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**MISSION OF ADVENTIST SCHOOLS  
WITH A CHANGING CLIENTELE:  
AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE**

**By**

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## INTRODUCTION

Once in the vanguard of Church work in Australia, the Seventh-day Adventist Education System is now the largest employer in the South Pacific Division. Enrolment growth in the School System has increased by twenty percent during the past decade. It manages a budget of over seventy million dollars, boasts excellent facilities and engages the minds of 10,290 students on a daily basis in 2007. While there is much cause for rejoicing, particularly amongst educators, there is a growing realization at all levels, from parents and students, to teachers and principals, to education and Church administrators, that a continuance of unfettered growth in our schools may be counterproductive to the mission of the Church in the South Pacific Division and undermine the integrity of the School System.

The stated vision of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific Division is: *'To know, experience and share our hope in Jesus Christ'*. It is time to ask some searching questions regarding the ability of Adventist Schools in Australia to continue fulfilling their mission effectively. Such questions include: Are schools true to their mission after a decade of unprecedented growth? Is an authentic Adventist worldview being maintained in our schools? Are there antecedents present which may serve to undermine the construction of an Adventist worldview in our schools? How may our schools be governed and managed to ensure they are true to the vision and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church? Such are the questions that will be explored in this paper.

## THE CONTEXT OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION SYSTEM GROWTH IN AUSTRALIA

The establishment of Adventist schools in Australia was fostered by Ellen White (Knight, 1985; Knight, 2008; White, 1903). Avondale College is a prime example of her vision for Adventist education in Australia. Mission schools slowly materialized in the late nineteenth century. During the twentieth century Adventist schools took root in major capital cities and regional areas where a significant population of Adventists existed. Often such schools were small primary schools that focused on meeting the Christian education needs of Adventist families. Many were located at the back of churches and had little public profile. The development of secondary school facilities took longer to emerge.

Up until the 1980's Adventist schools were perceived as existing to primarily serve the needs of Adventist families. A 'fortress mentality' was commonly held where our schools served to shield young people from the evil influences of a secular world and to inculcate Adventist values. It was rare to employ a non Adventist teacher. There was little effort to promote Adventist education outside of the immediate church community and the majority of Seventh-day Adventist families supported their local school. Parents and the church community often gave of freely of their time and finances to support their school.

During the late 1980's and early 1990's several factors combined to cause the South Pacific Division to call two Summit meetings to consider the shape and direction of Seventh-day Adventist education in Australia. The purpose of the Summit meetings held in 1996 and 1997 was to consider the Church's position regarding the mission of its schools. Such factors included: demands for higher levels of professionalism and improved educational facilities amongst Adventists and the broader school community; the decline of available Adventist families to maintain educationally competitive schools; competition from rapidly growing Christian schools; calls for the inclusion of non Adventists on School Boards and greater autonomy at the local school level; moves to maximise of State and Commonwealth funding; and frustration from School Boards regarding the strictures of South Pacific Division Policy in raising loan funds for the realisation of school master plans.

The stated purpose of the Summit review was:

*"...a process designed to develop a more efficient and effective system of Adventist education and to reposition our schools in the broader community as a means towards enhancing the mission of the Church". (p. 27)*

The intent of the Summit meetings was clear - a more professional and viable system which was loyal to the mission of the Church. A plethora of recommendations was generated in the areas of organizational structure, financial management, quality assurance management and the preservation of Adventist Education ethos.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the Summit meetings was the signal to the educational community that Adventist Schools were indeed an authentic arm of the mission of the Adventist Church in Australia. This was a breath of fresh air to school leaders who had long felt that they were part of a second class ministry. They were given a brief that extended beyond providing educational services to Adventist families and now had the opportunity to evangelize in the broader community by offering quality education to all who were willing to respect our Adventist worldview.

The fervor of Adventist educators to reach into the community and attract Christian and secular families into our schools is illustrated by the rapid of growth in student numbers, teaching and non teaching staff, new schools and extended campuses over the past decade.

## **CURRENT TRENDS IMPACTING THE MAINTENANCE OF MISSION IN AUSTRALIAN ADVENTIST SCHOOLS**

Changing worldviews and societal influences have shaped the perspectives of church members, teachers and administrators towards Adventist education. Strong community bonds have been replaced by consumerist, pluralist and individualistic attitudes towards schools and their services. Economic rationalism has permeated Church and School System management. An attitude of service to the Church and community is not as strong as it once was amongst pastors and

teachers. Adventist values are questioned and church member loyalty has dissipated (Gregorutti, 2008).

