

When You Are a Delegate

PART ONE OF THREE

We have all had opportunity to either attend a General Conference Session or to read part of a Business Meeting report in one of the ten GC Bulletins issued by the *Review* throughout each five-year Session.

Whether witnessing a Business Meeting or reading about a Business Meeting in a Bulletin, one is aware of a certain futility which, by their comments, the delegates also sense. A similar situation exists in conference constituency meetings.

It would be helpful if the situation is explained so you can better understand it. The purpose of this brief article is not to point the finger of blame at anyone, but rather to clarify the nature of the problem.

Over the years, the author has been personally acquainted with a number of delegates to conference constituency meetings and General Conference Sessions, as well as those who have served on nominating committees. From time to time, friends have served on academy, conference, and union-level committees and boards, as well as high-placed General Conference committees.

What are constituency meetings? A constituency meeting is a gathering of representative delegates sent by a sizeable number of lower-level church groups. A five-year (*quinquennial*) General Conference Session is a type of constituency meeting. Another is the two-year (*biennial*) conference constituency meeting.

What are board meetings? These are somewhat different. The actual people who should constitute its “constituency” (the people who pay for and support the institution) generally have little or no say in higher-level board representation. More on this later.

What are special (ad hoc) committees? These are small committees appointed by a larger committee, or board, and given a single (*ad hoc*; special purpose) assignment to research and prepare a report. They are appointed by a committee rather than being voted on by the constituency. However, the ad hoc committee only presents a report; it has no authority to enforce it.

What is the process by which delegates and board members are selected?

In the case of a biennial conference constituency meeting, each local church decides whom it

will send to represent it. One of the two is generally the pastor. This is understandable, since the church loves its pastor and it would be expected that he should be there. Yet, if anything controversial occurs at that meeting, he will not dare cast a vote opposed to the will of conference leadership. That fact heavily skews votes, on critical issues, in a certain direction.

If it is the board of a church entity—such as an academy, college, hospital, union, or division committee—no open vote as to who should serve on the board or committee is made. Instead, part of the board will be composed of church leaders holding certain offices. In addition, a few laymen will be selected who may be very capable, but who are unlikely to oppose the will of the two or three in charge of the church entity. Added to this is the fact that the one who invited them onto the board will be the head of the institution. This, of course, makes them indebted to him as a friend. It is also only natural that they would like to retain their honored position on a conference or union committee.

Pastors and office staff members of the entity (whether it be a conference, union, hospital, etc.) will also be on the committee. They are employees and dare not cast an unwanted vote. One pastor told me how he was nearly ousted from the ministry when, on a conference committee, he voted against the president.

At the time that we wrote about the Pacific Union College crisis in the mid-1980s, we learned from a variety of sources that only two men were in charge of all decision-making on the board: the college president and the union president. No one else figured in. They decided who would be on the board; they decided what all its decisions would be. Other church leaders on the board helped them execute their decisions (*PUC Papers [WM-53-60]*). Since the leaders are all on one another's boards, the unwritten code is: When my board meets, help me do what I want; when I attend your board, we will all help you accomplish your objectives.

Some church institutions have a special “constituency,” which is something akin to voting rights. When, in the mid-1980s, we wrote about the Pacific Press crisis, we learned that the plant's employees were the constituency, but that, in spite of their almost unanimous vote in one direction, the General Conference was easily able to do just the

opposite—which it then did (*Pacific Press Crisis* [WM-67-68]).

Are any of these various committees ever able to arrive at a decision, not predetermined by someone else?

Any church entity controlled by a higher-level entity of the church will generally do what it is told to do. The outstanding exception is the biennial conference constituency meeting. If awakened to the seriousness of a current situation, the delegates can, and occasionally do, make major changes in spite of higher-level pressure. They have the authority to do this.

Another exception would be special (*ad hoc*) committees. These were convened for a special purpose, and they sometimes do not issue a report desired by the organization appointing them. But an *ad hoc* committee has no power to enforce its decisions. As soon as it presents its final report, the committee ceases to exist.

Another exception could, at times, be the delegates attending the General Conference Session. More on this below.

Other exceptions, of course, are local church board and constituency meetings, and local school or academy board meetings. The will of church members can be very powerful at such gatherings. However, some of the problems and principles, discussed later in this paper, can affect the outcome of such meetings.

The remainder of this paper will concern itself with two types of constituency meetings: two-year conference constituency meetings and five-year General Conference Sessions. In some respects, the problems encountered by their delegates are similar, but not always.

What are the reasons why the members of these committees cannot always make the changes and reforms which are needed?

Composition of the constituency delegates. Delegates to a constituency meeting heavily consist of conference pastors. That is due to the fact that the local church respects its pastor and wants him to be one of the delegates representing them at the constituency meeting. But, because he is paid by the conference, he dares not speak out of turn or make an improper vote. Associate pastors of larger churches will also generally be sent. The laymen in attendance generally know little about parliamentary business meetings; and, frankly, they are a little awed at attending the two-year meeting.

