

SEVENTH DAY  BAPTIST®

Annual Report
of the Seventh Day Baptist
General Council
for the year 2021-2022

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Report of the General Council

to the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference, USA and Canada, Ltd.

June 3, 2022

The Seventh Day Baptist General Conference is blessed by God with volunteers, staff, and directors who are dedicated to pursuing the ministry opportunities God presents to us. Over the last three ministry years, your General Council has been impressed and encouraged by the persistent effort, teamwork, pursuit of goals, and consideration of new opportunities demonstrated by people across the Conference.

Meetings of General Council

Although travel restrictions have, once again, prevented our gathering in person for the requisite number of sessions, your General Council met 6 times in the 2021–22 ministry year:

- October 1–3, 2021, in person, Janesville, WI
- January 9, 2022, by video
- February 22, 2022, by video
- March 20, 2022, by video
- April 6, 2022, by video
- May 19–22, 2022, in person, Janesville, WI

We had expected to meet in person on July 24, 2022, in Colorado Springs, CO. We will meet by video June 21, 2022, and at a yet-to-be-scheduled date in late July or early August.

Introduction to the Report

When the 207th session of General Conference adjourned on August 3, 2019, there was no expectation that the next session would be delayed by 4 years.

This report was written with the expectation that General Conference would gather for the 208th session in Colorado Springs, CO, the week of July 24–31, 2022. When the sessions were canceled, we chose to maintain the focus of this report, revising the language to anticipate gathering at Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI, in 2023.

While this report includes the events of the 2021–22 ministry year, we know that General Conference will be evaluating everything that has happened since the last session and expanded the scope of this report by quoting or paraphrasing prior General Council reports to help the General Conference

- see what has been done for **continuity**,
- be informed of significant **decisions** that changed the status-quo,
- **ratify** those decisions that are generally reserved for the Conference-in-session, and
- **point forward** to the goals we want to pursue and how we want to pursue them.

Nominations, Elections, Vacancies, and Appointments

The General Conference has established a rhythm of electing and appointing individuals to serve in positions responsible for a wide variety of Conference ministry.

At the heart of this rhythm is Committee on Nominations. They prayerfully consider the terms that are concluding and seek the best people to fill those positions: sometimes by nominating the incumbent for an additional term and sometimes by nominating another person for the role.

Even though the rhythm of election and appointment was broken by our response to the COVID pandemic, the Committee on Nominations continued to carry out its responsibility, providing a report to the General Conference every ministry year. However, because General Conference did not meet in session, no nominations could be made, and no elections could be held.

Continuity for elected offices

The General Conference bylaws provide a path toward continuity in unusual circumstances.

First, in a paragraph addressing both “specific offices” and any “such assistants, boards, committees and/or agencies as may be deemed necessary, expedient, or convenient,” the bylaws state that those “elected or named and shall continue in office until their office is duly filled by a successor” (Article V, Paragraph 2–3 of introduction).

Second, the bylaws also provide that: “Vacancies in any office may be filled by General Council appointment until the next session of General Conference” (Article V, Paragraph 4). Later, the bylaws specify that General Council vacancies “shall be filled for the unexpired term either by the General Conference in regular session or by the General Council *ad interim*” (Article VI, Section 2).

Based on the guidance in these bylaws, your General Council worked with the Committee on Nominations to ensure that the people prayerfully chosen for positions of responsibility were recognized and empowered to serve with the full confidence of the Conference. To be specific: at the end of each ministry year, General Council appointed the slate of nominees prepared by the Committee on Nominations.

General Council also appointed people to fill vacancies that arose when individuals resigned or were no longer able to serve.

Recommendation The General Council will recommend that the General Conference ratify all appointments made by General Council between August 2019 and July 2023. Specifically, we will recommend that General Conference ratify all appointments listed in the 2023 report of the Committee on Nominations with terms ending in 2025, 2026, and 2027 for positions with 5-year terms, and with terms ending in 2024, and 2025 for positions with 3-year terms.

Note: This recommendation will not disrupt the normal process of nomination and election for terms that conclude with the next session of the General Conference.

Standard Operating Procedure for Committee on Nominations

With successive votes in 2018 and 2019, General Conference established the Committee on Nominations as a nine-member, term-limited standing committee, entrusting General Council with the responsibility to maintain a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) reflecting specific

recommendations adopted during the 2018 sessions. In addition to its primary task of nominating people, the Committee on Nominations has worked with General Council and the Conferences Coordinator to make changes to the SOP which clarify committee responsibility and improve the committee's operation.

Appointed Offices: Current Practice

Before the adoption of new bylaws in 2013, all General Conference offices were nominated and elected. With the new bylaws, General Conference established that in addition to election, some positions could be appointed "as determined by the Conference." At the time, General Conference adopted a policy statement indicating which offices were to be elected and which should be appointed. In the eight years since, ad hoc changes have been made to our practice of nomination, election, and appointment.

The current practice of the General Conference is to nominate and elect the people who serve our agencies and standing committees with multiple-year terms.

For Conference offices with one-year terms, the following summarizes current Conference practice:

- The General Conference nominates and elects the President, President-Elect, Business Recording Secretary, and Treasurer.
- General Council appoints the Program Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, Obituaries Coordinator, and Assistant Treasurer.
- The Conferences Coordinator appoints the Credentials Coordinator (whose appointment is affirmed by the Conference as part of the procedural motion at the opening of Business), and the Courtesies Coordinator.

General Council has begun a review of the responsibilities assigned to each of the appointed roles and expects to bring specific policy recommendations to the General Conference in 2023.

