

Report of the General Council

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

June 21, 2024

Several matters for General Conference consideration required work past the deadline for the publication of the Yearbook. We will provide an addendum to this report at the General Conference sessions.

State of the General Conference

The Seventh Day Baptist General Conference is an association, a network, of churches with a common faith and practice who have voluntarily banded together to encourage and support each other as we, individually and collectively, pursue the ministry opportunities, the good work that God sets before us. God has blessed us with churches, employees, leaders, volunteers, and friends who are dedicated to and enthusiastic about our shared mission.

The General Conference elects five people, one each year for a five-year term, to serve as voting members of the General Council. The five elected members serve with two non-voting, ex-officio members: the Executive Director and the Financial Officer. The General Council is entrusted with the responsibility to provide creative leadership and to carry out the will of the General Conference between business sessions.

Your General Council delights in hearing about and seeing the results of people from the Conference working together to equip our churches to actively advance God's kingdom. We are impressed and encouraged by the persistent effort, teamwork, pursuit of goals, and consideration of new opportunities demonstrated by people across the Conference.

Twelve years ago, the General Conference reorganized itself. Now that a decade (and COVID) has passed, the General Council has considered the changes that flowed from the reorganization. We believe those changes facilitated healthy collaboration among the core directors of the Conference, provided a path to a more unified budgeting and spending process, strengthened our ability to identify crucial aspects of our shared ministry, created the opportunity to articulate a shared mission and vision, and encouraged deepening partnerships between the Conference, Missionary Society, and Memorial Fund Trustees. In other words, we believe the Conference culture and ministry relationships are healthier than they were 12 years ago.

The stage is well set for the General Conference to pursue living better into our mission of equipping our churches to actively advance God's kingdom. Please pray that our Father will grant clarity, unity, common language, resources, and passion (in the sense that Paul was passionate about spreading the gospel to the Gentiles) for the shared ministry He sets before us in the coming years.

Executive Director

The Rev. Dr. Carl P. Greene serves well as the Executive Director of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference. We reviewed his work last year in preparation for the General Conference's

confirmation of his appointment to a second three-year term (2022-25) already in progress. His performance this year confirms what we wrote last year.

Carl provides excellent leadership. He represents the General Conference in the appropriate ecumenical spaces and builds relationships in ways that strengthen connections with organizations that pursue similar goals. He is in frequent communication with the Allied Societies of the Conference, ensuring good working relationships with the Memorial Fund Trustees and with the Missionary Society. He serves as the convenor of the Coordinating Leadership Team and facilitates their regular communication. He supervises the Core Directors of the Conference and works to clarify areas of ministry ability and responsibility. Even as we recognize a healthier balance than exists now can be achieved, Carl is helping the director team establish healthy rhythms of goal setting, achievement checking, and resting.

Carl helps the General Council remember the vision, set the right kind of goals, and make long-term plans. He is goal-oriented and helps the General Council maintain 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 when he interacts with us in General Council meetings. He points to the accomplishments of core directors, administrative assistants, standing committees, councils, and interns. He searches for and shares stories about good things happening in churches. He looks for opportunities to make sure that the good work done by others is seen and noticed.

We believe that the General Conference benefits 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 term. General Conference bylaws indicate we should make this decision one year before the conclusion of the Executive Director's term. Accordingly, we make the following recommendation.

Recommendation A.

The General Council recommends that the General Conference confirm The Rev. Dr. Carl P. Greene to a third term as the Executive Director of the General Conference (2025–2028).

Indemnification Process

Based on 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. Most Seventh Day Baptist churches have signed the document and returned the supporting documentation to the Conference office.

A few churches have not yet completed the process.

Your General Council sent a certified letter to these churches in January to let them know that failure to complete the process will result in a recommendation this year to have the General Conference remove them from this list of member churches. Director John Pethel and Intern Asabe

Miller have diligently worked to ensure that we have done all that we know to do to help churches finish the process. Unfortunately, a few churches have failed to act.

Since we know the General Conference desires to give every church a full opportunity to finish the process before the General Conference session, we are holding recommendations about completing the indemnification process for the addendum to this report.

Conference Event Alignment

One highlight of last year's General Conference was an event designed to help us think collectively about how we can better align the Conference event with our mission. Multiple groups of people gathered in our primary meeting space to talk, generate, and capture ideas, and then to report to the whole group one of the ideas that the group thought was great. Your General Council collected the list of ideas, sifted through them, and generated the summary document appended to this report. We shared the gist of the ideas with President-Elect Tom Davis, and he will experiment with some initial steps toward aligning the Conference event with our mission and vision.