Such forces have created the milieu in which Australian Adventist Schools currently endeavour to remain focused on the mission of the Church. Prior to outlining the major trends which present challenges to the Adventist School System in Australia I wish to stress that there is much to be proud of in regards to the quality of education provided by Adventist schools in Australia. It is not all doom or gloom by any stretch of the imagination. The Adventist School System in Australia is indeed a system of schools with a clear philosophy, governance structure and coherent set of operational policies. This system is the envy of other Christian School Associations and should be appreciated and valued. School facilities are of an excellent standard. Our teachers are well trained and most have a strong Adventist worldview as a consequence of the majority attending our teaching training program at Avondale College, Australia. Academic standards are high. Varied cultural, sporting and service programs abound ensuring that students have ample opportunity to develop spiritually, socially, mentally and physically. It is a vibrant system run by dedicated principals and Directors of Education.

While being aware of the strengths of the Adventist School System in Australia it is important to honestly and openly consider emerging trends that impinge on the ability of schools to fulfill the mission of the church. Such trends will now be considered.

### **Increasing Non SDA Clientele**

The majority of growth in Adventist schools in Australia over the past decade has been from non SDA clientele. Statistics collated by the South Pacific Division indicate that in 1997 the percentage of non Adventists in our schools was thirty seven percent. In 2007 this figure has increased to sixty six percent. Such a figure mirrors international trends with General Conference statistics indicating that 56.9 percent of students worldwide in 2005 were non Seventh-day Adventists. Such a circumstance presents a paradox. On one hand the presence of a large non SDA component in our schools provides an outstanding evangelistic opportunity particularly when families have a secular orientation. While on the other hand it presents a challenge in terms of maintaining an Adventist worldview. Addressing such a paradox requires careful consideration by Church and School System administrators to ensure that our unique worldview is not diluted.

An increase in non SDA enrolments also precipitates additional challenges. These include: a growing cry for the inclusion of non SDA's on School Councils and Boards of Management; challenges to SDA lifestyle standards; issues of ownership; and a diminishing sense of community.

### **Changing Attitudes of Adventist Clientele**

Adventist families tend to reflect broader community attitudes. Such attitudes tend to be shaped not only by Christian values but by consumerism, individualism and pluralism. While many Adventists families are loyal to Adventist education there are those who choose other schools. Reasons often given are financial; however, this is often an excuse as Adventist schools work extremely hard to accommodate genuine church families seeking Adventist education (Gregorutti, 2008). Some feel that our schools no longer represent an Adventist worldview while others believe that their children will achieve higher academic results in more elite private schools. This has often been the case amongst upwardly mobile Adventist families. 'White flight' has also played a part in some school contexts.

Pluralism in Adventism is taking a toll with more liberal attitudes to lifestyle issues, Sabbath observance and doctrinal purity. This creates challenges for school administrators, teachers and loyal Adventists who look to other Adventist families to uphold Church standards and doctrines. When Adventists fail to uphold Church standards and doctrines, double standards become evident, and the potential of portraying the Adventist Church as a vibrant, Christ centered community of believers, who have a special end time message for the world, is made more difficult. Loyal Adventist families are caused then to question their continuance in the school of their choice.

### **Increase in Non Adventist Teacher Numbers**

Traditionally it has been very important to the Adventist School System in Australia to employ practising Seventh-day Adventist teachers. It has been strongly contended that the fulfillment of the mission of our schools hinges on the employment of committed Adventist teachers (Rasi, 2008). However, with the unprecedented growth of Adventist schools over the past decade it has increasingly become a challenge for Directors of Education to locate and employ Adventist teachers. This situation has become most apparent in those States at a distance from the Adventist hub on the East Coast, and in more isolated country centers.

In 2007 the Adventist School System in Australia employed eleven percent non Adventist full and part-time teachers as compared with three percent a decade ago. As compared to the worldwide average of twenty three percent Australia is doing well. However, such trends need to be noted and considered particularly when cognizant of the drift to secularism that has occurred over time in many educational institutions across the world. Many of these institutions started with a strong mission-focused mandate but have lost their vision and now aspire to utilitarian goals (Holmes, 1987).

Teacher quality is also becoming a concern in school communities as Adventist teacher supply becomes more of an issue. Christian and secular families in Adventist schools often argue that it is far better to employ an excellent Christian teacher rather than a mediocre or inexperienced Adventist teacher. Adventist principals and Directors of Education are finding it increasingly

difficult to counter such arguments. At times non Christian teachers are being employed as a matter of expediency. Unequivocally this creates a clash of worldviews. Gaebelein (1968) sees this as, “*surrender to expediency*”, and states:

*“The fact is inescapable; the worldview of the teacher, in so far as he is effective, gradually conditions the worldview of the pupil. No man teaches out of a philosophical vacuum”.* (p. 37)

Holmes (1987) would contend that the imperative for the maintenance of a Christian worldview is the employment of passionate, committed Christian teachers. Considered debate is required regarding whether the Adventist School System in Australia is prepared to employ Christian teachers to maintain a Christian worldview or whether the maintenance of an Adventist worldview is of a higher priority. The outcome of such a debate will determine the shape and mission of Adventist education well into the future.

