

SeLD - 329 - The Church Elder and the Church Manual

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1. The Church Manual is the official document that guides all activities of Seventh-day Adventist Churches worldwide:

The General Conference Bylaws Book (English: 2018-2019) and section BA 15 05 (with a title: Standards and Practices), states that the standards and practices of the church are based on principles established in the Church Manual (Seventh-day Adventist Church), published by the General Conference. These principles are to be respected and observed in all matters relating to the administration of a local Church, in both areas, the internal and also in its relationship with higher organizations. No employee should be permitted to set membership standards or to force or attempt to force, rules or procedures for the church which have not been adopted by the body of believers and which have not been contemplated in the Church Manual (of the Seventh-day Adventist Church).

In the same Book of Bylaws of the General Conference, but in BA 15 10, it is clarified in its title: Changes/Revisions only through a World Congress of the General Conference. It describes that the Church Manual (SDAC) can be changed or modified only through a General Conference (see General Conference Report, No. 8, p. 197, 14 June 1946). The content of the Church Manual is presented in two formats, namely Chapters and Notes. The main content of each Chapter is of worldwide value and applicable to each local church. Understanding the need for some variation in the operations of the local churches, additional material is added which is explicatory in nature and contains the Notes at the end of the chapters and is intended to serve as a guide.

If revisions to the Church Manual Notes (SDAC) are required by the constituent bodies of our Church, the Church Manual Commission will consider the respective requests for revision. And if approved, revisions will be brought to the consideration of the Plenary Board of the General Conference, at its Annual Council meeting, which corresponds to the last of the quinquennium and coordinate with any motion for change/revision of the Church Manual (IASD) which will be recommended for consideration by the next General Conference. In addition, the General Conference Annual Council may authorize changes in the Notes at any Annual Council.

The Church Manual Commission shall be given authority to make routine editorial changes that do not alter the meaning of the current Church Manual (SDAC). A report of such editorial changes shall be submitted by the Church Manual Commission (SDAC), through the General Conference Administrative Commission, to the General Conference Board of Directors at its

Annual Council meeting. In the event that the Administrative Commission or the Plenary Board of the General Conference determines by one-third vote that the editorial suggestions substantially alter the meaning of the current text, then those proposals shall be decided by the World Congress of the General Conference.

Then, in the General Conference Bylaws Book BA 15 15 stands out: that the Divisions shall be responsible for the Translation of the Church Manual (SDAC) which shall circulate in their respective territory and shall ensure the accurate and correct translation thereof, as approved in the English version, at a Congress of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Finally, also in the Book of By-Laws of the General Conference BA 15 20, it is stated that although the Church Manual must be of worldwide application, the divisions must see to its distribution in the languages corresponding to their territory, also the divisions may add "appendices" or "supplements" to the Church Manual (SDAC), not to modify it, but to provide additional material according to the conditions and circumstances prevailing in their division. Manuscripts of these "supplements or appendices" should be submitted to the General Conference Board of Directors for support prior to printing (see General Conference Board 1948-Annual Council, p. 19).

2. The Church Manual establishes the organization of the local Church and the respective authorities within the Church:

At the beginning of the General Conference Book of Bylaws, we have section A: Total Dedication to God-A declaration of spiritual integrity and faithfulness in the Family of Faith. It emphasizes that each Church member and each entity/organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, under the divine anointing, should find the most effective way to fulfill the mission of the Church.

And then on page 47 of the Book of Bylaws of the General Conference (and in this section on Total Dedication to God, and then in the paragraphs corresponding to the Total Dedication to God of all the members of the Church, and also of all the pastors of the SDAC and in A 15 20, it highlights what Total Dedication to God involves on the part of all the Congregations (Churches and Companies). And among these concepts of faithfulness and integrity to God, in item #5, it says that it recognizes the privileges of being a congregation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as presented in the Church Manual (SDAC) by accepting and implementing comprehensive plans that allow the spread of the Gospel in larger contexts and by participating in the organization, finances, and system of representation designed to facilitate a worldwide/global reach.

3. Local Church Leaders (Importance of familiarity with the Church Manual):

The pastor of the local church, as well as the church elder(s) (as well as other local church leaders), should be familiar with and know the concepts, directions, and guidance that the Church Manual (SDAC) represents for all local churches of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide.

