

Brief Organizational History of Seventh-day Adventists

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(A Work in Progress)

Year	Membership	Problem/Issue	Organizational Solution/Innovation	Country(ies) Entered
1848		Seeking general acceptance of seventh day as Sabbath	"Sabbath Conferences" held in homes of various members	United States
1849		How to advance the message of the Seventh-day Sabbath	Sabbatarian Adventists begin publishing (<i>Present Truth/Second Adventist Review</i>). First Ellen White testimony to the Church	
1850				
1851		Beginning of rapid increase in Sabbatarian Adventist membership	Calls for 'gospel order,' beginnings of local church organization: deacons, elders	
1852				
1853		Disunity, breakaways, false ministers	Cards signed by "leading ministers" to recognized ministers. Sab Schools org	
1854		How best to advance Adventism as movement spreads to Midwest	First tent meetings held in Battle Creek	
1855		Lack of official places to worship	Erection of church bldgs; Advent Review office moved to Battle Creek	
1856				
1857				
1858		What was the scriptural council concerning support of ministry?	Bible class held by J N Andrews in Battle Creek concerning the question.	

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1859		Lack of plan to finance ministry; ministers leaving to support families	"Systematic benevolence" adopted; local church treasurers appointed	
1860		Denominational identity	General acceptance of the name Seventh-day Adventist	
1861		Lack of formal ownership of property; lack of formal organization of local churches	Michigan Conf organized; denomination holds property; church covenant accepted	
		Frequency of ministerial licenses, credentials	Licenses, credentials to be issued annually by state conferences SDA Publishing Association incorporated	
1862		Criteria for holding official conference leadership positions	William S Higley, a layman, elected president of Michigan Conf for 1863 term	Canada
1863	3,500	Need for general supervision of "missionary labor" (within North America)	General Conference organized with GCC authority between regular sessions	
1864	3,800	Need for accounts of general laborers to be audited	1864 GC Session votes for State Confs to select lay members to audit accounts	
1865	4,000	No organized work for "colored" people	1865 GC Session votes that such work should commence	
1866	4,250	Major church disaffection in Iowa (Snook and Brinkerhoof)	Statistics required of churches and local conf; ministers to also submit reports	
		How to promote healthful living among SDAs	Estab health inst at Battle Creek; becomes Western Health Reform In 1867	
1867	4,320			
1868	4,475	Developing new methods for spreading SDA message	Local tract/missionary soc org in South Lancaster; SDA Benevolent Assn org	

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1869	4,900	Plea for missions outside the United States; lack of ministers to fulfill the call	Attempt to foster Swiss mission through correspondence	
1870	5,400	Continuing request for missionary to Switzerland; enhanced organization needed for developing tract and missionary work	James Erzberger returns f/US to Switzerland to minister there; first conference tract and missionary society organized in New England Conference	Switzerland
1871	4,550	Need to utilize full SDA resources in spreading SDA message	Initial licensing of SDA women as ministers	
1872	4,936	Need for general supervision of Tract and Missionary Societies	S N Haskell chosen to perfect such a plan	
1873	5,875	Means of fostering missionary spirit within the local church	Organization of General Tract and Missionary Society	
		GC Session endorses idea that God had chosen great leaders in history to guide His Church and certainly has chosen such a leader to guide the last church (ie James White)	Although the Session passed the resolution, James White the next year wrote a series of articles disavowing that position	
1874	7,000	Continued plea for missions work outside the United States	J N Andrews, first foreign missionary sent to Switzerland	
		Centralized plan for coordinating Tract and Missionary work	Organization of General Conference Tract and Missionary Society	
		Incorporation of SDA Educational Society	Battle Creek College, SDAs first college-level educational institution established	
1875	8,022	Dangers of "one man's mind" controlling that of others	Ellen White urges wider division of administrative responsibilities	Germany
		Are all GC resolutions the "voice of the Lord"?	1875 GC Session disavows 1873 resolution on great leader position	