### **Changing Attitudes of Adventist Teachers**

The majority of Adventist teachers in Australia maintain a strong sense of mission. Their professionalism and commitment to Adventist education are cause for rejoicing. However, it would be naïve to believe that societal attitudes and competing philosophies do not impact the Adventist teacher workforce.

Some Adventist teachers are less loyal to the school system than in the past. The Adventist Church is seen as but one employer and if employment terms and conditions or promotion possibilities are perceived to be better elsewhere they will leave the System. Some view overseas travel as attractive and will not commit to more than one or two years service in the System. Hence holding younger teachers in the Adventist System and wooing them back after overseas travel is becoming problematic.

Directors of Education and principals express concern particularly regarding the attitudes of Generation Y teachers. There is no doubt that they are products of their generation; however, care needs to be taken regarding making generalizations in regards to Generation Y. The power of Christ and the Holy Spirit on the life of a teacher, no matter the generation, works in their hearts to inspire them to serve God with passion. It is incumbent on the Adventist School System to inspire its teachers regarding the value of their service in Adventist schools and to infuse them with an Adventist worldview. This responsibility must also be shared between Adventist homes, churches, our teacher training college and inspiring Adventist work places.

### **Specialist Bible Teaching and Chaplaincy Services**

It is challenging to meet the spiritual needs of diverse school clientele and there has been a trend towards the employment of specialist Bible teachers rather than relying on generalist teachers with a ‘tacked on’ Bible loading. Such a move has merit; however, care needs to be taken to avoid teachers completely divesting themselves of the responsibility of inculcating an Adventist

worldview. Holmes (1987) would argue that such a move is counter-productive and that for a Christian worldview to be maintained all teaching staff need to be immersed in the Word of God if the mission of the school is to be enhanced.

A similar danger exists with regard to the move to employ chaplains in Australian Adventist Schools over the past decade. The trend towards the employment of chaplains has enhanced the mission of Adventist schools. However, it has tended to create an attitude in some schools where teachers feel that it is the chaplain's responsibility to meet the spiritual needs of students and that they, in turn, merely need to focus on the ever increasing demands of teaching. Such a trend is cause for concern. All members of staff need to share in the mission of the school and to sense that they, as a community of believers, are responsible for the spiritual well being of their students. Sire (1990) would contend that the building of Christian community is fundamental to the establishment of a Christian worldview and that all stakeholders must share in this responsibility.

The sea of need in terms of pastoral care and quality Bible teaching is huge. It is beyond the ability of a chosen few. The Christian imperative is for all involved in the educational enterprise to remain engaged in the mission of the Church.

### **Growing Dependence on State and Federal Government Funding**

The Adventist Church in Australia has moved from viewing State and Federal Government funding with suspicion to open acceptance of such monies for school operation, capital development and specialist projects. The School System is now heavily dependent on Government funding with over two thirds of operational funds now coming from such sources.

To the majority of Church Administrators and church members, access to Government funding has been seen as a blessing. It has enabled the development of school facilities and reduced the financial burden on church communities who for many years were struggling to cope with high levels of financial support for Adventist schools.

It needs to be recognized that the trend towards the dependence on Government funding has potential for negative consequences and the loss of shared responsibility for the Adventist School System in Australia. Schools' Companies can become saddled with significant debt in an endeavour to provide quality facilities for their clientele. At the same time church communities may lose their sense of ownership of Adventist schools. Most Adventist Churches in Australia are now required to merely contribute to the School System via free will offerings. This trend sends a message that Adventist schools are now remote and separate from local churches and levels of ownership have diminished commensurately (Sire, 1990).

### **Devolution of School Governance Responsibilities**

Traditionally the Adventist School System in Australia has operated in accordance with a strong hierarchical model. Authority flowed from the South Pacific Division Education Department to Union Conference Education Departments and, in turn to, Conference Education Departments and on to principals and School Councils. This model has served the Church well for many years; however, with school growth, professionalization of education and higher levels of System and Government accountability, devolution of responsibility became not only necessary, but expedient, as rapidly growing schools tended to move ahead of policy development or chose to ignore it to suit their own educational ends.

During the last decade there have been significant changes to Adventist School System Governance structures. In 2001 the Australian Union Conference was formed as a consequence of the amalgamation of the Trans Tasman and the Trans Australian Union Conferences. This move gave governance of Australian Adventist schools to one body – Adventist Schools Australia. Subsequent to this change in governance structure was the formation of Schools' Companies in each Australian Conference. Primarily this move was made to protect the assets of the Church; however, it introduced a more accountable and regionally focused school governance body in each Conference.

