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“Local Self-government” **(*Manual of The Mother Church*, Article XXIII, Section 1)**

- 1889 June Mary Baker Eddy calls for the organization of Christian Science churches. (These will eventually become branches of The Mother Church, in its reorganized form as The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1892.) The National Christian Scientist Association (an organization comprised of Christian Scientists from all over the country and not just those in Eddy’s association in Boston) is to appoint a committee “to look after church work and organization” (*The Christian Science Journal*, July 1889, 178). These regional associations were often directed by teachers who were the leaders of branch churches.
- 1890 February 10 Eddy writes to Hannah Larminie, a teacher and student of hers, who has written several letters informing her of difficulties with the organization of First Church, Chicago that will continue for several years. “I leave you to your own convictions of the way in which to act, not doubting God’s promise, power and presence to sustain you.... Also I beg that you will not consider me in any way responsible for the decision you have taken or any you may take” (L06442).
- 1890 February 24 Eddy writes to Margaret Burgess, a Christian Science practitioner and student of hers, reiterating her non-involvement with problems in First Church, Chicago: “At the same time I required my son [Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy] to read the letters first, and if they were on the subject that had been named to me of difficulties in the Church — as far ago as Dec last, — to put those letters in the waste basket. I had given my advise through the Jour. in my article ‘The Way’ and was determined to take no sides either way” (L03969). “The Way” appeared in the *Journal* in December 1889 (431–434). It was later published in *Miscellaneous Writings* (355–359).
- 1892 September 23 The Church of Christ (Scientist) is reorganized with twelve members as The Mother Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts. While government of its predecessor was democratic with the members conducting church affairs by vote, in this reorganization the government is divided between Eddy, the Christian Science Board of Directors, and the First Members. (First Members were initially chosen by Eddy. They consisted of the twelve individuals who were at the meeting when The First Church of Christ, Scientist, was established in

September 1892. Additional First Members were elected by the initial dozen.) On January 10, 1901, the First Members relinquish their role in church government; on March 17, 1903, their designation becomes “Executive Members”; and on July 8, 1908, they are disbanded.

- 1893 February 8 Eddy writes to the Board of Directors once again warning against interfering in branch church affairs: “Now I enjoin it as your obligation according to the spirit of the Deed which founds the present church in Boston to participate in no way in the business of any other church. To be responsible in no way for the action of other churches but to look well to the welfare of the one I have committed to your charge” (L00041).
- 1893 February 20 Eddy sends a letter to William B. Johnson, Clerk of The Mother Church and a member of the Board of Directors, with the first version of the By-Law, closing by saying “I see the need of it.” The By-Law at that time reads: “The First Church of Christ, Scientist, Boston, shall not enter into any transaction, mission, or official relation in connection with another Church; and shall not change its present Tenets and Bylaws” (L00043).
- 1893 February 28 The By-Law as sent by Eddy is adopted as part of the Church records; there is not yet a *Manual of The Mother Church* (L00656).
- 1894 January 29 Eddy writes to her student John Filbert, again stating noninterference with branch church matters: “The system of C.S. leaves the church government solely to the church and its pastor as to who the church chooses for pastor and to his term of office. Therefore I say commit thy way to the Lord and he will direct thy path” (L09982).
- 1895 September 10 The first edition of the *Manual* includes the By-Law as follows: “Article IV. Relation with Other Churches. Section I. The First Church of Christ, Scientist, Boston, Mass., shall not enter into any transaction, mission, or official relation with another church, and shall not change its present Tenets.”
- 1895 By the second edition of the *Manual*, the By-Law has been adjusted to read: “The First Church of Christ, Scientist, Boston, Mass., shall assume no official control of other churches, of this denomination, and shall be controlled by no other church; and shall not change its present Tenets.”
- 1897 Two small changes to the By-Law are made for the sixth edition: its article is renamed “Branch Churches,” and the first few words are changed to add “in.” It now begins “The First Church of Christ,

Scientist, in Boston, Mass....”