Composition of the Session delegates. Two-thirds of the Session delegates are church officers and their employees. These delegates are not likely to speak or vote improperly, except when the most

flagrant doctrinal standards or moral issues are involved. Even the lay delegates are not too likely to stir up problems, for they are greatly indebted to some church entity for selecting and paying their way to the Session.

Each Session has 2,000 delegates, apportioned in accordance with a certain formula. The Toronto Session is typical of the current pattern (*Toronto GC Bulletin #2, p. 21*).

265 - General Conference committee members. These are the top-level church leaders in the world.

28 - All the secondary leaders at the General Conference.

34 - Other delegates from the General Conference staff.

313 - Selected by the General Conference committee and its divisions. This number brings the total up to 640 (a little over one-third of the total of 2,000), which were directly selected by top-most leadership.

1,360 - This is the pre-determined total of other delegates. They primarily consist of leaders of Adventist institutions and entities worldwide: academies, colleges, hospitals, missions, conferences, unions, etc., plus individuals selected by each of those entities to fill up their delegate quota. As the following figures will indicate, most of these individuals are also salaried workers.

Breaking the delegate totals down a different way, we have this (*GC Bulletin #1, p. 37*):

263	- - - -	General Conference committee
710	- - - -	Other administrators
973	- - - -	Total administrators
548	- - - -	Non-administrative workers
1,521	- -	Total salaried church workers
425	- - - -	Laity
2,000	- -	Total delegates

Because over two-thirds of the delegates are church workers, the following age categories are what would be expected (*GC Bulletin #1, p. 36*):

49	- - - - -	under 30 years of age
232	- - - -	30-39
1,366	- -	40-59
299	- - - -	over 60

By the way, 1,645 of the delegates were men and 301 were women (*GC Bulletin, #1, p. 37*).

When delegates attending a conference constituency meeting or a General Conference Session arrive, they encounter certain problems.

Are the delegates or committee members given advance copies of the agenda? An agenda is needed for any meeting of importance. It lists the items to be discussed and possibly voted on. But were copies of the agenda distributed *prior to the meeting*? This is important. Otherwise the delegates arrive at the meeting with a blank mental slate. Everything is new to them; and, unless discussion ensues, they have only

When You Are a Delegate

a few moments in which to make a snap decision. They are therefore likely to vote in accordance with leadership recommendations. Surely, the leaders ought to know what is best, since the subject is not new to them.

The argument will be made that the agenda was not finalized until just before the meeting began, it costs money to print and send them out, or those in charge did not have time to send it to the members. But the key issues to be decided were generally known several weeks in advance of the meeting, and disorganization by management should not be used as an excuse for not providing advance copies of the agenda. Transmission of data can today be done very fast.

Unfortunately, even if a printed agenda is mailed to the delegates in advance, it frequently is only a bare outline.

Some of the basic problems encountered.

Whether arriving at a conference constituency meeting or a General Conference Session, the delegates encounter problems with the elections, the discussion of agenda items, and other factors.

Constituency meeting time problems. There never is enough time for what needs to be done! The constituency meeting is only one day long, is held only once every two years, and the delegates have to listen to a sermon before they can begin the business meeting; the chairman keeps telling them they do not have time and must rush on, and that they should end by 5 p.m.

Of course, they can do whatever they wish, but they do not realize this. They can vote to make the meeting two or three days in length. They can call for another meeting in a week, etc. They have the authority to do all these things.

Session time problems. Not enough time is made available for the delegates to properly transact all the business. Yet, as always, the meetings are packed with lots of items of little consequence, with several crucial items crammed in with them. There is no time for the introduction of new business from the floor.

Nominating committee. A nominating committee is appointed to select the officers, with a final vote being taken by the group as a whole.

Constituency nomination problems. Delegates attending a conference constituency meeting select the members of a small committee, which then may select the nominating committee. However it is done, the nominating committee is generally stacked with local pastors, frankly, because the local church delegates love their pastor so much. But, as an employee, he is not qualified for what he should do at the constituency meeting.

The nominating committee meets with the union conference president who chairs it. He usually an-

nounces that he has brought with him only one name for each office.

The pastors dare not complain and the laymen present do not wish to appear to be causing problems; so only a few muffled complaints may be heard, to which the chair replies that he really is sort of helpless in the situation because all he brought is the one name. The result is a pre-selected set of officer nominations which they rubber-stamp.

Returning to the main auditorium, the assembly is told that this is what, after careful deliberation, the nominating committee has selected. So everyone is voted in.

Session nomination problems. Delegates to a General Conference Session encounter a much more democratic process. At the first Business Meeting, on Thursday evening, the delegates are instructed to select a specified number who will serve on the nominating committee.

When the nominating committee meets, it tends to accept many of the nominations presented to it by leaders on the committee. Although committee members occasionally object, most of the time they accede to the names presented to them. Frankly, most of the nominating committee know relatively little about the nominees.

