

Official press release from the  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Atlanta countdown: How are church leaders elected?

Silver Spring, MD – For many Seventh-day Adventists who make the trek to General Conference Session every five years, it's a long-anticipated chance to celebrate the church's culture and values on a global scale. But for thousands of delegates, it's also a voting marathon.

This summer in Atlanta, Georgia, those delegates will consider upcoming agenda items during the 11-day international business meeting, including the election of top church leadership.

They'll accept reports from world church leaders and the church's 13 world regions, approve new church administrative bodies, elect officers and departmental directors, propose amendments to the church's constitution, bylaws and manual and consider any number of miscellaneous items added to session agenda by the church's Executive Committee.

While all 2,410 delegates vote on Session agenda items, only a select number actually nominate church officers.

During their first day in Atlanta, delegates from each of the church's 13 regions will meet and appoint a prescribed number of their members – typically around 235 total – to the Nominating Committee, according to guidelines set by the church's Working Policy. Delegates vote at the General Conference Session in St. Louis, Missouri in 2005. [ANN file photo]

Those selected as Nominating Committee members then convene to recommend candidates for various offices and departments at world church headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Any candidate the Nominating Committee chooses is immediately presented to the full body of delegates, where a majority vote determines if the nominee is elected. If he or she isn't, the Nominating Committee reconvenes to recommend someone else.

The church's highest positions – those of world church president, secretary and treasurer – are the first nominations. Presidents of the church's world regions are nominated next, the Working Policy states.

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While Nominating Committee members are free to recommend reelection for incumbents, they can also suggest another candidate. While the process is less straightforward than say, national elections, church leaders said it's designed to discourage campaigning in the run-up to Session by narrowing the time between nomination and voting.

The church's Constitution doesn't specifically dictate delegate make-up, but it's "expected and assumed" that delegates include both genders, as well as a broad range of age groups and nationalities, said Larry Evans, world church undersecretary.

The 300 members of the church's Executive Committee, which include representatives from each of its 13 regions, are automatically considered Session delegates. The remaining 2,000 and some delegates are selected proportionally as outlined in the church's Constitution. Consideration is given to factors such as church membership and the number and size of administrative entities and regional institutions in a given church region. Minimum quotas are also in place to ensure that laypeople and other non-administrative employees are among the delegates.

While it's impossible to eliminate what he calls the "human element" of the nomination and voting process, Lowell Cooper, a world church vice president, said the process is not skewed toward self-advancement.

"It's not so much the person looking for the job, so much as the job looking for the person," making the notion of campaigning immaterial, Cooper said.

Even if a potential nominee were to try to influence votes in his or her favor, Evans said it's nearly impossible to determine a delegate's vote on all issues, given the volume of agenda items considered during Session.

"Because so many things are voted on at Session, there is no feasible way of predicting each vote, or stuffing the [ballot box]," Evans said.

Delegates are given a prepared agenda of voting items, called recommendations, at session. These items are approved ahead of time by the church's Executive Committee, a process outlined in the church's Constitution and designed to give church leaders time to study the implications of any given item well before it's voted on, Evans said. While individual delegates can still "technically" add or subtract agenda items, such new proposals are generally referred to a steering committee for future consideration, he said.

"Since each change takes a substantial amount of consideration before it's voted on, it's not likely the agenda will change at Session itself," he said.

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