Reporting on Appointed Offices

We discovered during the 2021–22 ministry year that prior General Council reports have not included lists of General Council appointments. Beginning with our 2023 report to General Conference, this oversight will be corrected.

Executive Director

The Rev. Dr. Carl P. Greene began serving as the Executive Director of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference at the conclusion of our 2019 General Conference sessions. The Executive Director is a non-voting, ex-officio member of the General Council. His initial term of service was scheduled to conclude with the 2022 General Conference sessions.

Over the last three years, Carl has provided excellent leadership. He has represented the General Conference in the appropriate ecumenical spaces and has built relationships in ways that strengthen our connections with groups that are pursuing similar goals. He has been in frequent communication with the Allied Societies of the Conference, ensuring good working relationships with the Memorial Fund and with the Missionary Society. He has served as the convenor of the Coordinating Leadership Team and has facilitated regular communication within the group. He has supervised the Core Directors of the Conference, working to clarify areas of ministry ability and

responsibility while establishing what appear to be healthy rhythms of goal setting and achievement checking. In all these spaces, when General Council has sought feedback from those who work with Carl, we have received statements that Carl is doing his job well.

Carl has helped the General Council work on vision, goal setting, and long-term planning. He is goal-oriented and has helped the General Council create an annual review process that incorporates his intentional process of setting and monitoring goals.

Carl understands and demonstrates that he is part of a team. This is clear when he communicates in public settings, and also by his interaction in General Council meetings. He makes us understand when work is done by the Core Directors, pointing to their accomplishments. He informs us of the ministry being accomplished by Agencies and Standing Committees. He encourages us with stories about good things happening in churches. He wants to make sure that when good work is done by others, it is seen and noticed.

We believe that the General Conference has benefited from the leadership exercised by Carl Greene as Executive Director of the Conference and that he should continue to serve in that capacity for another three years. Accordingly, we have appointed him to another three-year term, pending confirmation by a vote of the General Conference.

Recommendation The General Council will recommend that the General Conference confirm The Rev. Dr. Carl P. Greene to a second term as the Executive Director of the General Conference (2022–2025).

Financial Director

Ron Ochs capably serves the Conference as the Financial Officer. His roles include serving as the Conference Treasurer and as a non-voting ex-officio member of the General Council. We continue to appreciate his wise counsel in General Council sessions and the ways in which he supports and encourages the leadership of Carl Greene.

Over the last decade, Ron has worked with Conference Center staff, Conference directors, and the General Council to refine our budgeting and accounting process to provide better month-to-month support of ministry expenses. This effort has freed other Conference directors to focus more of their time and energy on matters which advance their ministry areas. We are grateful for what Ron has done to improve this “behind the scenes” ministry.

Supporting the Director Team

The directors of the General Conference do their jobs well. They bring a high level of skill to tasks and are committed to the mission of the Conference and to its people. We value their work as individuals and their work as a team.

As we reported last year, General Council shares the repeatedly expressed concern the General Conference about the workload and stress level carried by our directors. General Council has been taking specific steps in the last three ministry years to support their continued health and success.

Annual Review Process & Goals

First, the Executive Director has worked with the directors to establish a healthy pattern of setting specific goals and evaluating achievement via those goals. This has provided the directors with ways to see the fruit of their labor each ministry year.

Compensation

Second, with the help of Financial Director Ron Ochs, General Council evaluated the directors' financial compensation. We gathered information about similarly-sized non-profits and the pastor salary guidelines published by COSAR as points of comparison and made appropriate adjustments to their salaries. The changes took place across the 2020–21 and 2021–22 ministry years.

Third, building on the first two items, General Council approved a shift to a merit-based bonus structure in the 2021–22 ministry year.

Administrative and Support Staff

Fourth, General Council approved hiring people to assist the directors with important administrative responsibilities. Executive Director Carl Greene is working with the directors to identify responsibilities that can be delegated and to encourage such delegation.

Jeremy Howard and Jan Ehlers have been faithfully serving in the Conference Center Building for decades. Patty Petersen and Brittany Kersten are serving as virtual assistants in a variety of data gathering, entry, and tracking roles, along with supporting conferences logistics and in-house publication preparation.

Church Planting Coordinator

Fifth, the Church Planting Coordinator was created as a part-time position for an initial 18-month trial run. This role was created specifically to address the additional resources in terms of time and attention needed to carry out what we want to do in Church Planting.

Travel

Sixth, we have asked the directors to safeguard crucial relationships as they consider requests for travel. In particular, we've asked them to think about what they need to do to maintain healthy relationships with their families and with their local churches. We've encouraged them to offer video conferencing as an alternative to travel when it is appropriate to the circumstance.

We recognize that in-person visits are an important way to build and maintain relationships within the Conference. However, we don't want the value of traveling for in-person visits to undermine the maintenance of the crucial healthy relationships at home.

Sabbatical

Seventh, we continue to encourage Conference directors to participate in the Sabbatical Policy adopted for their use in 2018. Nick Kersten took a Sabbatical in 2019. General Council has worked with John Pethel to adapt to his scheduling needs, providing a partial Sabbatical in December 2021–January 2022 to be completed in a similar time frame about a year later.

Conference Center Building

The Conference Center, the office building owned by the General Conference in Janesville, WI, is a useful tool for Conference ministry. Following a review in the late 2010s of the Conference Center's value, location, and fitness for service, General Council reported to General Conference that there was no compelling reason to change our physical plant.

Having concluded that we should remain in the building, General Council determined that the time had come to strategically address decades' worth of deferred maintenance and to begin making long-overdue improvements to the building. We asked Ron and Renee Ochs to guide us through this process and have been grateful for their leadership in making this happen.