The Church Manual (SDAC - version 2015 - the last and the one in force throughout this quinquennium, contains the following sections:

1. **Why does our Church need a Church Manual?** (Authority and guidance it contains and how to obtain counsel and guide the activities of the Church.
2. **The Church as the Living Body of God:** with biblical principles, and without discrimination, knowing that it is "spiritually complete" in Christ, and which is the "supreme object of the Lord's esteem."
"I testify to my brethren and sisters that the **church of Christ, enfeebled and defective** as it may be, is the only object on earth on which **He bestows His supreme regard.**" (Testimonies to Ministers, p. 15.2)
3. **Organization and Authority:** Biblical basis of organization, in addition to establishing the importance of the Organization, its purpose, model of the NT, organizational description of the Church and its entities/institutions, authority already in the Early Church and that the General Conference contains the highest authority:
"I have often been instructed by the Lord that no man's judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other one man. Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans shall be followed. But when, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body." (Ellen G White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 260.1)
4. **Pastors and other persons employed by the Church:** A ministry of divine recognition. Persons employed by the Church in the Association (president, departmental, ordained pastors, licensed pastors, Bible instructors, other employees.
5. **Organizing, Uniting, or Dissolving Local Churches and Companies/Congregations:** Local Church Organization, Companies/Congregations/Groups, Church Union, Dissolution of Churches, and the care of each member, records and funds.
6. **Membership:** becoming part of the Church through baptism, rebaptism, profession of faith, and membership transfer mechanisms.
7. **Discipline** general principles, disciplinary reasons, processes.
8. **Officers/leaders of the local Church and its organizations:** general attributions (spiritual qualifications, ethical-moral, respect for the pastor and leaders, setting an example in everything-including tithes-, responsibilities. Terms of office, elections. The

responsibility of the Elders (and their ordination) and all other leadership functions: Deacons, Deaconesses, Secretary, Treasurer. All the ministries of the local Church: Children, Communications, Education, Family, Health, Music, Public Relations and Religious Liberty, Publications, Sabbath School and Personal Ministry, Christian Stewardship, Women's Ministry, Youth Ministry.

9. **Elections:** Nominating Committee, to elect the leaders of the Local Church (in the terms established in that Conference/Mission/Union of Churches. Also the election for the Congresses of Conference/Mission/Union of Churches.
10. **Local Church Services and other meetings:** General Principles, Place of Music in the Church, Pulpit and its Use, Importance of Maintaining Unity, Sabbath School and Divine Worship, Communion Service, Prayer Meetings, Administrative Meetings, Finance Commission, Adventist Education Commission Meetings, Youth Gathering.
11. **Finances** Concepts and principles of Christian Stewardship; Tithe; Offerings; General Financial Councils.
12. **Standards of Christian Living:** Accepting God's Call; Daily Bible Study and Prayer; Community Relations; Sabbath keeping; Reverence in the House of Worship; Health and Temperance; Clothing; Simplicity and Modesty; Mass Communications Today; Recreation and Entertainment; Music.
13. **Marriage, Divorce and New Marriage:** Social Relations; Bride and Groom; Marriage; Divorce; Church Position on Divorce and New Marriage; Family Ministry at the local church level.
14. **Fundamental Doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.**
15. **Notes**
16. **Abbreviations**
17. **General Index**
18. **Index of the Holy Scriptures**
19. **Index according to sources.**

It is the responsibility of local church leaders (especially the Elders) to pay attention, know, apply, and serve in harmony with the guiding concepts of the Church Manual (SDAC).

4. Functions of the Church Manual for the good functioning of local churches:

In the General Conference Book of Bylaws (2018-2019, p. 67) and B 10 05, the constitution of a Local Church is described, where a group of Seventh-day Adventists are organized into a Church by the leaders of the Association/Mission/Union of Churches, according to the provisions of the Church Manual (SDAC). And in that way this new Church is accepted in the brotherhood of all the Churches of the Association, through a vote of the following Congress of that entity of the Church.

The same is reaffirmed in B 60 10 (p. 87). Organization of new local churches according to the Church Manual (SDAC).

In turn, the Church Manual (version 2015) describes (in chapter 5) that a new Adventist Church, as a congregation of believers, is organized as such (page 5). 36), by an ordained Pastor and following the recommendation of the Conference in its Board of Directors. (pages 37-38 describe the organization of a Congregation, Company, or Group). Of course, this group of believers must have the spiritual maturity and ability to assume the responsibilities of an organized church as such and will act in consultation with the President of the Conference/Mission/Church Union. Then follows the explanation of all the steps to be taken in the organizational meeting.