The Director of Adventist Schools Australia (Hammond, 2008) believes that the most effective form of governance is where authority is vested as close as possible to the local level. This enhances ownership and empowers systems, communities and individuals working with these communities. It has also meant a shift in responsibility for some aspects of educational administration from the Union to the Schools' Company level. Currently there is some conjecture regarding the degree of independence of Schools' Companies and South Pacific Division and Australian Union Conference policy makers will need to address issues of devolution of authority and the degree of autonomy of Schools' Companies to avoid confusion, inefficiency and frustration at all levels. The mission of the Adventist School System and Church will be enhanced as new governance structures are clarified.

The remainder of this paper will firstly seek clarification as to what represents an Adventist worldview. Secondly it will seek to identify potential initiatives and policy changes which may have utility in protecting and enhancing an Adventist worldview in Australian Adventist schools in the light of identified trends. It is to be hoped that policy and practice will be informed by such an analysis.

### **IDENTIFYING AN ADVENTIST WORLDVIEW AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS**

Whether a worldview remains latent in our minds or finds expression it nevertheless exists (Sire, 1990). It is shaped by cultural and social forces and informs our views on human existence. Rand (1975) suggests that:

*“Consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, man knows that he needs a comprehensive view of existence to integrate his values, to choose his goals, to plan his future, to maintain the unity and coherence of his life – and that his metaphysical value-judgments are involved in every moment of his life, his every choice, decision and action”. (p. 19)*

Sire (1990) defines worldview in the following manner:

*“A worldview is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world”. (p. 30)*

Of the three fundamental worldviews – naturalism, pantheism and theism – the Christian chooses theism. This worldview purports that reality consists of God and the universe, His Word and that He is prior to and separate from His creation but that He acts in it (Rasi, 2008).

Sire (1990) suggests that there are seven worldview questions that when answered assist in the formation of a set of assumptions and inform our beliefs, attitudes and approach to life. It is his contention that the Christian worldview answers these questions with clarity and consistency. These questions are:

1. *“What is prime reality – the really real?”*
2. *“What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?”*
3. *“What is human existence?”*
4. *“What happens to a person at death?”*
5. *“Why is it possible to know anything at all?”*
6. *“How do we know what is right and wrong?”*
7. *“What is the meaning of human history?” (p. 30/31)*

The formation of a Christian worldview commences with an attitude of awe and reverence towards God and His revelation through His Word and is enhanced by an attitude of humility generated by staying focused on God rather than oneself (Sire, 1990). Through immersion in the Word of God and obedience to His will the Christian mind is developed. This is a process which Sire (1990: 24) suggests is *“an endless process this side of glory”*.

It is a process in which Christian teachers need to engage if they are to be vital and relevant in reaching the questioning minds of young people (Roy, 2008). The Bible admonition regarding the importance of maintaining a focused worldview is clear when Paul writes in Colossians 2:8:

*“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ”*

An Adventist worldview accepts the major tenets of a Christian worldview; however, the twenty eight statements of fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church inform our view of the world and God’s plan of redemption. It is imperative that the Adventist Church, its pastors,

teachers and administrators continue to define and redefine our unique worldview. By focusing on the essential features of an Adventist worldview while avoiding spiritual arrogance, Adventist schools will continue to serve the mission of the Church.

Bertrand (2007) reminds us that espousing a worldview is only part of the equation when he states:

*“One of the blind spots of much worldview chatter is the failure to connect thinking and living. Worldview formation is not just a means of getting one’s intellectual ducks in a row, ensuring that one buys into the official evangelical position on the various hot-button issues of the day. Instead, worldview thinking should lead inevitably and organically to changed behavior”.* (p. 115)

It is incumbent upon Adventist schools in conjunction with parents and Church communities to ensure that the development of a Christian worldview leads to changed lives and commitment to the mission of the Church. Social forces promoting individualism and pluralism are conspiring to pull these institutions apart and it is imperative that all contribute to building Christian community, the body of Christ, if religiosity is to be transposed into deep spiritual commitment (Sire, 1990). Adventist schools are only a part of the equation.

Rasi (2008) holds that a biblical-Christian worldview provides an integrated and coherent framework that has clear implications for Adventist schools. A Christian worldview will determine the philosophy, vision, mission and objectives of a school. Further, it will influence school location and planning, administrative style, policy formation, financial management, curriculum content, teaching styles, co-curricular activities and behavior management practices. It will also inform employment practices and enrolment processes. An Adventist worldview will inform processes of the integration of faith and learning or as Holmes (1999: 161) suggests a “reintegration” of God’s truth into all aspects of school life. Such a process is ongoing Gaebelien (1968). This process of reintegration must intentionally continue as schools and the communities they serve change, if the mission of the Church is to remain in focus.