In the last three years, through funds set aside for the purpose, new funds allocated to the purpose, and generous donations, several improvements have been made to the building. The most noticeable are new lights throughout the building, new heating/cooling units, a new roof, a refreshed parking lot, landscaping, a new Conference Center sign, and an overall reduction in clutter.

The building is more fit for service now than it was three years ago and we expect additional improvements to be made over the next few years.

Vision Map

The mission of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference is to equip our churches to actively advance God's kingdom.

In the time since the Vision Map was first introduced to the General Conference in 2015, General Council has continued to refine and clarify the document. The purpose of the Vision Map is to help us keep track of all those things we are pursuing as a Conference: the primary mission, the kinds of ministry we have chosen to focus on, the culture we've been called to create, and the principles that guide our walk together. While the document can't include everything, it brings into focus those things Seventh Day Baptists have already identified as most important in Conference Ministry and increases the ability of General Council members to keep the big picture in mind when we make decisions.

The Vision Map is a living document. It works best for us when General Council reviews it periodically and makes changes to it to refine our focus, or to clarify our intent. This process of use, evaluation, and revision, has confirmed the ongoing value of the Vision Map. It is not a tool we expect to discard.

The members of your General Council are mindful that all "decisions shall be guided by their understanding of previous General Conference action and shall be subject to the will of the Conference and to the review of the Conference" (Article VI, Section 5, Paragraph 3). The content of the Vision Map has been guided by our understanding of General Conference action. The use of the Vision Map is in accord with our responsibility to "provide creative leadership and initiative for Seventh Day Baptists" (Article VI, Section 5, Paragraph 1).

Recommendation Because the Vision Map is a tool we intend to keep using, and because we are mindful of our responsibility to ensure that our decisions are guided by General Conference action, the General Council will recommend that General Conference adopt the “Vision Map Resolution” presented at the end of our report.

Church Planting Funnel

The Seventh Day Baptist General Conference is a voluntary association of churches—when churches ask to join the General Conference those already in the association decide whether to grant membership or not. To ensure order in the membership process, the General Conference established procedures to help churches requesting membership know what factors we consider in the decision-making process.

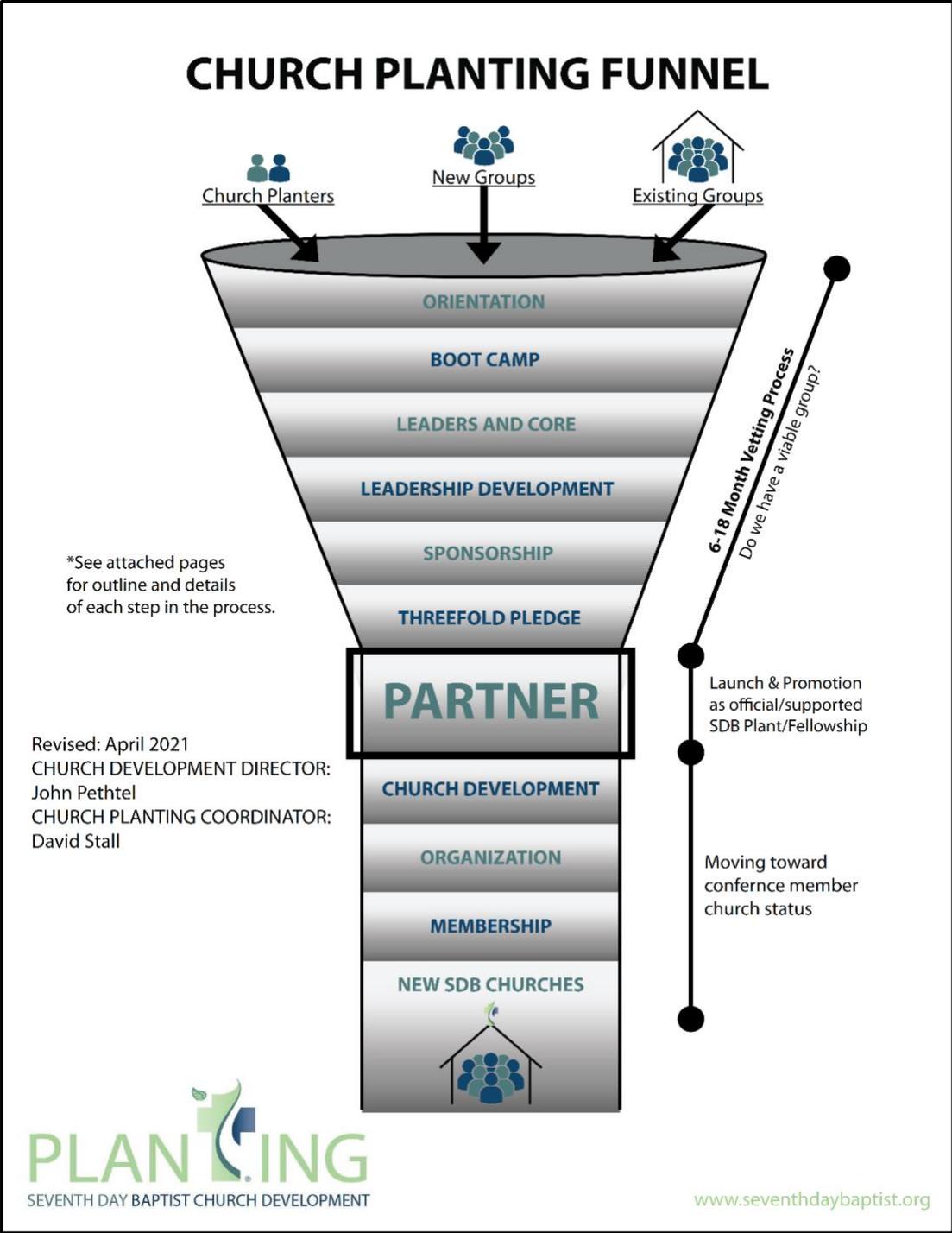
While General Conference personnel have routinely helped churches navigate the membership procedures, we have generally left churches without help through the early stages of organization—helping only when asked to help.