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1876	10,044	Increased understanding of Biblical principles concerning church finance	Tithing accepted as Biblical principle. (More fully adopted 1879)	France
1877	11,708	How to bring message to various nationalities	Encourage non-English language workers. Increased work w/foreigners in US (1878)	Denmark, Italy
1878	13,077	Need to coordinate work within the various Sabbath Schools	SDA Sabbath School Association organized	Norway, United Kingdom
1879	14,141	Need for coordination of work amongst non-English language believers	Foreign Mission Secy, Mission Board of 9; GC to credential those in its employ	Egypt
		Need for better coordination of work within the State Conference	Organizational districts set up within State Conferences	
1880	15,570	Need for more in-depth organization for areas outside North America	First conference outside North America organized in Denmark	Sweden
1881	16,916	Need to finance work beyond the State Conference level	State Conf to pay tithe to GC quarterly; GCC to care for mission enterprises	
		SDA women ministers continue to evidence success in their evangelistic ministry	1881 GC Session discusses question of ordaining SDA women to ministry	
1882	17,169	Need to implement decentralization	Formation of European Council of SDA Missions: Scandinavia, Great Br, Switz	
1883	17,436	Need for better communication between entities; suggestions of a church manual as guide for operation of local SDA churches	<i>Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook</i> to be published annually; rejection of church manual idea as it opposed SDAs anticeedal heritage/reliance on Scriptures	
1884	18,702	Need for overall guidance of financial structure of the Church	Formation of General Conference Association	

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1885	20,547			Australia, New Zealand
1886	23,111	Need to give gospel in non-Protestant areas of the world	L R Conradi establishes SDA work in Russia	Russia, Ukraine
1887	25,841	Need for better guidance over various branches of denominational work; need to coordinate denominational publications	Foreign Mission Secy, Home Mission Secy, Educational Secy appt; Book Committee of 13 appointed; general canvassing agent appt	Guyana, South Africa
		How to finance growing overseas mission work	First-day, Week of Prayer, Christmas offering systems inaugurated	
1888	26,112	Need for greater local church involvement in health and temperance work	Organization of local health and temperance societies	Hong Kong, Poland
		How to resolve theological disunity within North America?	O A Olsen elected president, first GC president not born in United States	
1889	28,324	Multiplication of conferences/missions creates need for greater coordination; need to coordinate local churches concerning religious liberty issues	Creation of General Conference Districts from several local conf-missions; Natl Religious Liberty Assn organized; Battle Creek Church transferred to GC	Turkey
		1889 GC Session discusses during 3 mtgs a complete reorg that would place the various branches under one president w/depts represented by secy. Recommendation withdrawn at request of committee. Eliminated from minutes. Implemented in South Africa and 1889 and Australia 1894.		
1890	29,711	How to reach remote areas of the South Pacific islands with gospel message	Sailing of the <i>Pitcairn</i>	Argentina, Leeward and Windward Islands (various), Pitcairn Island
1891	31,665	Financing salaries of GC workers; who should license medical workers?	3/4 of Battle Creek Church tithe to GC; Intl Health Temp Assn issues credentials	Barbados, Honduras, French Polynesia, Belize
		Ownership of publishing houses, sale of denominational literature, appt of editors,etc	General Conference Association enlarged to control such enterprises	

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1892	33,778			Cook Island, Finland, Romania
1893	37,404	Further dissemination of localized organizational authority needed	Further devt of district organizational scheme to embrace Australia and Europe	Jamaica, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago
1894	42,763	Need for greater decision-making authority in areas remote from the United States	First union conference organized in Australia	Brazil, Ghana, Norfolk Island, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Surinam
		Need to present gospel in non-Christian areas	Work begun in Matabeleland, South Africa	Azerbaijan
1895	47,680	Shall SDAs accept grants/donations from civil governments?	No! (GC Session action)	Bahamas, Caymans, Bermuda, Chile, Uruguay, Fiji, Samoa/
		Need for greater refinement of General Conference District structure	District committees appointed, duties defined; district councils provided	Tokelau Island, Tonga, Western Samoa, India
1896	52,202			Japan, Latvia
1897	56,436	Need for General Conference territorial decentralization	GC territory divided: US/Br NA; European Union Conf; Australasian Union Conf	Belgium, Iceland
		Need for General Conference administrative decentralization	GC Assn vastly curtailed; Book Comte discontinued; union conf idea fostered	
1898	59,447			Ireland, Netherlands, Israel (Palestine), Peru
1899	64,003	Supporting laborers in overseas fields	Local conferences asked to contribute to such support; union presidents on GCC	Lesotho
1900	75,767			Indonesia, Paraguay, Virgin Islands

