

**The Combined Report from the Study of Organizational Structure Task Force**  
*Advent Christian General Conference*  
· December 17, 2025 ·

### **Introduction**

As instituted by the Executive Council, the work of this task force commenced in June 2024, labors being shared by two groups chaired respectively by Nathaniel Bickford and Tom Loghry. Both groups met their deadline of producing reports by September 2025. Following the Executive Council meetings of that month, Paul Dean took up his role as chair of the task force for the stage of synthesis, bringing Nathaniel and Tom together to produce the combined report now before you. As the initial reports were considered, they were found to be consonant with one another, though differing in emphasis and the detail provided. In light of this, the insights of both have redounded to the benefit of creating a proposal that as a united whole addresses the needs that have been identified by both groups and which is believed to be achievable.

In what follows, we present the current form of the denomination's structure and consider its effectiveness in fulfilling the biblically grounded purpose that is sought in forming any denomination. After identifying particular weaknesses, we put forward feasible recommendations that we believe will improve the health of our denomination. To be clear, it is not suggested that we present here a cure-all for the woes that afflict the denomination. Rather, in keeping our concern limited to the sphere of our task, our aim is to recommend a course of action that will demonstrate a commitment to both faithfulness and excellence in this aspect of our denominational life.

### **Describing the Current Denominational Structure**

The structure of the Advent Christian General Conference is congregationalist in nature. Matters of the local church are determined by the local congregation; matters concerning the local conference, region, or General Conference are largely determined by delegates sent from Advent Christian congregations.<sup>1</sup> Conferences represent the most obvious ecclesial relationship with local churches that welcomes the possibility of oversight; churches become Advent Christian through conference membership and pastors obtain credentials through the local conference. *In principle*, all of the aforementioned collective bodies could determine standards to which their member ministers, churches, or conferences must adhere. *In practice*, the General Conference and regions seldom hold conferences, churches, and pastors to account, even where constitutions explicitly acknowledge such authority.

This leaves the authority of the local church mostly absolute, despite the possible check that conferences might provide. Regions and the General Conference are bodies of common

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<sup>1</sup> Functionally, many pastors serve as delegates for their churches simply on the basis of their ministerial credentials. Delegates are also sent from conferences and regions to larger collective bodies. Associate institutions are also afforded delegates.

ministerial cause of which churches, among others, are stakeholders. As stakeholders, they speak into these bodies via their delegates, but need not answer to them. This being the case for these bodies, it is all the more true for their staff (e.g. Regional Superintendents, ACGC Executive Director); they serve Advent Christian churches and bodies, but have no authority beyond the resources of their own institutions.

### **What Should Be Expected of a Denominational Structure**

While denominations as such do not appear in the record of the New Testament, we do find precedence for local churches cooperating together in common purpose and appealing to leaders and bodies of higher authority to determine matters of controversy.<sup>2</sup> While it is not biblically compulsory for local churches to be members of any denomination, we do believe membership in a denomination is both permissible and advisable, presenting certain benefits. Namely, those benefits would include (1) the collective strength gathered for advancing the Gospel mission (e.g. international missions, leadership development, church planting) and (2) in establishing a safeguard of accountability to local churches in matters of Christian character, (3) in doctrinal matters essential to the integrity of Gospel, and (4) in doctrinal matters that necessarily affect the cohesive cooperation among churches in advancing the Gospel mission together (e.g. baptism, Sabbath/Sunday worship).

In summary, denominational structures exist to serve the ends of promoting missional strength in unity and upholding Gospel integrity among its member bodies, churches, and ministers. Deficiencies in achieving any one of these ends will tend to limit the achievement of those remaining, rendering the structure ineffective as a whole. Accordingly, analyzing the effectiveness of the denominational structure of the Advent Christian General Conference will require consideration of every end taken up in organizing a denomination.

### **Analyzing the Effectiveness and Sustainability of the Current Structure**

In considering the effectiveness of the present structure, our determinations follow from the previously identified purposes of a denomination, now listed and considered as follows:

#### *1. Organizing collective strength for the advance of the Gospel mission.*

The current three-tier structure (General Conference, region, local conference) and the autonomy possessed by each tier presents certain challenges in promoting a united effort throughout. While the General Conference and regions have established arrangements for mutual support under

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<sup>2</sup> See Acts 15; 21:1-26. Paul was commissioned by the Antioch church in Acts 13:1-3 but he consults the Jerusalem council as an authoritative body. In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul reminds Timothy of his ordination by a council of elders, using the same word used elsewhere for the Sanhedrin, likely referring to a council consisting of elders from multiple churches. Paul's collection for Christians in Jerusalem is also a modest example of church cooperation for a common purpose, see 1 Corinthians 16:1.