Aligning the Conference Event with our mission and vision will be an iterative process that leads us to ask unexpected questions and to experiment with new ways of doing things. Please keep your General Council and all of us in prayer as we work together to discern the best ways to organize and use the time when we gather.

General Conference Event in 2025

As reported last year, your General Council encourages the Conferences Coordinator and Conference Presidents to experiment with separating the business and connectional portions of the Conference Event by focusing on business at the start of the event and connection at the end. Both the 2023 and 2024 events follow variations of that model. Alongside alignment considerations, we will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of separating the business and connectional portions of the event.

In this spirit of experimentation, President-Elect Tom Davis asked whether it would be possible to start the General Conference event on a Tuesday or Wednesday and still accomplish what we must do. General Council considered the request, thought that it might be possible with careful planning, and encouraged him to work with the Conferences Coordinator to see what is possible. We expect that the General Conference sessions will not start on Sunday in 2025, but plans for the session have not been finalized.

Bylaw Changes Required for Electronic Business Sessions

Our current bylaws require business sessions of the General Conference to be physical gatherings of the delegates. Last year, the General Conference proposed changes to our bylaws to enable electronic sessions of the General Conference (first reading).

Recommendation B.

The General Council **recommends** that *Article III. Meetings* of the General Conference bylaws be amended by inserting (between the first and second sentences) the sentence "General Conference may occur in person or by electronic means, such as video conferencing, that permit speaking, the display of text, and voting by delegates."

If the General Conference delegates adopt this recommendation by a two-thirds vote, we amend the bylaws (second reading). With the amendment, Article III will read (added language in bold):

Article III. Meetings

A meeting, session, or conference, herein called “General Conference” shall be held annually or at such times and places as the General Conference may from time to time determine. **General Conference may occur in person or by electronic means, such as video conferencing, that permit speaking, the display of text, and voting by delegates.** Delegates, when assembled under the corporate name and in the manner prescribed by its Certificate of Incorporation and Bylaws, shall have and may exercise all the powers, rights and privileges of a meeting of the corporation. Roberts Rules of Order (the most recent edition) shall guide parliamentary procedure at meetings.

Proposed Resolution on Human Trafficking

The 2023 session of the General Conference referred a statement drafted by the Interest Committee on Christian Social Action and Disaster Relief to the Standing Committee on Christian Social Action and Disaster Relief (CSADR) for further consideration in consultation with the General Council. CSADR collaborated with a General Council representative and is presenting a resolution on Human Trafficking in their 2024 report to General Conference. We appreciate CSADR’s work to find organizations actively engaged in preventing human trafficking and rescuing people who are trapped by it. We especially appreciate their efforts to identify an organization with which individual Seventh Day Baptists could partner if they so choose.

Recommendation C.

The General Council **recommends** that General Conference adopt the Proposed Resolution on Human Trafficking presented in CSADR’s 2024 report.

Budget

The ongoing ministry of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference is supported by new gifts (large and small), income and principal from past large gifts (often designated for specific ministries), income from sales and services, and grants from the Memorial Fund and other granting organizations.

The last page of this report is the summary document of the working 2024 budget. It shows expected income and projects how we expect to spend those funds in support of our overall mission. We encourage you to review the budget summary. In particular, look for the ministry categories that stretch across the columns (Administration, Church Development, Communication, Leadership Development, and Gospel Saturation). See the kinds of expenses identified across the rows (programs, compensation, travel, facilities, and overhead). Those ministry categories and kinds of expenses describe how we are living into our shared mission and vision. Consider using the budget summary as one more tool to help you pray for the ministry God has given us together.

Last year, the General Conference adopted a budgeting process that encourages the General Council, in consultation with core directors and in partnership with the Memorial Fund trustees, to create a budget in the fall for the following calendar year that reflects the ministry priorities

approved by the General Conference in session. This process anticipates a time when delegates of the General Conference will vote on the budget in a virtual special session. With our current flow, your General Council adopts a budget for the calendar year and presents the budget to General Conference for ratification at our annual session.

2024 Budget Recommendation

Recommendation D.

The General Council **recommends** that General Conference ratify the adoption of the attached document, “Seventh Day Baptist Summary of 2024 Operating Income & Expense Budget” as the General Conference Budget for 2024.

Additional Information Regarding 2023 Conference Action

Ministerial Interest–Website Statement

The 2023 report of the Ministerial Interest Committee suggested that General Council explore making a statement on the Conference website “clarifying that we as a conference are open to females in ministry.” (The text of the suggestion is in the attached implementation report.)