For example, at the 1990 Indianapolis Session, Folkenberg (who himself had been elected only a couple days earlier!) tried to keep David Dennis from being reelected. On that one point, the nominating committee did not obey. They were impressed by the objections of several prominent individuals, so they reelected Dennis. (But Folkenberg came up with an excuse to fire him, the last General Conference whistle-blower, a couple years later.)

Back in the main auditorium, the delegates rarely reject any names sent them by the nominating committee.

Constituency and Session agenda problems. Few delegates know how to handle the situation when confronted with agenda items. Here are some of the reasons:

If given a sheet in advance with a bare outline of an agenda, they do not really understand what each item involves until suddenly confronted with it.

If given an extensive packet of dozens of changes in doctrines (1980), church governance (1995), or the *Church Manual* (2000), there is so much detail, they feel helpless to address it in the small amount of Business Meeting time allotted to them. (If they wanted to, they could vote to skip the evening presentations—and use that time for additional Business Meetings. The delegates little realize the vast power in their hands.)

Very little time is allocated to each item. The delegates do not have enough time to think through the matter and make an intelligent, prayerful decision

before moving on to the next item.

When a delegate recognizes a problem, he rises to speak and, hopefully, will be able to speak into the microphone before discussion is cut off by the chairman or an aid. But, when he does so, he is frequently allowed only two minutes to speak.

His brief statement may be ever so well-worded (as they very often are), but then he steps aside and the next person immediately speaks. That tends to erase the first delegate's words from most minds. They listen to the next speaker, and the next, and the next.

Finally debate is cut off and a vote is taken. It is urged that it is needful to rush on to the next item of business.

When a single, tiny detail is introduced, which is clearly wrong, the delegates may be able to handle that. For example, On July 3 at Toronto, a woman delegate from Germany moved to insert "part of" into the statement "the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church." After several vigorous protests, the motion was voted down (*GC Bulletin #6, p. 26*). Success occurred because it was a single point, and every speaker spoke directly to it and, then, voted down her amendment.

But with anything that is somewhat detailed and has several parts to it (as most everything generally is), the delegates find themselves unable to deal with the problem. Each subsequent speaker may comment on a different point, and soon the excellent comments become a bewildering jumble which may have accomplished but little, except a generalized atmosphere of disapproval of various things.

Another agenda problem. We have said that the delegates did not have opportunity to discuss the agenda beforehand among themselves. But the leaders did. During the Pacific Union College crisis, a layman on the PUC board needed to return to the room, where the board meeting was slated to be held the next morning, for his brief case.

Upon entering it, he found that all the church officers who were members of the board were there. From words he heard, he knew they would railroad through their plans for the next day's board meeting.

The lay delegates and lower-echelon workers arrived at the meeting as separate individuals, knowing relatively little of what to expect; whereas leadership is already united on the goals they wish to attain.

Working toward solutions. Are there no solutions to these problems? Here are a number of helpful suggestions; but first, we need to introduce the

subject:

Introduction. Genuine Christians are basically very nice people. They want to get along, and they are very willing to follow. This is the spirit they will carry with them to heaven, and they will thoroughly enjoy it up there. But down here, they must remember that they are representing God and His Inspired teachings, and their first loyalty must be to Him. They must ever be aware that God and His Word, the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, are the highest authority in the church. Even though the leaders may forget that fact, the laity should ever remember it.

A related problem is that liberals are worldly; they enjoy taking over, railroading schemes through, and doing whatever it takes to achieve their objectives.

There are many faithful church leaders and workers. We must help hold up their hands as they attempt to uphold godly principles and standards in the church.

If the sixteenth-century Reformers had been little follow-after sheep, we would still be in the Catholic Church. There are times when men and women must take a stand for the right, regardless of what others may say or think of them. In order to serve God aright, we must lay wise plans and carry them out. Haphazard living will never finish the work of God on earth.

You want to help your church to better the standards, not only of your conference but of the entire denomination. As you humbly move forward in the strength of Christ, angels will work with you.

Suggestions for becoming a better delegate at a conference constituency meeting or General Conference Session.

Try to find out in advance what the agenda will be. But, whether or not you know it, you may be aware of key issues which will arise at the forthcoming meeting. Plan for them. Contact others who will be at the meeting and discuss the matter. Lay wise plans. Prepare contingency plans, what you will do if this or that happens.

Go to the meeting or Session with a briefcase and a clipboard with extra paper in it. Be prepared to jot notes, motions, and amendments. Keep in close contact with others who share your concerns. Do not all sit together.

During the nominations. Pre-plan for who will nominate who, so that some of you are placed on the small committee. This was how a number of faithful believers were placed on the nominating committee at the Georgia-Cumberland Conference constituency meeting in 1982 and 1984. When they did not fully succeed in 1982, they became even better prepared

When You Are a Delegate

PART TWO OF THREE

W
M

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

9
8
0

and accomplished their objective of kicking out a liberal conference president in 1984. In the process, they got themselves placed on the conference committee. They did this because there was a genuine need. It is not wrong to do what is right. It is not wrong to stand nobly in defense of God's truth in these last days. What must our kind Father think of His people who are so brave when it comes to attending church and occasionally telling someone about the Bible Sabbath, but are cowards when they enter a church committee meeting?