Dear Elders: We must unite in the ultimate goal, which is to invite our beloved brotherhood, that together with us leaders, we can narrow efforts under the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit (see Zechariah 4:6), to proclaim the Message of the 3rd Angel, and reach the 7.7 billion people who inhabit our world, with the wonderful message of Hope. The Spirit of Prophecy assures:

“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.” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9 116.4)

5. Development and suggestions for updating the Church Manual:

a. Body in which changes to the Church Manual can be decided:

In the Book of bylaws of the General Association (2018-2019) is the Statute of the General Association (pp. 23-40): world governing document) and on page 24, there is Article II, relating to the Commissions that will act at a World Congress of the General Conference. In Section 1 (of Art. II) it is described that at each World Congress of the General Conference, commissions will function (according to need) but will include the following, which must be elected at the Congress and will last for the duration of those sessions, to study and bring their reports and recommendations to the plenary of the Sessions:

- a. Church Manual Commission of Congress
- b. Commission on the Constitution and Statutes of the Congress
- c. Congress Appointments Committee
- d. Congressional Steering Committee

In section 2, of this Article II of the Statutes, it is stated that the President of the Commission of the Church Manual of Congress shall be one of the Administrators of the General Conference.

In turn, between Congresses of the General Conference, the Board of Directors of the General Conference maintains the authority granted by the World Congress, in turn appoints a Church Manual Commission (SDAC), which shall be responsible for receiving, studying and proposing to the Board of Directors of the General Conference (in their Annual Councils-with the presence of the presidents of Unions from around the world), modifications to the Church Manual, which in turn will be presented at the next World Congress of the General Conference, for study and approval.

b. Process for modifying the Church Manual:

The World Divisions, through their Boards of Directors, receive, study and approve to send to the General Conference, suggestions for changes, modifications, cancellations or additions to the Church Manual (SDAC).

The General Conference Church Manual Commission then prayerfully studies these motions and makes a decision to accept or reject these motions, and the appropriate motions are presented for study and decision at the Annual General Conference Council and will be part of all suggestions for change to be presented at the next SDAC General Conference.

This Church Manual Commission, in its end-of-year meetings, in addition to the regular members (which is made up of General Conference leaders), is enlarged by representatives from each of the 13 world divisions.

c. Legal Implications:

The Church Manual (SDAC) governs all the functions of the local churches of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide, according to the criteria and principles emanating from the Holy Scriptures (main source), but also (with the advice of advisors and lawyers), seeks to comply with all relevant laws, corresponding to the various countries where the SDAC is located and serving the community.

d. Importance for local Church Elders of how to use the Church Manual:

It is vitally important for local Church Elders to know and be intimately familiar with the Church Manual (SDAC) so that with prayer and under the anointing and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the Church may be administered in harmony with biblical principles and the Spirit of Prophecy, and the brotherhood may be encouraged to be involved in the Mission of the Church.

Missionary principles and objectives are the main instruments for fulfilling the mission that the Lord has entrusted to us. However, on this "battlefield" (conflict between good and evil) the enemy of souls tries to persuade and cause many (and especially the leaders) to slip, so that they may be the cause of discouragement and loss of faith and trust in the administration of the

Church on the part of the brethren. Hence, the Church Manual also contains the principles of discipline, which are necessary and indicated by the Lord, to redeem, correct, and redeem.

The Spirit of Prophecy counsels:

“Each member of the church should feel under sacred obligations to guard strictly the interests of the cause of God. The individual members of the church are responsible for its distracted, discouraged state, by which the most sacred truths ever committed to man are dishonored. There is no excuse for this condition of things. Jesus has opened to everyone a way by which wisdom, grace, and power may be obtained. He is our example in all things, and nothing should divert the mind from the main object in life, which is to have Christ in the soul, melting and subduing the heart. When this is the case, every member of the church, every professor of the truth, will be Christlike in character, in words, in actions.” (Ellen G White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 278.1)

May the Lord richly bless you, that following these instructions, each of the dear Church Elders, may feel the joy of serving from the heart, as faithful servants of the Lord Jesus, and that soon the Lord may say of each one: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Mathew 25:23:)