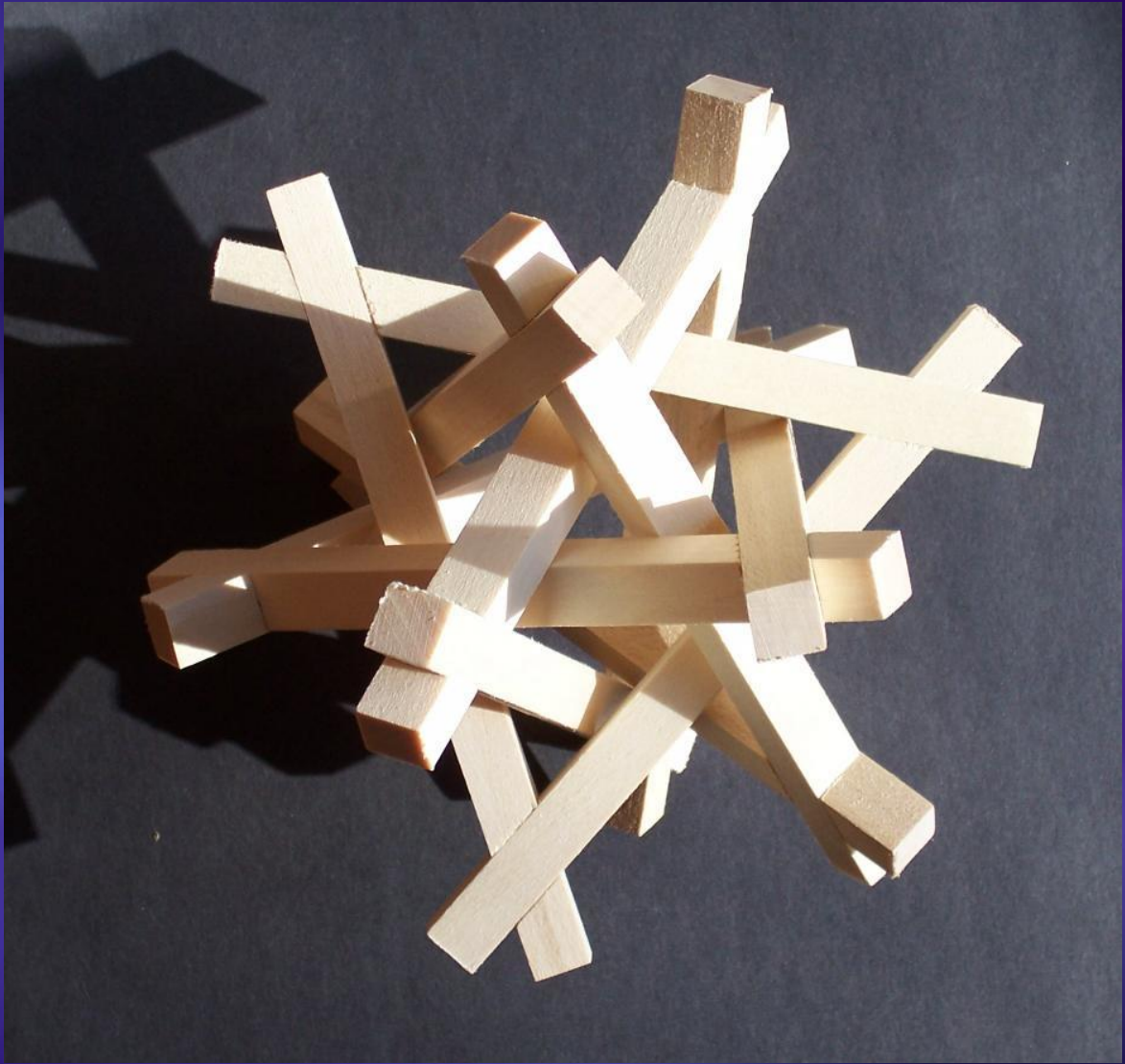


# SDA Church polity



Interlocking and interdependent





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# GC Working Policy

“...the accumulated policies adopted by General Conference Sessions and Annual Councils of the General Conference Executive Committee. It is, therefore, the authoritative voice of the Church in all matters pertaining to the mission and to the administration of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in all parts of the world.”

(GCWP B 15 05)

No departure from these policies shall be made without prior approval from the General Conference Executive Committee... (GCWP B 15 10)



Officers and administrators are expected to work in harmony with the General Conference *Working Policy*. Those who show inability or unwillingness to administer their work in harmony with policy should not be continued in executive leadership...

(GCWP B 15 15)

# Leadership standard of conduct

Compliance with *Working Policy* is a standard of conduct for Seventh-day Adventist leaders.

End