But, before you can work to help the church, change yourself. Plead with God for a fuller conversion. Then begin to not only work for souls outside the church, but try to hold the church back from the downward spiral it is drifting into.

Be prepared to suggest alternate names of godly men who could be elected to office or could be placed on the conference committee. Think through things ahead of time. Plan for success; work toward it.

Arrive early. Arrive early at the meeting. Seat yourself a third of the way down, next to the center aisle. If a stationary mike will be in that aisle, or even if a roving mike is used, you can get to it easier. Even though no microphones are used, an aisle seat is still helpful.

During the agenda discussions. If you previously received an agenda sheet, you have taken time to think through what is probably involved in each item. Be assured that there is a reason why every point is there! Some items will stand out as specially important.

Then there are new items which you may want to introduce. You will have thought through this with your friends and have not only written down your motion, but have considered the ramifications and likely objections. Attorneys regularly do this. They consider each argument and counter-argument, and plan replies to them. It is called their *brief*. "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light," yet it need not be. Defending God's Word is our responsibility. Angels will help us as we move forward.

Imposing initial limitations. The individual in charge of the meeting is the chairman (the *chair*). If it is a conference constituency meeting, he will be the union president (or, in his absence, a General Con-

ference officer). The chair will be an expert at handling committees.

Listen closely to the initial requests from the chair. He may ask that the delegates approve things which will limit debate, curtail the presentation of "new business" (by restricting discussion only to items on the pre-arranged agenda sheet), or vote to end the session at an early hour, etc.

You do not want to oppose everything, neither do you want to appear to be negative at the beginning of a meeting when the delegates do not see a reason for your concern. You are wise to wait until a doctrinal standard or moral issue is dealt with (either one on the agenda or one you introduce). However, an initial motion to limit the discussion only to the printed agenda, omitting all "new business" is not right and may be delicately opposed. Speak in a common sense, friendly manner which other delegates can identify with.

Making motions and amendments. Making carefully worded *motions* and *amendments*, instead of merely standing and giving your opinion, is the most important part of this entire paper. Therefore we give special attention to it.

Making a motion. If an agenda item is presented which is a problem, you do not want to merely rise to your feet and state your concerns. *Do that also; but, before you sit down, state the changes needed as a motion or as an amendment to a motion already before the house.* This is very important!

If you say, "Well, for this reason and that reason, I think we ought to do this," and then sit down, you have imparted an idea, but little else. Instead, handle the situation as a motion or an amendment.

When the agenda item is initially introduced, be alert to whether someone has made a motion to accept it. *Always be aware of whether there is a motion before the house and what it is. Be aware whether any amendments to that motion have already been made.*

If no motion has been made, briefly state the reasons for your motion and then state your motion, always starting with: "I move that . . ."

Your motion must be carefully worded, written down before you rise to your feet, and read clearly and distinctly. Do not make it any longer than absolutely necessary. The more words that are in it, the more confusing it will seem to the delegates and the

less likely it will be accepted.

Making an amendment to a motion. Much of the time will be spent on printed agenda items. Generally an aid will frame it as a motion right away. If a motion has already been made and the delegates are standing up telling what they think about it, you want to sit there and carefully write down exactly how to solve the problems in that motion. (1) You add a word or phrase to it. (2) You remove a word or phrase, or more, or most of it. (3) You substitute something else for part or all of it. You will then arise and amend the motion before the house.

As with the motion, an amendment must be carefully thought out and written down—before you stand up to speak. Here are some samples:

Added word or phrase: “I move to amend the motion by adding the words ‘and Spirit of Prophecy’ after ‘Bible’ in the motion. It would read thus: ‘We encourage the believers to value the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.’ ”

Changed section: “I move to amend the motion by striking out all words before ‘the Bible’ and inserting ‘We encourage the believers to carefully study.’ It would then read: ‘We encourage the believers to carefully study the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.’ ”

Changed section: “I move to amend the motion by striking out all words after ‘the believers’ and, in their place, inserting these words: ‘to learn how to give Bible studies in their communities.’ It will then read: ‘We encourage the believers to learn how to give Bible studies in their communities.’ ”

The chair will then say, “Is there a second?” Someone must immediately second your motion to amend. That is why some friends do not sit close to you.

Motion to close debate. You do not want to be dilatory about speaking to a point; for the chair has a way, at times, of letting about six to ten people comment on an item and, then, an aid jumps up and moves to close debate. A motion to close debate requires an immediate vote; also any amendment to this vote, to close debate, must immediately be followed by a vote, up or down. Then a vote will be taken on the *main motion* (as amended, if the amendment was approved).

Only one motion and amendment at a time. You can make a motion; but, if one is already on the floor and has not been voted on, you cannot make another. You can make an amendment to a motion. But if an amendment has been made, another cannot be made until that one is voted up or down. The main motion cannot be voted on until the amendment to that motion is voted on.