United Ministries, this mutual support does not extend to conferences. The result is a multiplication of appeals and a division of interests. While International Missions enjoys broad support under the drive of Penny Crusade, support for other needs is not as easily marshaled because of this multiplication and division and because of there being so many hands on the helm that must be persuaded before the full strength of our resources can be turned toward a united end.

As the various levels of denominational structure compete for the support of the local church, an uneasy truce has developed between conference, region, and denomination. The present layers of autonomy between these three bodies make it so that any communication and coordination among them is a challenge. There is confusion as to which layer or to what extent each layer is responsible for meeting various needs, such as planting churches, revitalizing churches, and developing new leaders.

Further, the denomination itself, and in some ways the regions and conferences, act, and are treated like, optional parachurch organizations. These things severely limit doctrinal and directional unity only to those who are well informed and particularly interested. There is a need, then, to develop a stronger denominational unity while maintaining the congregational structure so that we can successfully grow as a cohesive body of maturing and multiplying churches.

The attempted maintenance of this structure is hindered by a state of steady decline of churches, pastors, and church members. Such decline creates problems for any organization, and the impact has been felt within this denomination for some time. The many leadership positions in our local churches and current structure – whether local pastorates, denominational roles, or associated ministries (eg, campmeetings) – are increasingly difficult to fill, with fewer qualified candidates. Continued decline will only exacerbate the problems currently being faced.

In short, the present structure seems to bury untapped strength that might be brought to bear under different arrangements.

## *2. Establishing and providing accountability in matters of doctrinal and moral concern.*

Likewise, the autonomy of each layer prevents the denomination from establishing and maintaining accountability throughout. General Conference and Regional leaders are presently excluded from holding conferences and their ministers and churches to account in upholding any denominational standards. Superintendents, while offering much-needed counsel to pastors and churches, are ultimately relegated to the role of mere consultants in our present structure. Conferences do possess the authority to hold churches and ministers to account. However, because of the broader denominational culture of autonomy, there is a reticence to do so and there is great variance from one conference to the next in terms of their standards and the accountability provided.

In summary, the current structure has been ineffective in uniting and utilizing our resources to the fullest extent; it has come up short in establishing the accountability basic to denominational unity. We commend the organization of United Ministries, the ministry of superintendents, the relational warmth of our people, and the elective nature of this denominational association (churches are welcome to join or leave). However, in the face of a general need for revitalization throughout the denomination, the current structure does not support the clarity and unity of purpose that will be required to renew our strength

## **The Restructuring Proposal:**

1. To **unify** the denomination under agreed upon beliefs and purpose.
  - a. **Goal:** to unify the churches and pastors of the Advent Christian General Conference under a committed relationship, one to another in Jesus Christ, for the purpose of mutual support, accountability, shared ministry, and Christian training, together forging a common vision of cooperation in response to the Gospel commission.
  - b. **Action Required:**
    - i. Clarify the beliefs that unify us as a group of likeminded churches;
    - ii. Refine our purpose as a denomination;
    - iii. Develop mutual support and accountability based around our clarified beliefs and purpose.
  - c. **Rationale:** The local church exists to glorify and enjoy God through worship, ministry, evangelism, discipleship, and fellowship. For these churches to join together in an effective and useful way within the context of a denomination, there must be a sense of clearly defined unity and purpose among them. The changes recommended to the ACGC Articles of Association and Bylaws presented below seek to accomplish these things by refining and clarifying what we are as a denomination.
2. To **maintain** a responsible and sustainable structure of denominational organization.
  - a. **Goal:** to establish clear, yet nimble, guidelines for the organization and maintenance of regional and conference membership in the Advent Christian General Conference.
  - b. **Action Required:**
    - i. Establish the minimum number of churches that will be required for conference membership and the minimum number of conferences required for regional membership.
    - ii. Protect the integrity of existing conferences and regions that meet the minimum numbers requirements and that do not seek consolidation.
    - iii. Require the maintenance of competent ministerial committees.
    - iv. Explain the manner in which regions and conferences are to be granted or removed from the membership of the General Conference by the delegate body.
    - v. Beyond the stipulations of the bylaws, provide guidance and assistance so that conferences and regions can come into compliance with these standards.
  - c. **Rationale:** Denominational structures exist to serve the ends of promoting missional strength in unity and upholding Gospel integrity among its member bodies, churches, and ministers. To ensure that our energies are effective, it is necessary to guard against needless structure that wastes energies and resources and is ineffective in supporting this mission.