## **KEY COMPONENTS OF MAINTAINING A MISSION FOCUSED AUSTRALIAN ADVENTIST SCHOOL SYSTEM**

Given that our worldview is in a constant state of what Sire (1990: 23) terms “forming” and “reformation”, it is important to recognise that the shaping of an Adventist worldview within an educational structure is an individual, community and system responsibility. Schools are made of flesh and blood and education is a very ‘human’ enterprise where personalities and relationships play a major part in achieving the mission of the church. Hence prescribing a set of guidelines to preserve and promote an Adventist worldview through its schools is a challenge. While structures and systems may be developed it is the power of the Word of God and the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of students, parents, support staff, teachers, principals and

Education Administrators, that will sustain and enhance the mission of the Church in Adventist Schools.

The following key components, while not exhaustive, are suggested as ways of enhancing the mission of Adventist schools in Australia under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### **Articulation of an Adventist Worldview**

In order to promote an Adventist worldview there is an urgent need to formulate and articulate who and what Adventism represents in our School System. A term now commonly coined in Australia is that of 'special character'. In other words what is the special nature of Adventist Education that makes us unique and gives us a mandate to exist?

A statement of special character that articulates an Adventist worldview is required. To this statement schools will be held accountable in all areas of their operation.

The time is right for this to occur. Adventist schools in Australia have demonstrated that they are able to flourish in the broader community context. The cringe factor that once existed regarding Adventists being a cult has dissipated. Some Adventist Schools who took the name 'Adventist' out of their school names are reassessing their stance. To be true to our mission we must articulate our special character and be intentional in its infusion into all aspects of school life.

### **Clarification of Issues Regarding Maintenance of an Adventist Worldview**

It is close to ten years since Summit 1 and 2. It is important to take stock of the issues now facing the Adventist Education System after ten years of growth. It is time to survey stakeholders and to consult with all interested parties regarding their perceptions as to whether Adventist schools remain strongly focused on enhancing the mission of the Church.

Recently, Adventist Schools Australia conducted an audit of stakeholders in the Australian Adventist Education System regarding curriculum practices and the servicing of schools by the Australian Union Conference Curriculum Unit and Schools' Companies personnel. The audit highlighted, amongst a wide range of recommendations, the need to focus on the development of a relevant Bible Curriculum and associated resources (Lloyd, 2007).

The Lloyd Report represents a small facet of a system review which will inform future policy and practice. While organisational structure, financial and quality assurance management may feature highly in a system review, special focus is required in the area of the maintenance of Adventist special character. Tactfully, perceptions will need to be gained regarding the growing non Adventist clientele, the employment of non Adventist teachers, pastoral care services in schools and other issues of general concern.

In preparation for a system review all stakeholders need to be consulted. This may be a time consuming process yet it is imperative that it occur in order to maintain the integrity of the Adventist Education System in ensuing years. Adventist schools in Australia require a mandate from the Church regarding their role and function in fulfilling the mission of the Church for the next decade.

### **School System Enhancement of the Adventist Worldview**

The enhancement of the Adventist worldview will require the cooperative efforts of a broad range of stakeholders. Stakeholders include: the South Pacific Division Administrators and Education Department personnel; Avondale College Education Department; Adventist Schools Australia; Conference Schools' and Church Companies; Directors of Education; Principals; Pastors, School Councils; teachers; parents; and the Church communities. In this paper focus will be given to those areas over which Adventist Schools Australia has been empowered to support and serve.

### **ADVENTIST SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA**

Adventist Schools Australia must take the lead in being custodians of the School Systems special character and setting education policy in consultation with Directors of Education and Schools' Companies. Key tasks may well include: maintaining education audits; developing distinctive Adventist curriculum; conducting Adventist Distinctiveness Programs; setting and monitoring policies regarding school growth, staffing and teacher supply; and conducting Conferences to enhance spiritual growth and an understanding of an Adventist worldview.

### **Maintaining and Focusing Education Audit Processes**

Adventist Schools Australia has conducted regular education audits of all areas of schools operation on a cyclic basis for over twenty years. In addition, high levels of professional support are being provided by Schools' Companies to their schools in each Conference. As a consequence of such processes and support Adventist schools have become increasingly professional in the areas of strategic planning, curriculum documentation, development of plant and facilities and financial management. This being the case, it may well be appropriate for Adventist Schools Australia to hone the audit process to focus on the implementation and maintenance of special character in its schools rather than endeavouring to cover areas that other bodies such as State Registration Boards cover. Such a process would focus our schools on what it means to clearly represent an Adventist worldview.

### **Development of Distinctively Adventist Curriculum**

In the past, the Curriculum Officers at Adventist Schools Australia have endeavoured to produce curriculum documentation representative of an Adventist worldview for all Australian States. This has been an extremely challenging task for just two people to develop and in-service in a

country the size of Australia. The Lloyd Report (2007) suggested that the Curriculum Unit focus primarily on the development of a Prep- Year 10 Bible Curriculum. The Bible curriculum has been under development for many years yet through a range of circumstances has not reached fruition. In fact, some of the original material is well out of date and a complete overhaul is required.