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1901	78,188	Major decentralization of denominational work; monolithic-type branches of work made departments of General Conference	Major organizational reorganization: depts, union idea extended; GCC to supervise foreign mission wk; unions hold property; 2d tithe to support mission wkrs	Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Jordan, Panama, Puerto Rico
1902	73,522	Fires destroy Battle Creek Sanitarium, Review and Herald offices at Battle Creek		Austria, Burma, China, Malawi
1903	77,554	Need to finance increasing mission thrust	% of Conf tithe used for foreign work; move f/Battle Creek; Ingathering begun 10c weekly for foreign missions; plan for supporting aged workers/widows	Costa Rica, Cuba, Spain, Tanzania (Zanzibar)
		Need for closer coordination w/work of unions in North America and Europe	Creation of vice presidents for North America and for Europe	
1904	81,721			Korea, Singapore, Portugal, Georgia
1905	87,311	Need to relocate GC offices, Review, and medical work from Battle Creek	GC offices to Takoma Park Station, DC; GC Corporation organized; Young People's work organized under the Sabbath School Department	Algeria, Ecuador, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Yugoslavia, Zambia
1906	91,531	Increased need for funding of growing institutions/foreign mission work	Loma Linda Sanitarium dedicated; \$150,000 fund for instl and foreign needs	Bangladesh, Kenya Philippines
1907	94,048	Growth of missions evidences need to greater participation by believers outside US	GCC meets in Gland, Switzerland. First genl representatives council outside US	Bolivia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Greece
1908	97,579			Bulgaria, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Lebanon, Papua NG, Armenia
1909	100,931	Continuing need for financial basis for funding growing mission work	Local/Union to appropriate from 1/4 to 1/3 of total tithe to foreign missions (Session)	

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		Continuing dissemination of authority to three major units of worldwide work	Creation of vice president for Asiatic Div in addn to those in NAD and Europe	
		Need to coordinate work for African-Americans	North American Negro Department organized	
		Should publishing instit tithe be paid to GC or to Unions as previously done	GC session resolution voted that publishing institutional tithe be sent to GC	
		First GC Session to have official delegates from each of the world's major continents		
1910	104,526			Venezuela
1911	108,975	Need for financial plan to sustain retired workers/widows of workers	Sustentation fund implemented. Funded by 5% of tithe receipts of local/Union/GC	Iran, Malaysia
		How to emphasize advancement in non-Christian and non-Protestant countries	Beginning of compiling statistics showing growth in such areas	
1912	114,206			New Hebrides (Vanuatu), Nicaragua
1913	122,386	Growth creates need for further organizational refinement	Three distinct Division Confs created: North American, European, Asiatic. Div thus had its own constituency sessions, elects its officers, etc.	
1914	125,844	Dislocations created in worldwide work because of World War I	GC to retain funds to cover 3 months for worldwide emergencies	British Solomon Is, Guadeloupe, Mauritius, Nigeria, Pakistan
1915	136,879			El Salvador
1916	141,488			Niue Island

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1917	153,857	Funding for mission work slackens, GC lacks authority re NAD resources	Comte on Reorg recommends NAD Conf be eliminated, GC admin its territory	
1918	162,667	Financial and structural limitations of division idea increasingly surface	Division Conferences abolished: unions and missions again responsible to GC	
1919	178,239	How to finance new work	Birthday offering system established	Thailand
		Conradi (pres of European Division Section) notes that since 1882 Europe has had five distinct organizational structures		
1920	185,450	Increased opportunities, but lack of funds for advancing work overseas in 1920s	Week of Sacrifice, Big Week programs developed for missions extension	Faeroe Islands, Rwanda, Swaziland, Kazakhstan
1921	198,088			Botswana, Zaire, Colombia
1922	208,771	Further refinement of worldwide structure to maintain worldwide focus and yet provide local authority	Division "sections" w/responsibility for their territories; but NA not so organized. "Section" idea means that members of GCC are also members of Division Comte	Macao, Sri Lanka
1923	221,874	Administrative fears that the growing local pastorate would diminish mission thrust	Home Missionary, MV, educ sec to have evangelistic experience, preferably be ordained. This provision eventually greatly diminished admin positions for women	Iran, Namibia, Iraq, Faeroe Islands, Lithuania
1924	238,657	How to spread SDA message through radio	First SDA radio station established in Berrien Springs, MI	Angola, Martinique, Belarus, Luxembourg
1925	250,988			Burundi (Urundi), Morocco, New Caledonia