When the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference identified church planting as a ministry emphasis, it established the Church Planting Task Force. As it worked, the Task Force identified providing organized, systematic help to groups in the early stages of organization or seeking Conference membership as one important step in developing the Conference’s ability to foster church planting.

The Church Planting Coordinator and the Director of Church Development, in consultation with the Church Planting Task Force, developed a process to walk church planters, new groups, and established groups through the steps involved in organizing as a church and moving toward membership in the General Conference. The process identifies important milestones and provides multiple kinds of assistance to help churches achieve those milestones.

This process is the “Church Planting Funnel.” You can view a diagram of the funnel on the next page.

At each significant step in the development of the Church Planting Funnel, General Council has been informed, provided feedback, and given approval. We are grateful for the leadership of the Task Force, the Director of Church Development, and the Church Planting Coordinator in this space—and anticipate the Church Planting Funnel will be a valuable addition to the overall ministry of the Conference.



Special Committees (Task Forces)

In addition to General Conference agencies, allied societies, standing committees, and special committees, the General Conference establishes ad hoc committees as “necessary or appropriate to conduct Conference Business” (Article XI, Introduction). As far as we know, only three ad hoc committees had continuing work at the close of the General Conference sessions in 2019.

Church Planting Task Force and Church Development Task Force

The General Conference, General Council, Coordinating Leadership Team, and Missionary Society acted in concert to create two special committees across the 2012–13 and 2013–14 ministry years. These committees were called the “Church Planting Task Force” and the “Church Development Task Force.”

Both groups continue to function as special committees of the Conference, working in close cooperation with ministries overseen by the Council on Ministry. They have been important contributors, helping to set the stage for the ministry of the Church Planting Coordinator and for our ongoing attention to local church health.

Because the focus of these tasks forces is integral to the overall mission of the Conference, we will have an ongoing need for people dedicated to improving our shared work in these areas. Because of that, we have begun to explore how to include these groups within the structure of General Conference.

Conference Week Task Force (2019 sunset)

The General Council appointed a Conference Week Task Force during the ministry year 2017–2018. The task force gathered information by researching past practice, taking surveys, and engaging in conversation with Conference members. Their work focused on ways we could improve how people experience the Conference Week and ways in which we could reduce the burden on those involved in hosting the week. The task force reported directly to the General Council and their final report was issued near the end of 2019.

The work of the Conference Week Task Force provided the impetus to clarify the role of the Conference President, to create the role of the Conferences Coordinator, to simplify the General Conference registration process, and to experiment with a new flow for the General Conference week. These are described in the next section of this report.

Conference Week Changes

Upon the receipt of the final Conference Week Task Force report, General Council approved changes to five significant areas of our General Conference week experience. These were to be implemented in time for the 2020 General Conference session and would be used for at least two sessions before a full review would take place following the 2021 General Conference session. With the cancellation of the 2022 General Conference week, we now expect the changes to be in place for the 2023 and 2024 sessions, with a review to take place in the fall of 2024.

Drawing heavily from the language used in our 2020 report, here is a brief description of the five significant areas of change:

Conferences Coordinator

The Conferences Coordinator role is still being developed but is envisioned as a person who can help oversee all the moving pieces related to the Conference Week. The establishment of this position will change how we approach recruiting people to serve in “host committee” roles. John Pethtel has begun to serve in this capacity to develop an understanding of all the role entails and to prepare the way for someone else to do the job well.

President Standard Operating Procedure

The General Council approved changes to the standard operating procedure of the Conference President. These changes allow the Conference President to focus more on program-related responsibilities by moving responsibility for several administrative tasks to the Conferences Coordinator. The SOP envisions the role of the Conference President as an active participant in the ongoing ministry of the Conference, working with the CLT and General Council to develop a theme and program which advance the mission and ministry of the Conference. Both President Kevin Butler (in planning for 2020 and 2021) and President Charlotte Chroniger (in planning for 2022 and 2023) used the new SOP as they served.

Registration Changes

Signing up for Conference Week has required navigating a convoluted mix of options. The process and forms are confusing for those who register and at times overwhelming to the volunteers who oversee on-site activity. Some of the complexity is driven by managing both registration and room and board on the same forms.

General Council determined that we must simplify the registration process. Too much time and energy has been spent on managing Conference registration. Full-week room and board options will continue to be part of the registration process, but many a la carte options will cease to be offered.

Experimental Scheduling

The Conference serves two primary functions: 1) conducting the business of General Conference, and 2) providing the space and time necessary for the people attending Conference to create and enhance relational connections through worship, talking, learning, eating, and playing together.

For decades, our primary approach to achieving the two functions has been to interweave the business and connectional functions throughout the week. It has been hard to do this well. The Conference Week Task Force proposed separating the business and connectional portions of the Conference Week by focusing on business at the start of the week and connection at the end. We have encouraged the Conferences Coordinator and Conference Presidents to experiment with that proposal over the next few sessions to look for better ways to complete business and enhance connecting during the week.