To maintain an Adventist worldview it is imperative that a comprehensive Prep –Year 10 Bible Curriculum be fully developed and in-serviced in the immediate future. To achieve this goal additional staff may be required; however, to delay is to incur criticism from all quarters that Adventist Schools Australia is not serious about the maintenance of its special character.

In addition to a comprehensive Prep –Year 10 Bible curriculum, focus needs to be given to all subject areas in terms of how special character may be infused. Given the recognition that all truth is Gods’ truth and that artificial barrier between the sacred and the secular (Gaebelein, 1968; Holmes, 1987) needs to be removed there is considerable scope for healthy dialogue to occur regarding the inclusion of an Adventist worldview in all subject areas. The curriculum unit of Adventist Schools Australia would be wise to activate such discussions and develop special character statements and guidelines for each key learning area that will challenge teachers to include an Adventist worldview in all subjects and units of work.

### **Maintaining the Adventist Distinctiveness Program**

Adventist Schools Australia, in conjunction with Schools’ Companies Directors of Education conduct Adventist Distinctiveness Programs for teachers who have not studied at Avondale College and who do not have an Adventist heritage. Such programs are run as a one day professional development activity near the commencement of each school year. It is imperative that such programs are maintained and even enhanced by requiring the completion of set course work to consolidate concepts covered in the Adventist Distinctiveness Program.

### **School Growth, Staffing and Teacher Supply Policies**

Painful as it may sound, a review of key policies in the area of school growth, staffing and teacher supply is required. For better or worse Adventists have tended to measure success in numbers – how many baptisms, how large was the offering and how many enrolments do you have at your school? To move beyond the mind-set of a small, emerging Church, questions now need to focus on: spiritual tone; faithfulness to mission; and benchmarks of quality Adventist education rather than enrolment growth.

Consideration may need to be given to policies that limit the growth of enrolments and the development of new facilities until the School System is able to support schools with well trained, vibrant, Adventist educators dedicated to the mission of the church. This asserts by inference that a decision will be made to limit the number of non SDA teachers in Adventist

schools to ensure the integrity of the Adventist worldview. An Adventist worldview is not achievable without Adventist teachers (Rasi, 2008).

At the same time policies and practices will need to be developed to train or attract and retain quality Adventist teachers. There are many fine young people in Australian schools and churches who, if encouraged and supported by teachers and church members, would consider a life of service as an Adventist teacher. It would be prudent for the Church to recapture its service mentality and to promote itself as an employer of choice serving the community of believers as part of its God given mandate. This will require intentionality and commitment at all levels of Church structure.

Considerable care needs to be taken when considering the employment of new teachers in the School System. Extensive profiling of potential staff, both Adventist and non Adventist, needs to occur prior to employment. Clear evidence of a commitment to Christian and Adventist values and lifestyle is required. It is unfortunate that on occasions 'Adventist' teachers are employed whose walk with God is questionable. Responsibility for such profiling should be shared between all entities and at times tough decisions may need to be made as once a teacher is employed it is challenging to redress issues of Adventist worldview. Further, once teachers are employed it will be incumbent upon all Directors of Education to ensure that they are challenged to remain faithful to their calling.

Employment contracts for teachers will need to be explicit regarding adherence to Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and lifestyle. Such contracts will require a regular monitoring process. Further, it may be necessary to introduce an accreditation process for teachers practicing in Adventist schools. This accreditation process may require elements such as: courses of study; set readings; and participation in workshops relating to Adventist distinctiveness. Such an accreditation program may enhance focus on an Adventist worldview while having the added benefit of elevating the teaching ministry in the eyes of church administrators and church members

### **Establishment of Education Conferences Designed to Support an Adventist Worldview**

Education conferences for principals have been traditionally conducted by the South Pacific Division. Such conferences proved valuable for networking, spiritual nurture and professional development. Principals' Conferences have been in abeyance for several years and Adventist Schools Australia has just recently been given a mandate to reactivate such conferences. To enhance the maintenance of an Adventist worldview it is suggested that a two year cycle be established where a Principals' Conference is held one year and a conference for principals, teachers and School Council members be held in the alternate year. The nature of such conferences needs to focus on spiritual refreshment and refocusing principals, teachers and

Schools' Companies Board of Directors members on the Adventist worldview and the mission of the Church.

It is important to remember that the transmission of an Adventist worldview is primarily in the hands of principals and teachers who are representing Christ in their schools each day (Korniejczuk, 2008; Roy, 2008; Sire, 1990). Conferences provide opportunities for spiritual refreshment, recommitment and consensus regarding the articulation of a clear Adventist worldview.

### **CONFERENCE LEVEL SCHOOLS' COMPANIES**

The formation of Schools' Companies in Conferences in Australia over the past few years has created some challenges regarding lines of authority in the education system. South Pacific Division Education Department and Adventist Schools Australia policies need to clearly reflect real or imagined changes in organisational structure, levels of authority and decision making processes. In the absence of clear policy it is easy for entities to 'run ahead' particularly when considerable pressure exists to meet staffing requirements and provide additional facilities in schools. A spirit of good will and Christian grace will be required to ensure the integrity of the School System in the light of structural changes.