Old and new business. *Old business* consists of items tabled from the previous meeting. They are dealt

with first at the meeting. *New business* includes both printed agenda items and really “new business”—unexpected, brand-new items brought up by delegates who make motions to accept them. In this paper, we will separate between “agenda items” and “new business,” unexpected by the chair.

We have already discussed how to deal with agenda items. Now we turn our attention to new points which are introduced but are not on the agenda.

Your new item of business. The chair is always hoping there will be no truly new business; and, at various times the chair may plead that there is not much time for debate or new business. Therefore, you do not want to be slow! As soon as the call is made, “Is there any new business?” *immediately stand up*. It is quite normal for those with new business to speak up right away.

As soon as you stand, speak calmly in a relaxed, but definite tone. State your point and the reasons for it. If you are not sure about your speaking ability, read it all off your clipboard. Conclude by stating your motion in full. Then sit down, and the chair will call for a second.

Discussion (“*debate*”) will follow, and some of your friends may have something to say.

Then the motion will be voted on.

If you want to personally examine how this debate works in action, purchase a set of the ten GC Toronto Bulletins, from the *Review*, and carefully read the Business Meeting sections. You will quickly see that it is the motions and amendments which get things done.

Parliamentary rules. Parliamentary rules are for the orderly conduct of meetings, what traffic rules are to busy city streets. Here are some of these rules which govern what is done in business meetings:

Order of business. Here is the order in which things are done in a business meeting:

* The secretary reads the *minutes* of the last meeting. The minutes include all *actions* (everything approved by vote) taken, and will generally include a brief mention of business matters discussed. The chair asks whether anyone wants to make any corrections or additions to the minutes. If there are any, each one must be voted on individually. The minutes must then be approved by a majority vote. (An alternative is for the chair to announce that, unless there is an objection, the minutes will stand approved as read.) Sometimes discussion occurs before the vote is taken.

* Standing and special committees then give their reports. These are committees earlier called into existence. Standing committees are ongoing committees; special committee were appointed for a special purpose (*ad hoc*; for one purpose).

* Members next take up any unfinished business left over from the previous meetings.

* Members then introduce new business. It is at this time that the planned agenda for the meeting is followed. New business that is not listed on the agenda may be called for before, but frequently after, the printed agenda. Be alert for the words from the chair: "Is there any new business?"

* Members introduce miscellaneous matters, such as announcements or requests, that require no formal action by the group.

* The meeting is adjourned by a majority vote.

Parliamentarian. In larger meetings, a parliamentarian will be seated on the podium. A church officer who is expert in parliamentary law is prepared to provide counsel on matters of procedural difficulty. However, the chairman is also highly skilled. It is remarkable how ministers, who never took a day's course in parliamentary procedure, in college or seminary, later become such experts on managing meetings. But, as they climb higher in the ranks, they spend more and more time in committee work.

Procedural rules. The rules given on page 7 are typical of the parliamentary rules governing most organizational meetings. *Robert's Rules of Order*, written by Major Henry M. Roberts in 1876, is the generally accepted standard. Hall and Sturgis is another one. But meeting rules of the Adventist denomination may vary slightly from the chart on page 7.

More on motions. Because motions are so important, here is more information on them.

There are four kinds of motion: *privileged, subsidiary, incidental, and main* (chart on p. 7).

A member can only make a motion of one kind or another, when he *has the floor*; that is, when the chair has given him permission to speak.

Each time a motion of any kind is made, the chair generally restates it (or he may ask the secretary to read the motion from the minutes). As soon as it is made, the members *debate the motion*; that is discuss it.

An *amendment* changes the motion in some way. If by vote the members approve the amendment, they then *debate the motion as amended*.

Limiting Debate. *Debate can be limited* in several ways: (1) by restricting the amount of time each person can speak and (2) by a motion to close debate or (3) to set a time limit on the amount of debate before it closes. *Cloture* means to shut off debate.

Tabling a motion. Each motion must to disposed of in some way before another item of business can

be discussed. (1) They can *table the motion* (postpone it till another time) or (2) *refer it to a committee*. Eventually, all motions must be approved or rejected.

Referring a motion to a committee. This is a great favorite at General Conference Sessions. At the beginning of the Session, the chair asks the delegates for permission to refer all changes to a committee. Then, whenever any change to the pre-printed agenda wording is made, it must be referred back to the committee for study.

Frankly, whether or not it is so intended, this is a most excellent way to distract and confuse the delegates. The problem is that their attention is fully fixed on a matter. Then it is referred back to the committee, before they really settled the matter in their minds and in discussion. Many hours, or even a day later, that point comes back for them to consider and vote on. By this time, unless they are geniuses, they cannot possibly recall the details or ramifications discussed earlier. Indeed, they will hardly know whether the requested changes have been made. The result is studied confusion.