Your General Council has begun to explore making a statement on the website. To the best of our knowledge, the General Conference in session has never made a statement about females serving churches in pastoral or diaconal roles. We know that the churches of the Conference have differing understandings about what the whole counsel of Scripture teaches about female service in pastoral and diaconal roles. We did not prioritize finishing our exploration of this suggestion in the 2023-24 ministry year, but we do intend to have a more considered response in our 2025 report to General Conference.

CSADR Interest—Topics and Statements

The 2023 report of the Interest Committee on Christian Social Action and Disaster Relief urged the General Council to review several topics to decide if further action on the part of the General Conference is needed. (The text of the urge is included in the attached implementation report.)

The Conference directors include mental health and social brokenness issues in the rotation of continuing education topics that are developed for The Summit (pastors conference) and other church leader training sessions.

The Standing Committee on Christian Social Action and Disaster Relief has this last year developed a resolution for the Conference’s consideration relating to human trafficking and has identified an organization with which interested people can partner.

We believe that the directors, training processes, and CSADR are identifying ways that the General Conference can address these matters while staying focused on our primary mission.

Church Development Interest–Membership Process

The 2023 report of the Interest Committee on Church Development recommended that the General Council and Executive Director investigate changing the standards of Conference membership to eliminate the requirement for a certain number of church members. The report also recommended

the development of a plan to review and renew membership in five-year increments. (The full text of the recommendation is included in the attached implementation report).

A goal of the membership process adopted by the General Conference is to ensure that churches admitted to Conference membership have demonstrated stability. While our membership documentation does include a numerical target for minimum membership, the long-standing practice of the Conference has been to consider the number of members as one factor among the many which can demonstrate stability.

One General Conference focus over the last decade has been to create a clear path for churches who wish to join the Conference. The Director of Church Development and Church Planting Coordinator have created and are implementing a Church Planting Funnel which helps everyone involved see how the process works.

We agree that there is an ongoing need to update the documented membership standards. However, we think that it is wise to gain a couple more years of experience with the Church Planting Funnel so that we can develop a comprehensive revision that reflects what we discover to be the practices that work best.

Another focus of the General Conference directors over the last several years is developing tools that can help member churches focus on church health. The PULSE process is the star of the show. Internally, the core directors in consultation with the General Council have been working to identify the basic health and connectedness of member churches. This is ongoing work that helps us identify the kind of help the Conference can offer to equip Conference churches to actively advance God's Kingdom.

Nominations, Elections, Vacancies and Appointments

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, 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.

Reporting on Appointed Offices

The addendum to this report will include a list of appointees.

Winter Virtual Delegate Forum

The second Winter Virtual Delegate Forum (WVDF) was hosted by Zoom on January 7, 2024. The forum was open to anyone who signed up. The Forum consisted of presentations followed by breakout groups that were for asking questions, sharing ideas, and just talking about Conference

ministry. More people participated in the forum this year than last year. We anticipate hosting a session in early January 2025.

Conference Center Building

Ron and Renee Ochs continue to guide us through the process of strategically addressing decades of deferred maintenance and making long-overdue improvements to the Conference Center. The improvements made in the last year significantly upgrade the look and feel of the space as you enter the building, highlighting our mission statement, and making that space easily available for gatherings too large to fit in the upstairs conference room. Carl Greene continues to discover ways to use this valuable resource to further our mission as a Conference. We expect that the Conference Center Building will become more attractive, usable, and valuable over the next few years.

Meetings of General Council

Your General Council met six times in the 2023–24 ministry year:

- September 24, 2023, by video
- November 10–13, in person, Daytona Beach, FL
- February 11, 2024, by video
- March 17, 2024, by video
- May 17-19, 2024, in person, Janesville, WI
- June 20, 2024, by video

We expect to meet in person on July 21, 2024, in Buckhannon, WV.

Respectfully Submitted,

Elected Members:

Andrew Camenga, Ericessen Cooper, Erin Inabnit, Maura Mazza, Steve Osborn

Ex-Officio Non-Voting Members:

Carl Greene, Ron Ochs

Summary of Conference Event Alignment Ideas

This is a summary of the ideas generated at the “Future of Conference Week” gathering at the 2023 General Conference small group sessions.