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1926	261,834	How to retain knowledge of previous Autumn Council and GC Session actions	Origination of General Conference Working Policy	Madagascar, Netherlands Antilles (Aruba, Bonaire), Uganda, Liberia, Mongolia, New Caledonia, Cameroon
1927	274,064			
1928	285,293	What is the relationship between different organizations/institutions?	GC in session and GCC betw sessions as highest authority, under God (AC action)	Tunisia
1929	299,555			Viet-Nam (French Indo-China)
1930	314,253	How to avoid top GC headquarters administrators involvement in all details	Formalized scheduled meetings of body known as General Conference Officers	Guam, Seychelles
1931	336,046	Limited financial resources during Depression era	Tenure of Office Policy until 1942. Top positions limited to 12 consecutive years; reduction of North American Union Conferences from 12 to 9	
1932	362,101	Continuing financial probs in Depression era, field considers GC staff is too large	SM recom to cut GC admin staff, GC to travel less, combine some positions, GC dept heads to promote with union conf secy only, not w/more localized entities	Cyprus
1933	384,151			
1934	404,509	Training of SDA ministers	SDA Theological Seminary opened	Azores
1935	422,968			Cape Verde Islands, Mozambique

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1936	438,139			Reunion
1937	452,758	Political-military conditions in Europe render a unified Central European Div impossible	Division divided into two sections, Section II administered by GC in Washington, DC	Khmer Republic (Cambodia)
1938	469,951			Sao Tome and Principe
1939	486,670			
1940	504,752			
1941	520,644			
1942	535,134	Advancing the message through radio	First Voice of Prophecy nationwide broadcast	
		Reexamination of Tenure of Office Policy	Tenure of Office Policy abolished	
1943	544,710			
1944	557,768			American Samoa
1945	576,378	NA Idrship reluctance to integrate, need to provide African-Amer leadership experience	Regional Conferences formed	Turks and Caicos Islands
		Massive destruction of SDA institutions, people in Europe/Asia in aftermath WWII	Displaced Persons Committee estab at GC level to find homes for the displaced	

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1946	598,683			French Guiana, Ivory Coast, Syrian Arab Republic
1947	628,594			Gilbert and Ellice Islands (Kiribati, Tuvalu)
1948	672,658			West Irian
1949	716,538			St Helena
1950	756,812	Advancing the message through television	Faith for Today telecast begun	
		GC Idrship expends much time on detailed admin of NAD work	Creation of NAD Admin Comte thereby releasing GC officers for more world focus; NAD Comte on Admin not to control \$, however. NAD minutes separate f/GCC	
1951	803,720			
1952	856,463			Senegal
1953	924,822			
1954	972,071			Greenland
1955	1,006,218			
1956	1,051,452			Libyan Arab Republic

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1957	1,102,910	Response to challenges concerning relationship natural sciences and Scripture	Geoscience Research Institute organized	Laos, Nepal, Uzbekistan
1958	1,149,256			
1959	1,194,070	Fostering SDA focus on good health within the greater community; how to involve younger Adventists in mission thrust of the church	Five-Day Plan to Stop Smoking initiated; beginning of student missionary program at Washington Missionary College	
1960	1,245,125	Annual Council calls for organizational simplification	GC not to add personnel prior to 1962 Session, limit travel, cut back on mtls sent f/GC/unions/confs, GC to operate under a regularized budget as other orgs	Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic
1961	1,307,892			
1962	1,362,775	GC Session focuses on GC headquarters "departmental simplification"	Temperance becomes dept; Rel Lib and Pub Relations again separated; office of Statistical Secy discontinued, duties assigned to Auditor	
1963	1,428,352			
1964	1,508,056	How to determine readiness of union missions for Union Conference status	Annual Council votes 11 criteria for such status as well as status procedure	Togo
1965	1,578,504	Internal Revenue Service ruling raising question of licensed ministers eligibility for parsonage allowance because limitations upon functions of licensed ministry	1966-1977 World Church allows NA to redefine the functions of NA ministry to resolve the issues raised by IRS and thereby continue to receive parsonage	Congo
1966	1,661,657	Training of SDA missionaries	Institute of World Mission established	

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1967	1,747,614	How to minimize financial outlay within national churches when membership is relatively low	Austrian Union of Churches formed. Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, Portugal, Spain all eventually form unions of churches	Dahomey
1968	1,845,183			
1969	1,953,078	Increasing number of depts at local, union, and GC levels. Growth in adm staffs.	Consolidation Comte to study role of depts, recommend streamlining	
1970	2,051,864	Continuing study of org structure in NA; call for reorganization of various territories in Africa-Middle East	Urges major restructuring. Cut unions from 10 to 6. No major results ensued. Afro-Mideast Division organized at GC Session	Chad
1971	2,145,061	Coordinating multiplying SDA radio programs around the world	Adventist World Radio launched	Afghanistan, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso)
1972	2,261,403	Reorganization Committee report; surveyed all GC dept positions (168 reviewed); creation of specialized decision-making groups at GC level (PRADCO, PREXAD)	Suggestion of merging of functions of various depts, coordinate councils for NA. Recom reduce f/10 to 4 or 6 unions in NAD. No major results f/study until 1985. Also recom mergers that would total six depts at GC at time of 1975 session	
1973	2,390,124			Gambia
1974	2,521,429	Major changes within health care field in United States	SDAs form 5 regional orgs to manage its health-care work. Exhibits corporate sgth	Sikkim
1975	2,666,484	Emerging worldwide membership within SDA faith	First General Conference Session held outside US (Vienna, Austria)	Guinea-Bissau, Liechtenstein
		Redefining functions/credentials of women ministers in light of IRS issues (1975-85)	Women placed upon a separate track of ministry outside possibility of ordination	