A better way would be to analyze a matter, come to a conclusion, and then pass on to the next point. Referring everything "back to committee" throws logical flow of thought, and thought connections, into continuing chaos. Here is how to go about solving this problem: The delegates should make a motion at the beginning of the Session, to eliminate all committee referrals except those they specifically request by a stated motion. Do not underestimate the authority of the delegates. The chair may protest that this is not "in the rules" or in the "General Conference Policy [books]," but the delegates can do what they wish—especially concerning procedural changes for the meeting they are in.

Delegates seated in certain areas. Delegates to Sessions are seated in specific areas, with their leaders on rear area corners. In this way, the leaders can see how each delegate votes. Since over three-fourths of the delegates are church employees, they must be careful how they vote, since they are being watched. It would be far better to let them sit anywhere they wish in the audience. Then they could vote their heart rather than their paycheck. If they wished to do so, the delegates have the authority to vote that change into the General Conference *Working Policy*. Or, at the beginning of a Session, they could vote it into effect during that Session.

Delegate power. Delegates have remarkable authority! It is greater than that of any officer or com-

When You Are a Delegate

PART THREE OF THREE

W
M

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

9
8
1

mittee below their level. Constituency delegates can make any change in the conference (although not within a local church). General Conference delegates can change anything in the General Conference, and a lot else besides. It is for this reason that leaders fill the delegate's time with preaching, parades, presentation of visiting dignitaries, and other time-consuming and distracting things. The amount of time allotted to business meetings at a General Conference Session is not a lot. Yet that is why the multimillion-dollar gathering was called! A sample schedule is shown on Toronto Session GC *Bulletin #1*, p. 17. During that time, the delegates are primarily asked to approve predetermined agendas. Because most delegates are denominational employees, they are generally careful to do it. At the Toronto Session, a significant portion of the business meeting time was devoted to non-business activities—including introduction of visitors, visitor speeches, special reports, etc.

You will recall that, during the women's ordination vote in 1995, the delegates were carefully told that they could vote any way they wished. This was a signal that they could vote as they wish, without reprisal.

Additional definitions. Every field of endeavor has its special words. Here are some "meeting words":

Recess is a temporary interruption of a meeting, generally for lunch.

Adjourn means to end a meeting.

Agenda is the list of items to be considered at the meeting.

The **chairman** (the **chair**) is the one in charge of the meeting, the presiding officer.

An **appeal**. In order to expedite the meeting, the chair sometimes makes decisions which are not voted on, such as moving to the vote. But a member can stand and appeal. This is a request for a majority vote to overrule a decision of the presiding officer.

Unanimous consent refers to a request by the chair on matters where differences of opinion are not expected. He might ask for the unanimous consent of the members on such a matter as approving the minutes.

The **Chairman Pro Tempore** is the temporary chairman who temporarily fills in for the regular chairman or until one is selected.

A **vote** can be taken in three ways: (1) **voice vote**, (2) a **show of hands**, or (3) by **secret ballot**. Candidates should leave the room during voice vote or a show of hands.

Division is called, when a count of vote by a show of hands is called for.

A **quorum** is the number of members necessary to transact business. Usually it is a majority of the total membership, but a group's constitution and by-laws can name any part of the total membership as a quorum. Apparently the 2000 Session did not have a quorum requirement; for, on the final Friday, only 150 delegates reversed a previous majority vote of 2000 delegates.

A **majority** is one more than half of those voting. If only two candidates are nominated for an office, one must receive a majority of the votes to win.

Plurality is the largest number of votes received by any candidate in an election involving three or more candidates. If the constitution requires a majority of votes to win, a **run-off election** of the two candidates with the most votes must be held. Our church never has run-off elections, because it never offers the large committee more than one name at a time.

Standing committees deal with regular and continuing matters such as membership and finance. These committees are usually selected after each election, and they "**stand**" (remain active) until the next constituency meeting or Session.

Special committees, also called **ad hoc committees** or **commissions**, are selected at any time to deal with specific matters or problems. As mentioned earlier, a special committee ceases to exist after it has issued its final report to the group or individual which called it into existence. Presidents, executive committees, and delegates to a meeting are all able to call special committees into existence.

Committee members. Each committee should have an odd number of members, in order to avoid **tie votes** on committee decisions. The organizational president, or committee chairman, usually selects the chairman of the special committee. Committees do

not have to follow all the rules of parliamentary procedure, but are generally informal discussions.

Decorum in debate refers to the observance of normal rules of courtesy and proper procedure while discussing motions.

Dilatory motion is a meaningless motion. The presiding officer will rule it out of order.

Order of business is the series of steps covered in a meeting, from the call to order through to the adjournment. We earlier listed most of them.

Pending question is any motion open to debate. The pending question is the motion on the floor at a given time, which can be discussed, debated, amended, or closed and voted on.

Point of order is called when an objection is raised by a member because of an improper procedure or annoying remarks. It must be ruled on immediately by the presiding officer.

Previous question (“I move the previous question”) is a motion to end debate on a pending motion and vote immediately on it.

