

Appendix C

CHURCH MANUAL: CHAPTER 5

Organizing, Uniting, and Dissolving Churches and Companies

Organizing a Church

A church is organized by an ordained pastor on the recommendation of the conference executive committee. (For the procedure for organizing a company, see p. 38.) Since so much is involved in the organization of a church, the local conference president should be invited to be present.

When a company of baptized believers is prepared to assume the responsibilities of an organized church, it must consult with the conference president and obtain approval from the conference executive committee prior to seeking a date for the organization to take place.

When the baptized believers assemble on the agreed-upon date, the individual officiating should first present a brief review of the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

Then the one presiding should make a call asking all who are in agreement with these principles and who desire to unite in church fellowship to come forward. The name of each person should be recorded. If any are already members of the conference church or another congregation, the one officiating should present the letters of transfers they have secured. Those transferring form the nucleus of the congregation.

If, however, there are no transferring members, then three members (preferably established Sabbath keepers among those present) should be selected as a nucleus. They may be asked these questions: Do you accept Christ as your personal Savior? Are you in full harmony with the principles of faith that have just been presented? Have you been baptized by immersion? Are you in regular standing and enjoying one another's confidence?

If they answer these questions in the affirmative, the three are declared the nucleus of the new church. Then one after another the names that were recorded are called, each person is asked the questions listed in the preceding paragraph, and the presiding person takes a vote among the nucleus to receive each individual into church fellowship. Each person thus received becomes a member of the church and is qualified to vote on the next name. Care should be taken to see that full fellowship and brotherly love exist among those received into membership. Should any difficulty arise in any case over a question either of doctrine or of fellowship, action should be deferred unless the matter can be adjusted kindly and tactfully.

When the nucleus has voted on all potential members, the church is a complete entity and ready for election of officers. Members then should choose a nominating committee, with the officiating pastor serving as chairperson. The nominating committee brings in nominations to fill the various church offices. When these have been elected, the elders should be ordained, unless they have already been ordained as elders. A similar but shorter service should take place for ordination of deacons and deaconesses. The church then is fully organized and ready for service.

Before the organizing meeting ends, the members should vote to request the conference to receive the newly organized church into the sisterhood of churches at the next conference session.

To maximize success of the new congregation, conference and local leaders should see that all officers are fully instructed concerning their duties. The church also should have the materials needed for the communion service, which, if possible, should be celebrated as part of the organizational meeting. The treasurer, the clerk, and the other officers should receive all the necessary records or equipment needed to carry out their responsibilities.

Organizing a Company

Where a number of isolated believers reside near one another or where they belong to a small group, house church, or church planting core group, they should consider forming a company of believers for fellowship, worship, and mission with the objective of growing into an organized church or multiplying house churches in that geographical area.

Company status is approved by vote of the conference committee, which, should it become necessary, may subsequently dissolve the company. The division and/or conference should have written guidelines for organizing companies within its territory.

Church members who are part of small groups or house groups may form the nucleus of a new company. Membership of all those who want to be part of a company should be held in either the conference church or a local church (mother church). If membership for those who want to be part of a company is to be held in the conference church, the conference committee will vote their membership transfers to the conference church and indicate that they are part of the new company.

When the conference committee approves establishment of a company, a leadership team should be appointed, including a leader, a clerk, and a treasurer. The appointment should be carried out by the district pastor, or other pastor appointed by the conference committee, in counsel with the group being established as a company.

All other company appointments should be made by vote of those who are part of the group that is forming the company. The district pastor or other person authorized by the conference committee shall preside at such a meeting. Only members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in regular standing shall be appointed.

The leader of a company shall not be ordained to that office and does not have the authority to perform those functions that are vested in an elder of a church. However, where exceptional circumstances warrant, the conference committee may appoint a person of church experience and leadership ability to serve as elder of the company.

The clerk of the company shall keep record of all activities and meetings of the company and shall send regular statistical reports to the mother church or the conference executive secretary. These reports should include statistics on attendance and activities of the company, including outreach ministries conducted during the week or on Sabbath.

The treasurer of the company shall keep record of all money received and disbursed and shall send promptly, at the time established by the conference, all tithes and offerings, other than funds collected for local purposes, to the conference treasurer, who also is treasurer of the conference church.

If the members of an organized company are members of the conference church, the company does not possess the right to administer discipline or transfer or receive members. All such matters must be referred to the conference committee, which constitutes the board of the conference church. The conference president is the elder of the conference church.

If the conference organizes a company through a neighboring mother church instead of through the conference church, the functions listed above (such as reporting and membership) would be cared for by/through the mother church.

Since a company should want to grow and eventually be recognized as a church, its leadership should prepare members for church status by promoting all activities generally carried on by a church.