Families of Conference Executives

In 2019, General Conference recommended that General Council “consider developing and implementing a plan before the 2020 session to allow the core family members of the executives and directors to attend conference at no cost to them. This would be in addition to current compensation packages.”

General Council has budgeted \$13,000 to pay for travel and registration expenses for the Directors’ core families (spouse and children 18 and under living in Director’s household) to attend General Conference sessions. We will evaluate this expenditure following our next in-person sessions.

Conference Week Cost and Registration Fees

Your General Council values the Conference Week. We understand that our decisions are guided by the actions taken by General Conference in session. We have been deeply saddened by the

cancellation of three straight Conference Week sessions and are doing everything we know to do to ensure sessions occur in 2023.

One obvious disappointment for everyone was the combined cost of registration, room, and board for the now canceled 2022 Conference Week. On-campus room and board, by itself, was approximately \$462. That cost was higher than we've paid in prior years but was not out of line with what other campuses were quoting for the summer of 2022.

The General Conference has little control over the cost of room and board. However, we do set the registration fee. The rest of this section is dedicated to explaining where things stand concerning the registration fee.

The General Conference office has records indicating the income generated and expenses incurred in hosting the Conference Week sessions. However, these records do not provide a complete picture of the cost of the sessions because some costs are paid directly by the agencies of the Conference without going through the host committee.

This reality led to the question, "How much does hosting the General Conference session really cost?" Your General Council thought it would be wise for us to develop a better understanding of the total financial cost of hosting the week. We wanted to be in a position to help the General Conference in session make intentional choices about which expenses for hosting the week should be borne by the registrants and which expenses, if any, should be borne by the Conference itself.

Your General Council asked the Conferences Coordinator to compile as complete a picture as possible of the financial cost of hosting the Conference Week sessions. We did not ask for this picture to include the pro-rated salaries of Conference employees required to attend the sessions nor the time they use in preparing for the sessions. General Council has determined that the General Conference has long considered those expenses as ministry-related expenses that should not be charged to the Conference Week.

For the 2022 General Conference sessions, the categories of expenses included: facility/campus, transportation, office, stipends, conference program, background checks, receptions, registration software, processing fees, and the travel and registration costs for Conference officers. **The total cost of these Conference Week expenses came to \$82,400 which would represent a \$306 per person registration fee (based on 270 registrants).**

This registration fee does not include room and board expenses, which are charged directly to the attendees. With room and board costs for a non-air-conditioned room included, this registration cost would have led to a charge of \$768 per person. Knowing that in prior years not all of these expenses had been borne by registrants, General Council authorized setting the room, board, and registration rate at \$600 per person, accepting that the Conference would likely cover more than half of the projected registration costs of the week, \$45,360 ($\$168 * 270$), had we been able to host Conference this year.

The General Conference in session will have to provide an answer about how to deal with what will likely be continuing increases to the cost of hosting Conference Week. Over the 2022–23 ministry year General Council will do what we can to provide General Conference with the information and tools needed to address questions about how the costs for the Conference Week should be borne,

what we want the Conference Week to accomplish, and how the Conference Week fits into our overall ministry and identity.

Bylaw Changes Required for Electronic Business Sessions

The electronic business session is an obvious solution to the inability of a deliberative body like the General Conference to gather for an in-person meeting. General Council explored the feasibility of shifting our assembled business sessions online.

The Seventh Day Baptist General Conference USA & Canada, Ltd. chose to organize as a corporation in Wisconsin. When the General Conference made that decision, our Conference agreed to operate in a manner that is consistent with the laws of Wisconsin. As part of the incorporation process, we presented Articles of Incorporation to the state and agreed to adopt bylaws—and these documents establish the legal framework that govern how we operate as a Conference.

Our bylaws specify that Robert's Rules of Order (the most recent edition) will function as our parliamentary authority. Robert's Rules of Order specify that unless an organization's bylaws provide explicit authorization for electronic meetings the only valid meetings are when the delegates are physically gathered. Our bylaws make no provision for electronic meetings for General Conference sessions. *Therefore, General Conference cannot **now** conduct a legally recognized electronic business session.*

However, with the appropriate bylaw amendments, Wisconsin law would permit the General Conference to legally conduct an electronic business session. Your General Council will explore the electronic business session options available for large deliberative bodies and will likely bring recommendations for bylaws changes to the expected 2023 General Conference sessions. (Amending the bylaws requires action at two General Conference sessions. Before the a bylaw amendment proposed in 2023 could become effective, it would require action at the next session, presumably in 2024.)

Crisis Management Team and Plan

In our report to General Conference in 2020, we stated:

An important part of leadership is responding well to unplanned and unforeseen circumstances that threaten an organization's ability to focus on or carry out its mission. In consultation with the Coordinating Leadership Team, the General Council has adopted a Crisis Management Plan which creates a three-member Crisis Management Team empowered to assess crises as they arise and to coordinate the overall Conference response, drawing in additional personnel and resources as necessary. One specific responsibility for this team will be to assess and coordinate responses to reports of abuse on a case-by-case basis.

General Council appoints the three members of the Crisis Management Team and may change the composition of the team at any time.

The Crisis Management Plan and Team had just been established when COVID began to cause widespread disruptions across our Conference. General Council has asked the team to respond to a few other matters.

Our current assessment of the plan is that it is working well for the Conference. The approach has provided a clear method for responding to unplanned and unforeseen circumstances, defining who should respond initially and how to bring additional people into the decision-making process. We think that this approach has allowed us to stay better focused on our primary mission while simultaneously improving our response to the unexpected.

General Council appointed John Pethtel as the Crisis Management Officer when the plan was adopted. He has served well in this role.