Key tasks for Conference Schools' Companies in regards to the enhancement of Adventist distinctiveness and mission include: supporting and implementing policy and initiatives of Adventist Schools Australia; developing and implementing curriculum of special character; conducting regular programs with special character focus; enhancing the role and function of School Councils; enhancing chaplaincy services; and maintaining a strong focus on service programs in schools.

#### **Supporting/Implementing Policy and Initiatives of Adventist Schools Australia**

A consistent and supportive approach to the implementation of Adventist Schools Australia's initiatives and policies will be required across the country. This will require consensus, teamwork and cooperation between Union and Conference personnel. This does not preclude healthy debate and prayerful consideration of the issues relating to the maintenance of an Adventist worldview in Australian Adventist schools. However, once decisions regarding key policies and initiatives have been agreed upon it is imperative that they be implemented in a manner that displays loyalty, professionalism and commitment to agreed courses of action. There will be no place for dissension or disloyalty.

### **Maintain and Support Curriculum Committees with a Special Focus on the Infusion of Special Character**

The National Board of Education has requested Schools' Companies to formulate Curriculum Committees to oversee the development and implementation of curriculum in their Conference. Such an action was both philosophical and pragmatic. It was philosophical in that it was perceived as important for curriculum to be developed, owned and implemented at a State level. However, in a practical sense, it was in recognition of the heavy load carried by Adventist Schools Australia Curriculum Officers in meeting the curriculum requirements of each State of Australia. Further, it was designed to enable the Curriculum Officers at the National Office to focus on the development of a comprehensive Prep to Year 10 Bible Curriculum.

It would be wise for Conference Curriculum Committees to focus on more than meeting curriculum development requirements for State registration processes. It will be incumbent upon them to ensure that an Adventist worldview is infused into all key learning areas in a well reasoned and thorough manner. Further, recognition and support for the Bible Curriculum under development at the Adventist Schools Australia Curriculum Unit will be essential.

Schools' Companies should be cognisant of the additional workload that curriculum development and implementation at a Conference level will bring. Staffing levels at the Conference level will require review to ensure that Officers charged with the responsibility of curriculum management are given appropriate time and resources to ensure that all aspects of curriculum are addressed in a timely manner and that an Adventist worldview be carefully and thoughtfully infused into all curriculum documentation.

### **Conduct Regular Programs for Principals/Teachers/School Council Members with a Strong Focus on Special Character**

Conference Schools' Companies have traditionally conducted quality professional development programs for principals and teachers on an annual basis. The genesis of such programs was 'grass root' oriented; however, over time they have been more corporately driven. This shift provides excellent opportunities for Schools' Company planning committees to ensure that a strong focus on Adventist worldview and mission are incorporated into annual conferences.

In the main, Adventist teachers are willing to seek subject specific professional development via a range of sources. Gone are the days when the only professional development Adventist teachers engaged in was sponsored by the Conference Education Department. Such a shift has created space in the crowded professional development agenda at Schools' Company programs and such a 'space' may well be filled by prioritizing seminars and workshops that focus on broadening an understanding of an Adventist worldview and the infusion of special character into all aspects of school life.

### **Enhance the Role and Function of School Councils**

Traditionally School Councils in Australian Adventist schools carried limited decision making authority. Finances were determined at a Conference level and operational policies were externally determined. In more recent years devolution of many responsibilities has occurred and levels of accountability at the school level has increased considerably. The formation of Schools' Companies in each Conference has tended to accelerate this trend and School Councils, in the main, have clear governance guidelines and high levels of accountability. Such governance structures will need to be carefully guarded to ensure that membership and control of the School Council remains firmly in the hands of the Adventist Church

To enable School Council members to govern effectively within an Adventist worldview and mission to the communities they serve they need training and to feel supported and valued. School Council members must take ownership of their roles and perceive that they are important partners in the provision of quality Adventist education. Currently, there is limited recognition of their important role and limited training opportunities are provided.

To address this issue it is proposed that School Council members be provided with formal training in governance issues. It is imperative that they recognize that their prime governance responsibility is the maintenance of an Adventist worldview in their schools. They need to be skilled in implementing and supporting policies which enhance the special character of Adventist schools. Regular correspondence regarding special character matters and inclusion in Schools' Companies conferences would also send clear signals that they are an essential part of the fabric of Adventist schools.

In addition, School Council members provide essential linkages between schools and their church communities. The move to alleviate Adventist churches in many Conferences of financial responsibility for running of church schools has served to isolate entities who desperately need to remain in community (Sire, 1990). The Biblical admonition in this regard is clear in terms of the importance of building spiritual communities and supporting each other in building the body of Christ. Homes, churches and schools are integral components of building spiritual communities and School Council members need to support the principal and teaching staff in creating strong links between home, school and church.