### **A Proposed Procedure to Facilitate Consolidation**

It is recognized that the standards outlined in the following bylaws indicate that certain conferences presently fall short of the required number of churches to maintain their membership. In some cases, these conferences may be content to dissolve and transfer their assets to another conference or region. However, it has been recognized that some of these conferences may wish to continue their organizational existence for the sake of certain ministries and to retain control of their assets. In such cases, it is recommended that these organizations transfer their membership in the denomination from that of a conference to that of an associate member organization. In effect, they would only be losing their license to credential new ministers and churches. Accordingly, they would no longer need to maintain a ministerial committee, thereby reducing their organizational burden.

The churches and ministers of any former conference could then be joined to an existing conference for the purpose of overseeing ministerial credentials. In some cases, an entirely new conference may need to be organized, in which case it may be advisable for the staff and/or officers of ACGC to provide assistance as needed; once organized, the new conference would be formally granted membership at the next Triennial convention. It is recommended that regions and conferences would be expected to comply with these standards by 2032.

## ACGC Articles of Association and Bylaws

*Only changed or new sections are presented in what follows.*

### ARTICLE I - Membership

Section 1. The membership of this body shall consist of churches which are members of Advent Christian Conferences; of Conferences which are members of one of the five Advent Christian Regional Associations; of the same Regional Associations of which the Conferences are members.

Section 2. Membership shall only include those regions, conferences, churches, and associate member organizations, that:

- a. Affirm and uphold the Advent Christian Statement of Faith
- b. Affirm and uphold the Advent Christian Declaration of Principles
- c. Affirm and uphold the Enduring Resolutions of the General Conference
- d. Financially contribute, directly or indirectly, to the ministry of the General Conference
- e. Cooperate with the provisions set forth in these Articles of Association and Bylaws

Section 3. Membership as an Advent Christian Conference shall be granted by the Advent Christian General Conference with the recommendation of the Executive Council and acceptance by the delegate body by a two-thirds vote at any regular or special meeting of the delegate body. Removal from membership shall follow the same procedure. Membership as an Advent Christian Conference shall require that:

- a. The membership of the conference includes at least six Advent Christian churches.
- b. These churches do not maintain membership in another Advent Christian Conference.
- c. The membership of these churches does not violate the territorial integrity of a recognized Advent Christian Conference.
- d. The conference maintains a ministerial committee in good standing for the credentialing of Advent Christian ministers and churches.

Section 4. Membership as an Advent Christian Regional Association shall require that the membership of the regional association includes at least one recognized Advent Christian Conference. Such membership shall be granted by the Advent Christian General Conference with the recommendation of the Executive Council and acceptance by the delegate body by a two-thirds vote at any regular or special meeting of the delegate body. Removal from membership shall follow the same procedure.

Section 5. Any organization located in North America, serving a constituency of the Advent Christian General Conference, may become an Associate Member of the Advent Christian General Conference upon the recommendation of the Executive Council and acceptance by the delegate body by a two-thirds vote at any regular or special meeting of the delegate body. Removal of associate members shall follow the same procedure.

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*There is great similarity between what is found below and the original. Stronger and more succinct wording has been introduced that also aligns with the recommendations presented here.*

## ARTICLE II - Object

The object of this body shall be to serve the Advent Christian people in furthering the fellowship of their faith, in advancing the ordering of their church life, and in encouraging and administering their common endeavors to fulfill the Great Commission in all its intent, as follows:

1. To serve in furthering the fellowship of their faith.
  - a. By establishing the Statement of Faith.
  - b. By establishing the Declaration of Principles.
  - c. By setting forth Enduring Resolutions.
  - d. By providing a design for united action.
  - e. By organizing gatherings for fellowship.
  - f. By providing an orderly means of communication.
  
2. To serve in advancing the ordering of their church life.
  - a. By establishing minimum criteria for denominational membership.
  - b. By establishing minimum criteria for the ordination of ministers.
  - c. By establishing credentialing committees of review and appeal for denominational members and ministers.
  - d. By addressing various concerns of the local church through Conferences, Regions, and the General Conference.
  - e. By providing means of cooperation with other organizations and movements.
  - f. By providing a program of stewardship and denominational finance.
  - g. By organizing retirement benefits for the welfare of Advent Christian ministers and workers.
  - h. By providing a corporation to receive, hold in trust, or otherwise care for all properties and business matters delegated to it by the Association.
  