Sabbath Recorder, Newsletter

We are grateful for Pat Cruzan's service as editor of the *Sabbath Recorder*. People across the conference continue to receive and read this valuable monthly publication.

Your General Council, in consultation with Director of Communications, Jeremiah Owen, continues to consider how to best pursue the continuing usefulness of the *Sabbath Recorder* while being attentive to the ever-increasing cost of publication and distribution. An initial approach to addressing some of the issues, developed during the 2020–21 ministry year, was delayed due to shifting priorities in the COVID season.

A printed newsletter, edited by Rick Crouch, focused more explicitly on Conference-wide ministry, has been developed and is being distributed by mail. It is scheduled for distribution a few times each year.

Obituaries

The Seventh Day Baptist General Conference values the contributions made by individuals over a lifetime of service to the Conference and its churches. We have remembered that service by reading the obituaries of Conference leaders during business sessions of General Conference.

In the distant past, General Conference appointed a committee to collect information and compile obituaries focused on Conference service. Because much of this information was already being published in the *Sabbath Recorder*, the committee eventually chose to compile and pass these obituaries along to the Conference.

In 2008, the General Conference recognized this change in practice by removing the Committee on Obituaries from our list of standing committees and electing in its place an Obituaries Coordinator. The role of the Obituaries Coordinator was to compile the obituaries of certain Seventh Day Baptist leaders published in the *Sabbath Recorder*. At the time the Conference defined "leaders" as "ministers, ministers' wives, missionaries, General Conference presidents, officers and executives of SDB Boards or Agencies, members of the General Council, and Deacons of SDB Churches in the U.S.A. and Canada." (2008 General Conference Minutes, A-18). At the time, that decision was sound and served the General Conference well for many years.

However, a shift in cultural norms around the content and placement of obituaries—one that had already begun in the early 2000s—has become more evident in recent years. Obituaries of Seventh Day Baptist leaders have not consistently been submitted to the *Sabbath Recorder* for publication. Some of the obituaries that have been submitted have not mentioned significant areas of service within the Conference.

This cultural shift around obituaries has meant that the process we have used for remembering individuals and recognizing their service no longer reliably provides a complete record for our use. It is broken.

General Council has approved a collaborative effort between the Council on History, the Tract and Communication Council, the editor of the *Sabbath Recorder*, and the core directors of the Conference to develop a consistent pattern of publishing death notices in the *Sabbath Recorder* and to find ways to generate accurate obituaries of Seventh Day Baptist leaders which include details of service within the General Conference.

2020 Statement Concerning Racism | Living into Diversity

On June 4, 2020, General Council approved the release of a statement concerning racism. The statement acknowledged an “opportunity to show our communities the true hope of their suffering, the true liberation of their oppression, and the true vindication of their injustices through the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

The statement was released at a time when many people in the United States were actively asking questions about how Christian institutions perceived and responded to racism in the culture at large and within Christian circles. Your General Council believed that it was important to provide a timely response to those questions and worked with our leadership team to craft a statement that we believe accurately reflects the sentiment of the Conference as a whole.

At this session, the first one following the time when that statement was released, we ask the General Conference to ratify our action by adopting the statement at this session:

Recommendation The General Council will recommend that the General Conference adopt the “Statement from SDB Leadership Concerning Racism” as a statement of this Conference session.

Note: The “Statement from SDB Leadership Concerning Racism” is included at the end of this report.

The leadership of the Conference committed itself in that statement to “move forward with ways in which it can support its churches to defeat racism by seeking diversity in its leadership, promoting racial and cultural sensitivity in their ministries, and providing resources that reinforce the value of all humankind. We are committed to pursuing the end to any systems, structures, and strongholds that affect racism in our organization and its culture.”

We reported last year that Executive Director Carl Greene is working collaboratively with Andy Samuels, Chief Executive Director of the Missionary Society, to guide our approach to this commitment. They have been working with many people to get a clearer understanding of current Seventh Day Baptist practice and opportunities in this realm.

Memorial Fund | Grant Process

The Seventh Day Baptist Memorial Fund trustees have consistently declared their desire to support the ministry of the Conference and its churches. They have been working closely with Executive Director Carl Greene and our core directors to establish a routine for handling grant requests. A typical grant process includes a conversation with one of the directors of the Conference (clarifying goals, methods, and specific needs), an evaluation by the General Council about how well the grant

aligns with the Vision Map, and a final determination by the Memorial Fund Trustees. The Memorial Fund Trustees have also worked with our team of directors to create a more streamlined grant process for challenges that arose in the midst of COVID, and smaller grants tied to specific planting or revitalization processes overseen by the Conference.

Memorandum of Understanding

The Seventh Day Baptist Missionary Society stands as its own organization. It relates to General Conference as an allied society. The level of cooperation and the completeness of communication between the two organizations waxes and wanes with changes in personnel and shifting ministry emphases. For more than a decade, they and we have been working to improve cooperation and communication. We believe that the current working relationship is healthy.

Because we believe the current relationship is healthy, General Council has authorized Executive Director Carl Green to work with the Missionary Society to create a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding between the two groups. The memorandum will define key terms, describe key roles, detail some areas of shared responsibility, and clarify the best ways for us to work cooperatively.

Significant progress has been made toward creating the memorandum, but it is not yet finished.

External Grants

General Council appreciates the initiative Carl Greene has taken in pursuing external grants to create ministry opportunities for the Conference. We have been grateful for his growing expertise in the field and have encouraged him to continue pursuing grants as appropriate opportunities arise. In his time of service, we have received funds from National Association of Evangelicals to foster wellness among pastors, from the Mustard Seed Foundation to explore the Theology of Work, and from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to encourage conversations about Worship.