Privileged question is a request made by a member who asks the presiding officer to deal with an emergency, disorder in the assembly, or other matters of general welfare. A variant is to ask for clarifying information pertaining to what is taking place.

Ratify refers to a motion to approve an action already taken, such as a ruling by the president.

Close debate refers to ending discussion on a motion, which is done by passing another motion to vote immediately.

Constitution and bylaws. It is helpful to acquire a better understanding of the basic operating papers which the organization is based on. These are called the constitution and bylaws. These are the highest law of a secular organization. However, in God’s Church, the law of God; the Bible; and the Spirit of Prophecy stand higher.

Contents of the constitution and bylaws. Here are the seven primary components of these basic organizational papers:

1. The **name** of the organization.
2. The **purpose** of the organization. A general statement of purpose is given, followed by how the purpose is to be achieved.
3. The **membership** of the organization. This is divided into qualifications for membership, how members are selected, and membership dues (if any).
4. The **officers** of the organization. Their titles and description of duties. The length of terms of office. How officers are elected.

5. The **committees** of the organization. The names and duties of standing committees. The procedure for creating special committees. How committee members and chairmen are chosen.

6. The **meetings** of the organization. When regular meetings are held. How special meetings are called. Selection of an authoritative book on parliamentary procedure. Special rules governing meetings.

7. The **amendments** of the constitution and bylaws. How the constitution and bylaws are amended. The vote required to adopt amendments.

Primary officers. There are three primary officers in charge of each organization and most subsidiary organizations:

The **president** presides over all meetings, supervises the work of other officers and committees, represents the organization, and appoints committees if the constitution and bylaws give him the power to do so.

Our denominational presidents, on all levels, spend an enormous amount of time attending committee meetings; many of them are outside their own jurisdiction. A survey made, in the early 1980s of the appointment schedule of the Northern California Conference president, found that he attended more meetings in a single year than there were work days in that year. Since many of those meetings were outside the conference, the complaint was made that he did not have time to properly manage conference affairs.

The **secretary** notifies members of scheduled meetings, keeps and reads the minutes, files copies of committee reports, and handles correspondence. In some respects, the secretary delegates much of these tasks to “office secretaries” while he is busy with speaking appointments and membership on various committee meetings, to provide added support to the objectives of the president in charge.

The **treasurer** handles all the organization’s finances, keeps a record of income and expenses, prepares financial reports, and helps prepare the annual budget. The treasurer is a busy man.

The policy books. The book, *General Conference Working Policy*, is the governing organizational rule book of our denomination. Each subsidiary entity will have its own unique policy books which, in theory, should be subservient to General Conference policies. Copies of this book can often be obtained from your local Adventist Book Center.

It is known that, at times, individual believers have asked their conference president that certain things be done, or that they might have permission to carry on a certain line of missionary work, etc., and have been told by the conference president that they can-

When You Are a Delegate

not do it “because it is not in our policy books.” Whether or not that reply is accurate, at such times, we must pray for our leaders but obey the call of God to obey Bible-Spirit of Prophecy counsels to work for the lost.

The General Conference and the Session. A brief mention should be made of some misunderstood terms.

The General Conference was originally the name of the General Conference Session. The leaders of the church were called the General Conference officers, and the building in which they worked came to be known as General Conference headquarters or, simply, the General Conference.

When Ellen White wrote about the General Conference, she was referring to the Session, not the small group of men in charge of General Conference headquarters. It is for this reason that the present writer always refers to these Sessions with a capital “S.” *As the very name indicates, it—the Session—is the General Conference, not the building in Silver Spring, Maryland!*

Since the “General Conference” is the Session, the building in Silver Spring should be called “World Headquarters”; and the men in charge of it, “the Central Committee.”

The Voice of God. Another misconception is the theory that the officers working in the General Conference, or the General Conference Committee (which meet in the Spring and Annual Councils), constitutes the Voice of God. *First*, neither one is a full General Conference Session. *Second*, they are entirely composed of high-level leaders and their employees.

“At times, when a small group of men entrusted with the general management of the work have, in the name of the General Conference, sought to carry out unwise plans and to restrict God’s work, I have said that I could no longer regard the voice of the General Conference, represented by these few men, as the Voice of God. But this is not saying that the decisions of a General Conference [Session], composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field should not be respected.”—*9 Testimonies, 260-261.*

If you will carefully read *9T 260-261*, you will find that nowhere in that passage are any human group of men ever called the “Voice of God.” A large gathering of God’s people should be respected, but it is not infallible.

We are told that man’s will and voice is not to be regarded as the Voice of God (*CT 528*) because he is so erring. The truth is that the men represented at a General Conference Session must be so closely connected to God that they are worthy of speaking on His behalf. And it cannot always be said that such is the case.

The following quotation is taken from a manuscript which is speaking about an entire General Conference Session, not merely a small committee of leaders. It is obvious that a General Conference Session is not necessarily the Voice of God.