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		Is SDA org too large, top-heavy, operating efficiently; how to strengthen effcy of depts	Committee on General Conference and Church Administration appointed at GC	
1976	2,810,606			Brunei, Western Sahara (formerly Spanish Sahara)
1977	2,949,758			Gabon
1978	3,117,535	Increasing authority of General Conference president	GC president gains effective veto power over the selection of division presidents	Kuwait, Sudan
1979	3,308,191	Need for improved organizational structure for Africa	Major reorganization within Africa	
1980	3,480,518	Who decides what Adventists believe? Appointment of Theological Consultation Planning Group.	Study papers, general discussions of biblical scholars/educators urges that laity, pastors, theologians and administrators should all have input.	
		Restructuring at GC departmental level	Merger of Ministerial Assn/Stewardship; merger of Health and Temperance Depts	
		Extensive revision of Fundamental Beliefs of SDAs with significant addition to Preamble suggesting possible revision in future when led by Holy Spirit		
1981	3,668,087			
1982	3,897,814	Continuing realization of value of corporate strength in uniting health care system	Creation of Adventist Health System/US uniting 5 health-care corporations	Mali
1983	4,140,206	Role and Function Comte: largest org study in SDA history up to that time	Define functions/programs on all levels; where specific functions should be most effectively administered; recommend functions that could be shifted/ended	Nauru

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1984	4,424,612	How best to coordinate SDA individual/community devt and disaster relief	Creation of Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)	
		<i>Spectrum</i> (March 1984) challenges much of current organizational structure	GC President, at Annual Council, issues statement distancing GC from <i>Spectrum</i>	
1985	4,716,859	Variations of several union conferences from the 'model' constitutions recom by GC	GC admin urges Pacific and North Pacific Unions to bring their constns into harmony	
		Major issues of church org discussed at this session. Africa again reorganized. Full report of the Role and Function of Denominational Organizations Commission accepted: GC President defined as "first officer and chairman of executive committee"; operationally departmental directors are responsible to the president; org of Church Ministries Department combining 5 former depts: Lay Activities, Sabbath School, Stewardship and Development, Youth, Home and Family Service; North America attains increased separation from General Conference		
1986	5,092,503			
1987	5,445,249			United Arab Emirates, Guinea, Niger
1988	5,816,767			
1989	6,260,617	McBride Study of role of General Conference departments/services	GC President/GC Officers to determine implementation of recommendations	Malta
		How to reach unentered areas of the world with the Gospel	Adoption of Global Mission with central focus upon reaching unentered areas	
		General Conference headquarters move	Move of General Conference Headquarters from Takoma Park to Silver Spring, MD	

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		Major article by Robert Folkenberg on church structure	Pub in June 1989 <i>Ministry</i> . Somewhat instrumental propelling RSF to GC ldrship	
1990	6,694,880			
1991	7,102,976			Oman
1992	7,498,653			Albania, Djibouti
1993	7,962,210			Bahrain
1994	8,382,558			
1995	8,812,555	Recommendations of World Church Org Commission presented at GC Session	Limit membership of GCC (assoc secy omitted); session delegate cap at 2,000; Church Ministries broken up into individual departments as before 1985	
1996	9,296,127			
1997	9,702,834			
1998	10,163,414			
1999	10,939,182	Resignation of Robert Folkenberg as General Conference President	Special mtg of GCC accepts Folkenberg resignation, Jan Paulsen elected GC Pres	
2000	11,687,239			

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2001	12,320,844			
2002	12,894,015			
2003	13,406,554			
2004	13,936,932			
2005	14,399,072	New Fundamental Belief voted; future planned revisions of Fund Beliefs must reach GC Pres ofce at least 2 yrs before GC Session; GCC should during next quinquennium systematically review denominational policies and procedures in light of Resolutions adopted on Bible and Spirit of Prophecy at 2005 GC Session.		
2006	15,115,806			