3. To serve in encouraging and administering their common endeavors to fulfill the Great Commission.
  - a. By providing a program of leadership development.
  - b. By providing for missionary outreach at home and abroad.

- c. By providing a program of church planting.
- d. By publishing materials for the benefit of Advent Christian churches and ministers.

In fulfilling these objectives, this body will promote and express the fulfillment of our Lord's great prayer for the unity of His people (John 17:11-23).

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*Recommended that Article VIII - Court of Appeal be replaced so as to delineate lines of accountability while retaining the function currently detailed.*

## ARTICLE VIII - General Conference Ministerial Committee

### Section 1.

Every Advent Christian Conference shall maintain a ministerial committee for the credentialing of Advent Christian ministers and churches. To remain in good standing, a ministerial committee must include a minimum of three members ordained to Advent Christian ministry and uphold the standards of Article I, Section 2. These committees are authorized to issue and revoke Advent Christian credentials for ministry and to make recommendations for the decision of the Conference delegate body regarding the membership of churches in the Conference. The decisions of these ministerial committees shall be recognized by the Advent Christian General Conference unless they are (1) overturned by the Conference delegate body or (2) further appeal is made to the General Conference Ministerial Committee through which their decision may be overturned by the General Conference delegate body.

### Section 2.

The General Conference Ministerial Committee (GCMC) shall oversee the denominational membership and credentials of all Advent Christian regions, conferences, churches, ministers, and associate members. The members of this committee shall include every ordained regional superintendent and one ordained Advent Christian minister from each region as elected by the delegate body of said minister's region for a term of three years, not to exceed two consecutive terms. In such cases in which the regional superintendent is not ordained or the region lacks a superintendent, the concerned regional board may appoint an ordained minister from their region to this committee until such time as a regional superintendent can serve in this capacity. The committee shall select one of its members by the vote of the majority to serve as the chair of the committee.

### Section 3.

The GCMC shall be empowered to determine the course of action that should be taken as far as it concerns the standing of any Advent Christian region, conference, church, or minister. The committee shall convene at least twice a year to (1) review reports that shall be submitted

annually by every Advent Christian ministerial committee, (2) receive any relevant appeals for adjudication, (3) consider matters within the committee's scope of oversight deserving inquiry, (4) and make any necessary determinations, referring any necessary actions to the parties concerned and the most immediate denominational body of oversight. Whenever such determinations are not heeded by those being advised, the GCMC shall be empowered to present a recommended action to the General Conference delegate body, up to and including removal from denominational membership and revoking denominational credentials.

#### Section 4.

The approval of any such determinations or recommended actions shall require that a minimum of two-thirds of the members vote in favor of the proposed motion; excluded from this percentage are any committee positions left vacant.

#### Section 5.

Before any appeal is made to the GCMC, it should first be heard by the relevant conference ministerial committee. If after such a hearing an appeal is made to the GCMC, any costs involved in this further appeal shall be advanced by the party appealing to the GCMC. In the event that the decision is favorable to the appellant, the costs will be refunded by the General Conference.

## Summary and Conclusion

The goal of this analysis and these suggestions is not for the mere sake of change. Change in itself has no meaningful purpose, although at times change is beneficial and even necessary. Instead, the goal of all that has been presented is for the sake of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and his glory, first and foremost, and simultaneously for the building up of his church within the Advent Christian denomination – locally, regionally, and internationally – for the work of the ministry together (Ephesians 4:12); greater unity among like-minded churches (Ephesians 4:13); and the continued maturity of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:13), all so that Advent Christian churches throughout the United States and the world may be used by God for the growth of his Kingdom today and until our Savior returns.

To these ends, we have proposed a series of changes that seek to provide for better partnerships among local churches; reduces the number of positions throughout the denomination to free up resources; enables a coordinated and cooperative effort between local churches and the various levels of the denomination; sets forth an agreed upon vision, purpose, and ministry focus at all levels; calls us to unify around agreed upon doctrinal essentials; with all of these helping us to pursue an effective and coordinated strategic plan.

Although it was discussed in our meetings, we have not addressed the relationship between ACGC and the various Advent Christian conferences around the world. We do believe this relationship needs further assessment, and call for this assessment to take place in the near future, in order to foster deeper unity and partnership among all Advent Christians throughout the world, for the sake of the Gospel and the glory of our great God.

May the Lord guide, direct, and bless our efforts to honor him in partnership with one another.

In Service to Christ and His Church,  
Submitted,  
*Paul Dean (chair)*  
*Thomas Loghry*  
*Nathaniel Bickford*