“It [the April 1901 General Conference in Session] is working upon wrong principles that have brought the cause of God into its present embarrassment. The people have lost confidence in those who have the management of the work. Yet we hear that the voice of the Conference is the Voice of God. *Every time I have heard this, I thought it was almost blasphemy.* The voice of the Conference [speaking of the General Conference in Session] ought to be the Voice of God, but it is not, because some in connection with it are not men of faith and prayer; they are not men of elevated principle. There is not a seeking of God with the whole heart; there is not a realization of the terrible responsibility that rests upon those in this institution to mold and fashion minds after the divine similitude.”—*Manuscript 37, 1901, 8 (Manuscript Release, No. 365). Emphasis ours.*

The General Conference Committee. This is another misunderstood term. This refers to all the world leaders, who attend the Annual (October) Council. Most or all of them also attend the Spring (March or April) Council. The Annual Council is second highest in authority, next to the Session.

The General Conference Executive Committee is assumed by many to be different than the General Conference Committee, but it is not. Both have the same membership and mean the same thing.

The committee meets twice a year (Spring and Annual Council) and at any other time at the call of the president.

It is the administrative body of the denomination in the intervals between Sessions, and consists of General Conference and division officers elected at the most recent Session. It generally has about 365-370 men in it. Included in it are the Session-elected officers of the General Conference and divisions, plus the presidents of unions, union missions, ex-presidents of the General Conference, presidents of Andrews and Loma Linda Universities (which are both directly under the General Conference), the *Adventist Review* editor, and U.S. publishing house presidents. The above are *ex-officio* (by virtue of one’s office) members. In addition, up to 80 others elected at, or between, Sessions are on this large committee.

The Annual Council is the most important committee meeting in the church, second only to the five-year Session.

The 1995 Utrecht delegates approved an agenda item which, henceforth, gave the liberal North American Division much greater voting power a majority of the time. Here is how it works:

1 - Wherever the Annual Council is held, the host Division is entitled to send all its conference and mission presidents as voting members to the Council.

2 - Three times out of every five, Annual Councils are automatically held in the United States. The other two are held on a rotating basis overseas.

Here is how the pattern works. Using it, you can always know which Annual Councils will be held in Silver Spring and which will be overseas:

Each Annual Council will be held in Silver Spring, Maryland, in the fall (generally October) of every year that ends in 0, 2, 4, 5, 7, and 9.

Annual Council will be held on a rotating basis in an overseas country in the other years (1, 3, 6, and 8).

For example, the 2001 Annual Council was supposed to have been held in Jakarta, Indonesia. (But, a month ago, it was disclosed that it would be held in the United States "for security reasons.")

If time were to last, it would take nearly 30 years for the Annual Council to be held once in each of all twelve world divisions. In that same period of time, it would be held 17 or 18 times in the U.S., which, of course, will keep it well stacked with NAD liberal delegates.

The General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) meets each Thursday morning at

General Conference headquarters. This is a rather small committee, and only a few men arrive for the Thursday morning meetings; many of the members are traveling throughout the world field. ADCOM deals with routine items generally associated with General Conference headquarters.

Conclusion. I believe we have now provided you with enough information to enable you to better serve your God and your church, the next time you are appointed as a delegate to a church committee. Pray and stand in defense of God and His Inspired Writings, which are the true highest authority in our denomination.

Down through the centuries, the tendency is for the faithful to prefer subjection to the liberals than to stand valiantly in defense of God's truth. The only thing unusual about Martin Luther was his willingness to remain firm in defense of the right and, if necessary, to die for his beliefs.

We need men and women today who are not ashamed of their Lord, nor of His holy Word. The promise is given that, if you will take your stand resolutely in defense of Bible-Spirit of Prophecy truth, the angels of God will cooperate with your efforts. You may not always meet with success, but you will please your heavenly Father. And what can be better than that?

— *vf*

New Book!

New Book!

General Conference Sessions and Parliamentary Procedure

— BY VANCE FERRELL

When You Are a Delegate: A Layman's Guide to Parliamentary Rules—Part 1-3 [WM-979-981]

Captive Sessions—Part 1-3 [WM-114-116]

The 1990 General Conference Session—Part 1-5 [WM-295-299]

Impact of Indianapolis—Part 1-3 [WM-304-306]

Disfellowship Item Removed from 1995 Session Agenda [WM-592]

The Ominous Utrecht Agenda—Part 1-3 [WM-620-622]

Our Church is in a Crisis! [WM-625]

The Utrecht Session—Part 1-5 [WM-634-638]

Journey to Utrecht—Part 1-3 [WM-639-641]

Our New Church Governing System [WM-644]

Another Journey to Utrecht [WM-656]

The 2000 General Conference Session—Part 1-4 [WM-975-978]

Call for a Seventh-day Adventist World Convention Center [WM-982]

138 pages, 8½ x 11

*One copy - \$10.00, plus \$1.50 p&h / Two copies - \$9.95 each, plus \$2.00 p&h
In Tennessee, add 8.25% of cost of books / Foreign: add 20% of cost of books.*