- 1899 Another organizational change is made for the tenth edition: the section is now titled “Local Self-government. Section 1.” Additionally, there is one small text change: the word “it” is added so that the By-Law now read “and it shall be controlled by no other church.”
- 1901 March 5 Eddy writes to William B. Johnson: “Call the Church meeting and vote on this By-law. It will save much difficulty among the churches” (L00275).
- 1901 March 6 The second paragraph is added to the By-Law for the twenty-second edition, reading “This is the denominational rule of Christian Science. Each Church of Christ Scientist shall have its own form of government. No conference of churches shall be held except the annual conference at the Mother Church in Boston in June of each year. Let individual intercourse and fellowship be among the churches and that love continue whereby the brethren may encourage and strengthen one another” (L00787). (No changes to the first paragraph.)
- 1901 March Eddy writes to her student Edward Kimball to say – “Enclosed is a skeleton, God must breathe into it the breath of Life. The Bylaw on Church conference does not affect the churches in Chicago. It covers the question of disunity not unity. It was the complaints of members in N.Y. that caused me to write that by-law. When churches confer for each others benefit they will not break that by-law because the good will be mutual. It was the attempt of one party to dominate another that caused the by-law. But this is inter noce” (L07534). It is unclear precisely to what she is referring when she writes of the complaints of the New York churches, save perhaps the always-ongoing strife with Augusta Stetson.
- 1903 For the twenty-eighth edition the article is renamed “The Mother Church and Branch Churches.”
- 1903 One word, “general,” is added to the first paragraph for the twenty-ninth edition: “shall assume no general official control of other churches.” The second paragraph is modified slightly to read “Let individual fellowship be among the members and let that love continue...”
- 1905 April 26 In response to a letter from Edward A. Merritt, a practitioner in Cleveland, Ohio, requesting clarification of the By-Law, Eddy writes “Yes, all the churches in your State can meet and confer together as to the laws of your State and how to obtain justice

therefrom. May God guide your thoughts, words, and acts, redress your wrongs, and show you the remedy” (L04069).

1905 May 1

Eddy sends in an amendment to the Christian Science Board of Directors in response to Merritt’s query; it is published in the *Sentinel* that week (L00874). The second paragraph, per Eddy’s edits of May 5, now reads: “No conference of churches shall be held, except the annual conference at the Mother Church in Boston; unless it be when our churches located in the same state convene in unity and love, to confer on a statute of said state abrogating individual rights, or attempting class legislation” (L00784). This change is made for the forty-ninth edition.

1906 January 10

Ira W. Packard, a practitioner and student of Eddy’s, writes to her asking for advice about how to keep the Christian Science branch churches in Chicago unified and still obey the *Manual* By-Law. He explains that the churches dissolved their “Conference Committee” when the second paragraph of the By-Law appeared, but since then have found themselves growing apart, unable to coordinate lectures and other citywide actions (IC 438).

1906 January 17

Eddy writes back to Packard: “I thank you for your dear letter in time to avoid difficulty; prevention is better than cure. I remember when Article 8. page 74. in our Manual was required to prevent a mistake and disunity – and now it is necessary to amend it so as not to avoid another difficulty. God works in His own way, not ours. I have written the necessary amendment and shall send it tomorrow to the C.S. Board of Directors in The Mother Church to act upon it. If the amendment is adopted I will have this, said, article published in our *Sentinel* and then you can at once proceed in unity to act wisely in Conference on all matters that concern the welfare of six dear Churches in privileged, God blessed Chicago” (L08894).

Eddy writes to the Board of Directors with a proposed amendment specifically inspired by Packard’s letter about coordination among the Chicago churches: “To prevent a difficulty caused by a conference, I sent this article to you years ago and it did prevent all trouble at that time; but now a change comes over the spirit of their dream and they write me that they must meet and confer or tumble one on to another in acting!”(L00459).

1906 January 19

The first paragraph in the fifty-third edition is changed to read “The Mother Church of Christ, Scientist shall assume no general official control of other churches; and it shall be controlled by none other. This is the denominational rule of Christian Science.” The second paragraph is changed to read “Each Church of Christ, Scientist,

shall have its own form of government. No conference of churches shall be held, except the annual conference at The Mother Church, unless it be when our churches located in the same state convene in unity and love, to confer on a statute of said state, or to confer harmoniously and agree on individual unity and action of the churches in said State.”

1906 July 10

Eddy sends a change to the By-Law, adding one sentence to the first paragraph, which now reads “the Mother Church of Christ, Scientist, shall assume no general official control of other Churches; and it shall be controlled by none other. The general Communion of this Church shall be observed triennially in Boston, Mass., on the second Sunday in June. Its local Communion service shall be held annually, at the same date. In the second paragraph, the word “annual” is changed to “triennial” to match the first paragraph.

1906 July 12

The proposed changes are adopted by the Board of Directors. That same day, Lewis Strang, one of her secretaries, sends a corrected version of the proof to the Directors, making the C in Churches lower-case: “no general official control of other churches.”

1906 July

In the fifty-seventh edition the changes to the first paragraph are printed, as well as small changes to the second paragraph, which now reads: “...unless it be when our churches, located in the same State, convene to confer on a statute of said State, or to confer harmoniously on individual unity and action of the churches in said State.”

1908 June 27

In the seventy-third edition the last two sentences of the first paragraph are dropped, and the By-Law appears in its present format from this edition on.