### **Strengthen and Streamline Chaplaincy Services**

Opportunities for the Adventist church to achieve its mission via its school system have increased dramatically over the past ten years as our schools have embraced the wider community. Despite the recognition at Summit 2 that Adventist schools were, indeed, evangelistic, it took some time before chaplaincy services began to emerge in schools. Such services have been warmly received in school communities; however, the time given to chaplains, in many instances, does not reflect the pastoral care needs of staff, students and school

families. Often they do not have the time allocated to meet the spiritual and pastoral needs of the school community.

The Federal Government has recognized the dire need for improved pastoral care services and is offering school based funding to enhance chaplaincy services in schools. No doubt Church and School System authorities would endorse such a move as such initiatives serve to build Christian community.

There are several issues that need to be addressed by School and Church Companies in relation to chaplaincy services in schools. These include: supply; training; and employment. Clearly, Adventist schools are in competition with the Church for the services of chaplains. Both sectors are in urgent need of passionate and committed personnel. It is imperative that chaplaincy, as a calling, is promoted and that sound training for the role is provided at both training institutes, such as Avondale, and by Schools' Companies. Further, consideration needs to be given to the employment of chaplains/pastors by Schools' Companies for contracted time periods rather than blurring the lines of accountability between church and school responsibilities while at the same time protecting their professional status and entitlements.

#### **Foster Service Programs as Integral to the School Curriculum**

The Adventist church has embraced an optimistic mission and in many respects it has been highly successful. In the Australian context its greatest challenge is to hold its young people in the Church. School students in Australia are a product of their culture which is dominated by materialism, pluralism and individualism. Adventist schools, in conjunction with parents and school communities, have a mandate to assist young people in accepting Jesus Christ, building a firm relationship with Him, becoming part of the church family and walking in paths of service as Christ did.

Authentic service programs in Adventist schools provide fertile ground for young people to put their Christianity into practice. However, rather than isolated service programs smattered through the school year, greater traction would be achieved if service programs became integral in school programs. Such an approach will need to be nurtured by School Companies and their Curriculum and Administrators Committees as essential to authentic Adventist education.

#### **SUMMARY**

Education System Review Committees (Summit 1 and 2) provided a clear mandate to Adventist schools regarding their importance in the achievement of the mission of the Adventist Church in Australia. As a consequence, the face of Adventist Education in Australia has changed considerably over the past decade. Non Adventist student numbers have climbed significantly to the point where Adventist students are in the minority in most schools. While remaining a vibrant school system with excellent teachers and facilities, rapid growth presents challenges in

regards to the maintenance of an Adventist worldview and loyalty to the mission of the Adventist Church.

Trends impinging on the maintenance of an Adventist worldview in Adventist Schools in Australia were identified and explored. Such trends included: increasing non Adventist clientele; changing attitudes of Adventist clientele; increasing employment of non Adventist teachers; Adventist teacher loyalty; specialization in chaplaincy and Bible teaching; growing dependence on Government funding; and devolution of governance responsibilities.

Key components of maintaining an Adventist worldview in Australian Adventist schools were identified. It was noted that the implementation of these contributing components would be subject to a systemic consultancy to explore in depth the challenges of maintenance of an Adventist worldview in the context of a changing clientele. A draft 'road map' was developed which focused on Adventist Schools Australia and its sphere of influence.

At the Adventist Schools Australia level it was suggested that focus will need to be given to: articulating clearly an Adventist worldview via the Bible Curriculum and subject frameworks; auditing the infusion of special character in schools; maintaining the Adventist Distinctiveness Program; developing clear policies regarding school growth and the employment of non Adventist teachers; and conducting quality conferences for key stakeholders with a strong focus on special character.

Recommendations regarding the maintenance of an Adventist worldview were made for Schools' Companies. It was recognized that a unity of purpose would be required from Schools' Companies and associated Directors of Education to ensure that Adventist Schools Australia policies and procedures relating to the maintenance of Adventist distinctiveness were to be achieved. In addition, it was suggested that Schools' Companies focus on the following strategies to uphold and enhance an Adventist worldview: strong Curriculum Committees; programs focusing on spirituality and Adventist worldview; enhancement of the role of School Council members; improved chaplaincy services; and maintaining a strong focus on service programs in schools.

All School Systems need to stop and take stock from time to time. There is much for which to praise God in Adventist Schools in Australia. Opportunities to fulfill the mission of the Church abound; however, the will must be found to ensure that during the next decade policies, resources and personnel are deployed to ensure that an Adventist worldview is enhanced at all levels of School System operation. It is to be hoped that the Australian experience will prove instructive for school systems in other Divisions of the Adventist world field.

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