- Train With Purpose
(align the kind of training with the mission and vision of the Conference)
- Create Training Tracks & Provide Cross Track Interaction
(let people focus on a training topic that makes sense – but make sure there are times for the whole group to interact)
- Distribute Materials
- Provide Objective Models of Church Health
- Use Experts When Wise
(be willing to bring trainers from outside the Conference if it makes sense)
- Involve More People In Leading Program Events
- Identify Promising Leaders
- Create Networking Focused Opportunities
(including intergenerational connecting)
- Engage the Public around the Conference Site
 - Public Events
(advertised services / programs)
 - Community Service
(do something to “leave it better” than when we arrive)
- Invite Aggressively / Intentionally
 - Advertise
 - Promote Content Early
 - Personally Invite
 - Church planters
 - Key church revitalizers
 - Youth
 - Younger adults
 - Subsidize The Cost When Necessary
- Pick locations conducive to engaging or inviting
- Pray together
- Launch Ministry Opportunities
(see the Conference event as the official “start” for ...)
 - Gather at Conference
 - Finish Training -or- provide encouragement
 - Send with Blessing

Implementation Report: from 2023 business

One responsibility of your General Council is to include in our report “an account of the implementation of previous General Conference action.” The General Conference has adopted three action words for General Council to track: suggest, urge, and recommend. What follows is a report about every suggestion, urge, or recommendation made by General Conference in last year’s business sessions¹.

Many items represent specific one-time tasks. These are marked “completed” when accomplished. An item is marked “in process” if work has begun on the task and it will be completed as resources allow. If an item cannot or will not be completed, this document will provide a reference to the report that explains the decision.

Some items refer to an ongoing focus or effort. Each of these items is marked “completed” when an initial implementation has happened. “In process” is used to indicate that an item has been considered and there is an intent to implement it when resources allow. If an item cannot or will not be completed, this document will provide a reference to the report that explains the decision.

Budget and Finance

- ... the Committee **suggests** that the General Council periodically communicate their progress on the budgeting process to the SDB membership during the year. **(In Process — The intent of General Council is to keep members of the Conference informed about the budgeting process. We are looking for ways to communicate the information in clear and timely ways.)**

Christian Social Action and Disaster Relief

- [As amended by Conference] **Recommendation 1:** We **RECOMMEND** the adoption of the Statement from SDB Leadership Concerning Racism as presented by General Council (with one change: replacing “affect” with “support” in the fourth paragraph). **We further recommend** that upon adoption of this resolution that the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference of USA and Canada, Ltd. mail every member church, sponsored church, and applicant for membership a copy of this resolution. **(Distribution by mail—Complete)**

- We **URGE** pastoral training to continue to develop further education for church leaders on social brokenness issues (domestic abuse, child abuse, conflict resolution, Sexual identity, etc.) and develop an adequate referral list of resources and counselors for church leaders to look to for guidance and leadership when these issues are involved. **(continuing to develop materials: Complete) (developing a referral list: In Process)**

- We **URGE** General Council to review the topics discussed in the CSADR Interest Committee meetings, and decide if further action is needed on these topics,

¹ This list does not include recommendations that were self-executing. For instance, it does not track actions such as the adoption of bylaw amendments, the election or confirmation of officers, or the ratification of the budget.

which include: Drugs; Homelessness; Media Indoctrination; Training to assist churches in dealing with mental health, addiction, etc., Child Abuse; Statement on Marriage (defining man and woman?) **(Refer to “CSADR Interest—Topics and Statements” in the General Council report.)**

Church Development

→ **Recommendation 1:** We **recommend** that the general council with the conference executive director investigate changing the standards for church membership in the conference to eliminate the requirement of a specific number of members but rather concentrate on the areas of leadership, beliefs consistent with those of the Seventh Day Baptist general conference and group stability and survivability with a goal of making a recommendation to the next general conference session. As a show of example for that model, **we further recommend** that a plan be proposed that would bring about a system of reviewing and renewing the membership of Seventh Day Baptist churches as members of the conference based on the same qualifications as incoming churches with that review being done in five-year increments based on the year of membership of the church. **(Refer to “Church Development Interest—Membership Process” in the General Council report.)**

Communications

→ Recommendation 1: We **recommend** that T&CC consider the importance of our Spanish speaking members and make available church publications in Spanish and English. **(In Process: Exploring different options for a sustainable and accurate process.)**

→ Recommendation 3: We **recommend** the 2024 conference president plan to include a seminar to assist churches in web design and new technology. **(This will not happen at General Conference—but virtual training sessions have been advertised and provided during the year.)**

Courtesies Coordinator

→ **Recommendation 2:** The Executive Director and Conferences Coordinator shall send a letter of appreciation from the General Conference to Hannah Patterson with the office of Event Services at Calvin University. **(Complete)**

→ **Recommendation 3:** The Executive Director and Conferences Coordinator shall send letters of appreciation from the General Conference to any guest speakers or participants during Conference Week 2023. **(Complete)**