Church Membership

As of the end of May 2022, two churches have initiated the process of applying for membership in the General Conference. We anticipate that one or both of the churches will complete the application process in time for a recommendation to be made to the 2023 session.

Recommendation The General Council will likely recommend that the General Conference add one or more churches to the list of member churches.

Accreditation

Pastoral Accreditation due for renewal in 2020, 2021, and 2022 were extended until the next session of General Conference can be held.

Recommendations The General Council in coordination with the Council on Ministry will recommend that the General Conference renew or grant accreditation to Seventh Day Baptist ministers based on current accreditation guidelines at the next session of General Conference.

General Conference Site for 2023

The General Conference signed a contract with Calvin University for the General Conference sessions originally scheduled for July 26—August 1, 2020. When we were forced to cancel those sessions in early 2020, they graciously worked with us to honor that contract with dates changed to 2023. The Lord willing, the 2023 General Conference session will be held at **Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI on July 23–29, 2023.**

Budget

The Financial Director has been working closely with the General Council and the Coordinating Leadership Team to develop a budget for 2023. The process will not be complete in time for the publication deadline of this report. As soon as we can, we will release the document the General Conference has, in prior years, adopted as its budget, the “Seventh Day Baptist Summary of 2023 Operating Expenses.”

Recommendation: The General Council will recommend the adoption of a summary document to be considered the General Conference budget for calendar year following the next session.

Second Reading of Bylaw Change

General Conference bylaws require a physical gathering for four of the six General Council meetings held each year. This requirement was not met in the 2019–20, 2020–21, or 2021–22 ministry years due to restrictions on gathering and travel related to COVID. We anticipate being in position to honor the bylaw requirement in the future.

However, before COVID hit, General Council proposed, and General Conference adopted as a first reading a bylaw change to reduce the number of required physical gatherings from 4 to three. We continue to believe that in many years three physical gatherings will be sufficient to faithfully execute our responsibility to the General Conference.

Recommendation: General Council recommends that General Conference complete the amendment process begun in 2019 by voting to amend Article VI. Section 4. of our bylaws, changing the word “four” to “three” as indicated in the following:

Article VI. General Council of the General Conference

Section 4. Meetings

The General Council shall hold at least six bi-monthly meetings each year. At least **three** ~~four~~ of the meetings shall take place with a quorum physically present. Three elected members shall constitute a quorum. Additional meetings may be called upon proper notice, and necessary action between meetings may be taken by mail ballot or electronic means. Any action taken by mail or other means is to be confirmed and entered into the minutes of the next regular meeting. All reasonable and necessary expenses incurred by members shall be paid by the corporation.

Indemnification Process

In the 2020 General Council Report, we said:

In response to General Conference action in 2017, the General Council asked member Churches to sign an indemnification agreement as a condition of continued membership in the Conference. The indemnification agreement states what has always been true: local churches are autonomous organizations that take responsibility for their decisions and actions. A majority of churches have signed the document and returned the supporting documentation to the Conference office. However, a significant number of churches have not yet completed the process. A conference executive has been tasked with helping churches complete the indemnification process before the General Conference has its next annual sessions. We expect that all churches will complete the necessary documents by early 2021 and that General Council will not need to recommend further action related to this matter.

The indemnification process was interrupted by everything involved in responding to COVID. As we enter the 2022–23 ministry year, this process will again become a priority. General Council and our Core Directors will do what we can to help the churches who have not completed the indemnification agreement. We now expect that all churches will complete the necessary documents by early 2023.

Even as we hope no further action related to this matter will be needed in General Conference sessions—General Council will recommend that the General Conference act as necessary to conclude the indemnification process at the next session.

Other Updates or Changes Since 2019

Change in oversight: School of Ministry

The General Conference adopted bylaw changes in 2019 transferring oversight for the School of Ministry from the Council on Ministry to the Christian Education Council. The transfer of responsibility appears to be complete.

Website

By 2019, the need for a website overhaul had long been obvious. However, several factors mitigated against making rapid changes to the website. Three of them were its structure, the amount and kind of content, and the number of Conference Agencies impacted by potential changes to the website. Preparatory work was done in the 2019–20 ministry year to better understand what needed to happen to upgrade the site.

As COVID's impact was intensifying in the summer of 2020, the overhaul of the website took on greater importance. The directors suggested and General Council agreed that updating the website should be a priority goal for the 2020–21 ministry year.

The church locator was revised in the website overhaul to include only member churches of the Conference. General Council recently approved a policy proposal to include additional groups on the site, groups that meet several criteria including their cooperation with the Conference through participation in the Church Planting Funnel.

Compilation of Selected Conference Resolutions

The Committee on Christian Social Action and Disaster Relief was asked by General Conference to create a booklet presenting Christian Social Action resolutions and statements that had been adopted by General Conference. The committee reviewed prior Conference action, selected appropriate statements, and produced a booklet. It has been printed and is ready for distribution.

403b Transition

Through the auspices of COSAR, the General Conference oversees a plan to help churches establish 403b retirement accounts for their pastors. In 2018, COSAR was forced to change the plan due to a change in the financial institutions with which they were working. At the time of General Conference in 2019, most of the initial work to make the transition was complete.

However, that transition process revealed many questions about how 403b programs work and should be run. The Conference's Financial Director, Ron Ochs, has devoted considerable time to understanding how these plans are and should be structured. He is working with COSAR to determine how to best continue offering this service to the churches and pastors of the Conference.

