

What does the Church Manual say about Conference Sessions?

There are several organizational levels within the Church leading from the individual believer to the worldwide organization of the work. Membership units in each of these levels periodically **convene formal business sessions known as constituency meetings or sessions**. (The constituency meeting or session of a local church is generally referred to as a business meeting.) In Seventh-day Adventist Church structure, no organization determines its own status, nor does it function as if it had no obligations to the Church family beyond its boundaries. (p 27)

1. Local Church—A group of members in a defined location that has been granted, by the constituency of a **conference in session**, official status as a church. (p 27)

Expired Credentials and Licenses—Credentials and licenses are granted for the duration of the term as provided for by the conference constitution and bylaws or operating policy and are renewed by a vote of the **conference in session** or by the executive committee. Possession of an expired credential or license gives the person no authority whatsoever. (p 34,35)

Organizing a Church ... Before the organizing meeting ends, the members should vote to request the conference to receive the newly organized church into the sisterhood of churches at the next **conference session**. (p 37)

When a church is expelled from the sisterhood of churches by action of a **conference session**, the memberships of all loyal members, except those who refuse, are considered moved to the conference church on a provisional basis. The conference church then may issue letters of transfer for loyal members and deal with other memberships as may be necessary. (p 54)

The conference president is the presiding elder of the conference church, and the work normally carried by the clerk and the treasurer is handled by the conference secretary and treasurer. Since the church has no board, all business normally conducted by a local church board is conducted by the conference committee, which also appoints delegates from the conference church to the **conference session**. (p 54)

Not Delegates Ex Officio—No church officer is a delegate ex officio to a **conference session**. If the church wants an officer to serve as a delegate, it must elect that officer as a delegate. (p 72)

In the absence of the pastor, the first elder (see p. 114) should see that the church elects delegates to **conference sessions** and that the clerk sends the names of delegates to the conference office. (p 76)

Notice of Delegates for Conference Sessions—The clerk, on authorization of the board, promptly notifies the conference of delegates elected to represent the church at a **conference session**, using blanks or forms provided by the conference. (p 82)

Delegates to Local Conference Session

Administrative authority in a conference originates with its constituency. The churches of a conference elect delegates to the **conference session** to represent them in the councils of the conference. The **conference session** elects conference personnel, grants credentials and licenses (unless the conference constitution gives its executive committee this responsibility), amends its constitution and bylaws if necessary, and transacts other business. One of its most important acts is the election of the executive committee, which functions for the constituency between **sessions**. In this committee is vested the delegated power and authority of all the churches of the conference.

Choosing Delegates—It is God’s plan that members chosen to be delegates be trustworthy, tried, and proved, “able to reason from cause to effect,” because they are to “lay the plans that shall be followed in the advancement of the work.”—9T 262.

The number of delegates from each church to a **conference session** is determined by the conference constitution. When the time comes to select delegates, the pastor, or the head elder in cooperation with the pastor, brings the matter before the church. A committee may be appointed to nominate delegates, or the board may be asked to nominate them. Nothing of a political nature should be allowed to come into this work. Men and women of known piety and loyalty and who are able to attend the **session** should be nominated as delegates. (See p. 82.)

When the committee or board has completed its work, it reports its nominees to the church. The church then votes on the nominations. No church officer is a delegate ex officio. After the election, the clerk fills out the delegates’ credential blanks and returns them to the secretary of the conference. The delegates become the representatives of the church, to unite with the delegates of other churches to transact all business coming before the **conference session**.

Delegates to a union conference/mission session are chosen by the conference, not by the churches. The delegates to a General Conference Session are chosen by the divisions and the union conferences/missions.

Duty of Delegates—Delegates to a **conference session** are not chosen to represent merely the church or conference. They should view the work as a whole, remembering their responsibility for the welfare of the worldwide work of the Church. It is not permissible for church or conference delegations to organize or attempt to direct their votes as a unit. Nor is it permissible for the delegates from a large church or the conference to claim preeminence in directing affairs in a **conference session**. Each delegate should be susceptible to the direction of the Holy Spirit and vote according to personal convictions. Any church or conference officer or leader attempting to control the votes of a group of delegates would be considered disqualified for holding office.

Responsibility of Conference Officers—The local church has no authority outside its own body. It unites with other churches in the conference in delegating authority and responsibility to the conference officers and executive committee to carry on the work of the conference between **sessions**. Conference officers are answerable to the conference as a

whole and not to any one church.

Conference Executive Committee—Conference executive committee members are elected to represent the work in the entire conference, not that of one church, district, or institution. Each member should foster all interests of the work in all parts of the field and make decisions only after prayerful and careful study. Decisions of the committee are not to be controlled or influenced by any church, group, or individual. (p 113-115)

See also: Church Manual Chapter 9 - Elections