→ **Recommendation 4:** The Corresponding Secretary shall send letters of greetings to the retired pastors and wives and widows, as well as retired and serving missionaries who were unable to attend this Conference. **(Complete)**

History

→ We **urge** the Council to continue developing ways of preserving digital media such as websites for historical purposes. We **encourage** churches to work

with the Council on History and use its resources. **(In Process — Director Kersten has used Archive.org to save snapshots of major Conference websites. Additional work is planned.)**

Ministerial

→ **Suggestion 1:** We suggest that as the Committee on Faith & Order revises the SDB Manual of Procedures, that it also considers clarifying requirements of pastors coming from other SDB Conferences outside the US and Canada. **(In Process — Will be considered when the Manual of Procedures is updated, but we do not know when we will be able to devote resources to revising the Manual of Procedure.)**

→ **Suggestion 2:** We suggest that the General Council explore making a statement on the Conference's website clarifying that we as a conference are open to females in ministry; making sure there is opportunity if they feel so called. **(Refer to "Ministerial Interest-Website Statement" in the General Council report.)**

→ **Suggestion 3:** We suggest that the Council on Ministry explore guidelines for associate pastors and non-pastoral leaders such as deacons and lay-elders for sabbaticals. **(In Process)**

→ **Suggestion 4:** We suggest that the leaders of SDBU explore offering Spanish-language courses and other practical ministry tools that pastors, and ministry leaders may need, with the goal of adding these tools to SDBU's curriculum. **(In Process—The Missionary Society and General Conference are working together to translate the TIME program into Spanish. Developing additional resources is a priority.)**

→ **Recommendation 1:** We recommend that the Council on Ministry make accreditation credentials meaningful and evaluate the holistic health of a pastor (academic, emotional, physical, and spiritual etc.). **(In Process — COM is actively working to design a meaningful credential.)**

Reference and Council

→ The committee **urges** General Council to complete the indemnification process by General Conference next year. (almost **Complete — see this report and the 2024 addendum**)

Seventh Day Baptist Summary of 2024 Operating Income & Expense Budget

Income	Administration		Church Development		Communication		Leadership		Gospel Saturation		Budget
	Conference Services	Building Operations	COSAR	Revitalization	Planting	Communications	CEC	Historical	Women's Society	Christian Social Action	
Giving	122,000.00	16,600.00	5,000.00	104,200.00	16,000.00	58,000.00	19,000.00	0.00	13,600.00	0.00	354,400.00
Investment	14,700.00	8,000.00	47,400.00	0.00	4,000.00	46,000.00	45,000.00	52,400.00	3,800.00	1,600.00	222,900.00
Sales / Services Income	20,000.00	0.00	0.00	300.00	0.00	400.00	50,704.00	2,350.00	800.00	0.00	74,554.00
Grants	93,700.00	6,200.00	0.00	79,200.00	139,900.00	18,750.00	101,250.00	0.00	2,500.00	0.00	441,500.00
Other					8,200.00						8200.00
Total Income	\$250,400.00	\$30,800.00	\$52,400.00	\$183,700.00	\$168,100.00	\$123,150.00	\$215,954.00	\$54,750.00	\$20,700.00	\$1,600.00	\$1,101,554.00

Expense	Administration		Church Development		Communication		Leadership		Gospel Saturation		Budget
	Conference Services	Building Operations	COSAR	Revitalization	Planting	Communications	CEC	Historical	Women's Society	Christian Social Action	
Programs	50,000.00	0.00	22,800.00	49,900.00	107,200.00	34,750.00	158,287.00	12,250.00	11,800.00	1,000.00	447,987.00
Compensation	157,030.00	0.00	0.00	142,232.00	26,500.00	69,920.00	58,697.00	26,515.00	0.00	0.00	480,894.00
Travel	28,000.00	0.00	0.00	9,000.00	5,000.00	3,000.00	6,500.00	1,500.00	2,500.00	0.00	55,500.00
Facilities	3,860.00	29,472.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	33,332.00
Overhead	40,090.00	0.00	480.00	2,560.00	1,000.00	16,200.00	2,500.00	1,150.00	1,960.00	460.00	66,380.00
Other											
Total Expense	\$278,980.00	\$29,472.00	\$23,260.00	\$203,692.00	\$139,700.00	\$123,870.00	\$225,984.00	\$41,415.00	\$16,260.00	\$1,460.00	\$1,084,093.00

Income/(Loss) (\$28,580.00) \$1,328.00 \$29,140.00 (\$19,992.00) \$28,400.00 (\$720.00) (\$10,030.00) \$13,335.00 \$4,440.00 \$140.00 \$17,461.00