Manual of Procedure

A revision of the Manual of Procedure is long overdue. It has been identified by General Conference, General Council, Conference Directors, and the Committee on Faith and Order as a priority. Plans were in place to begin the revision in earnest during the 2020–21 ministry year. General Council affirmed that those plans should be set aside as everyone adjusted ministry priorities in the light of COVID that year.

We do not know, as we write this report, when the next window of opportunity will arise to work on revisions to the Manual of Procedure.

Internal Development: Training, Handbook, Policy Collection

The General Council knows that part of our responsibility is to learn how to become as effective as we can be at the tasks entrusted to us by General Conference. Over the last year we have started the process of examining our role by studying together a book called *Ten Basic Responsibilities of Non Profit Boards*. While we have not yet determined how we will do it, we plan to continue learning about what we are doing and how to do it well.

Internally, we are working to improve how we work and how we track certain kinds of information. Specifically, we are in the midst of revising the General Council Handbook initially crafted after the 2012 Conference reorganization. Also, we have identified a history of creating, forgetting, and re-creating policy documents at both the General Council and General Conference level. We intend to find a way to break that cycle.

Respectfully Submitted,

Elected Members:

Andrew Camenga, Ericessen Cooper, Erin Inabnit, Steve Osborn, Patti Wethington

Ex-Officio Non-Voting Members:

Carl Greene, Ron Ochs

General Council Secretary:
Paula Davis

Statement from SDB Leadership Concerning Racism | June 4, 2020

The mission of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference is to equip our churches to actively advance God's Kingdom. That mission faces obstacles in this world. One of the particular ways in which that mission is hindered or opposed is by the sin of favoritism in various forms including racism.

Racism appears in beliefs or practices that distinguish or elevate one race over others. Its existence has unfairly benefitted some and burdened others simply because of skin color or ethnicity. No race or ethnicity is greater or more valuable than another in God's Kingdom. The gospel of Jesus Christ has no place for favoritism of any sort and contains the power to destroy the barriers that human hearts have erected with regard to race and ethnicity.

Recent tragic events have brought a greater realization of the continued existence of racism for some. However, racism should not only be addressed after tragedies. Sustained efforts must take place so that it might never be known as what our churches (and our Conference) support, defend, allow, or refuse to speak about. There is no room in our gospel proclamation and demonstration for this sin. We have an opportunity to show our communities the true hope of their suffering, the true liberation of their oppression, and the true vindication of their injustices through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to do better. We will do better.

The Seventh Day Baptist General Conference will move forward with ways in which it can support its churches to defeat racism by seeking diversity in its leadership, promoting racial and cultural sensitivity in their ministries, and providing resources that reinforce the value of all humankind. We are committed to pursuing the end to any systems, structures, and strongholds that affect racism in our organization and its culture.

The leadership of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference laments the continued destruction that racism and the injustice accompanying it has caused to our nations. We are urging all Seventh Day Baptists:

- to seek the peace and welfare of their communities;
- to do justice with humble hearts to the glory of God;
- to mourn with others who mourn and weep with those who weep;
- to love and show grace and mercy even when they do not understand;
- to listen quickly and to speak (or type) slowly in response to tragedy;
- to submit our responses and emotions to the leading of the Holy Spirit;
- to reflect personally on our attitudes and actions and repent of any areas where we have allowed prejudice to take root;
- to contact local, state, and national governments/authorities to share their concerns and to help catalyze change: and
- to treat ALL life as precious to God.

For Seventh Day Baptists and Seventh Day Baptist churches who are hurting right now, we stand with you. Let us know of any ways in which we can actively support Kingdom advancement or help overcome barriers to every tribe, tongue, race, ethnicity, and color worshipping God in your community.

With brotherly and sisterly love,

The General Council and the Coordinating Leadership Team for the SDB General Conference

Vision Map Resolution

*Note: The current Vision Map can be found at:
<https://www.seventhdaybaptist.org/vision-map/>*

Whereas the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference adopted new bylaws in 2012, reorganizing the General Council and continuing to entrust it with the responsibility to “provide creative leadership and initiative for Seventh Day Baptists” while acting with “the authority of General Conference in all denominational matters between sessions”, and

Whereas the General Council desired a tool that would help them express the mission, central ministry focus, guiding principles, and preferred culture of the Conference, in a form that would at first facilitate discussion between the General Council and the Coordinating Leadership Team (CLT), and later facilitate communication with the agencies, standing committees, and task forces of the General Conference, and

Whereas the General Council developed a Vision Map based upon structures found in the book *Leading from the Sandbox* by T. J. Addington, and

Whereas the General Council sought feedback from many individuals and groups across the Conference as they developed and refined the Vision Map, and

Whereas by 2015 the Vision Map had proved itself to be a useful tool and over the last seven years and has been used for internal General Council discussions and in conversation with the CLT and other groups within the General Conference, and

Whereas the General Council revisits and revises the language and structure of the Vision Map periodically to make it more effective tool, and

Whereas the General Council is “guided by their understanding of previous Conference action,” and

Whereas action by the General Conference in session establishes policy for the Conference,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

... that the General Conference adopts “Our mission is to equip our churches to actively advance God’s Kingdom.” as the mission statement of the conference, and

... that the General Conference affirms the content of the Vision Map presented by General Council at the 208th session in 2022, and

... that the General Conference supports the use of the Vision Map to guide the decision-making of General Council and to clarify communication with the CLT and other groups within the General Conference, and

... that the General Conference encourages the General Council to review the Vision Map as part of its annual routine and to adopt changes as they are necessary to further the mission of the Conference or to foster better communication within the Conference.