members to **witness** to the world, it is just as important that it calls them to **be** an authentic Christian community.

Conclusions

Remember my friend, the church elder. My respect for him has grown over the years as I have become more aware of what he was saying. He may not have had an extensive theological education. But common sense told him that there is no point in encouraging the members of the Church to share their faith and invite others to join the Church if we have not given a lot of thought to what the Church is and what we want it to be. I hope the generation that will lead the Church into the new millennium does some careful thinking about the Church and comes up with some good ways of understanding its nature and function.

Do We Need an Organised Church?

Barry D. Oliver

I was watching the broadcast of the Lillehammer Winter Olympics on television. The long anticipated return of Jane Torvill and Christopher Dean to the Olympic ice was about to take place. But first, there had to be "a commercial break." I was somewhat peeved by this interruption. One of the commercials was for "Coca Cola," one for "Pringles," one for an upcoming program on that channel, one for "Mitsubishi" cars, and one for "The Greater" building society. I was not really listening.

But the next advertisement immediately caught my attention. I heard the familiar tones of "Aussie kids are Weet-Bix kids." I listened with considerable interest and felt a bit of a warm glow somewhere inside. I thought "Hm, not bad. In fact, that was pretty good." I felt just a smidgen of pride in my Church and its Sanitarium Health Food Company.

Without a system of organisation the Church would not be able to operate a Sanitarium Health Food Company. There would be no Sydney Adventist Hospital, no Pacific Adventist University, no Signs Publishing Company, no Adventist Media Centre, Avondale High School, etc., etc. I could not have viewed that TV commercial and felt good about what my Church was trying to do. Sometime, you may care to do a little exercise and consider how many things the Church now does that it would not be able to do if there was no system of organisation.

> The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a multi-national organisation, more widespread than any other Protestant Church.

Fundamental to the need for organisation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the commitment of the Church to a global mission. The Church has taken seriously the words of Christ which have commissioned it to "go and make disciples of all peoples, baptising them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a multi-national organisation, more widespread than any other Protestant Church it needs to be organised for effectiveness and efficiency. Although the necessity of such organisation should be obvious to all who pause to think about it, let me stimulate your thinking by suggesting some reasons why the Church must be organised.

Some Reasons For Organisation

1. Coordination of Function

When our family served as missionaries in Papua New Guinea, we became close friends with some missionaries who represented various other Protestant denominations. They were committed Christians who were doing a fine work. But it did not take very long for my wife and I to realise that most of them had a serious problem. They obviously did not have strong supporting network. Many of them confided that they often felt very much on their own. Commitment they had. Efficiency and effectiveness they did not have because they often lacked the coordination and support of a strong organisation. Because we had an effective organisation behind us we felt very secure. We just did not have to worry about where our next crust was coming from as some of those other missionaries did.

The support of the missionary enterprise of the Church is only one example of the need for organisation. Organisation is necessary not only at the global level, but also at the national and local level. How would your church operate if there were no elders, youth leaders, treasurers, and other church officers? Who would plan the worship services, the social events, and the community services? Organisation for efficiency and effectiveness at different points of reference is necessary.

Different functions require different levels of organisation. It is unlikely that a local grocery store could mount a series of commercials for "Weet Bix" or "So Good." At a higher level of organisation the Sanitarium Health Food Company can do that. So it is with the Church. Levels of organisation beyond the local church are necessary for local, national, and global coordination of function.

2. Financial Stability

In order to finance the global, regional and local functions of the church, a coordinated financial system is necessary. It would be very nice to live in a world where money was not necessary. But that is not reality. While we must ever realise that the Church is a unique organisation, directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we must also realise that God has placed us in the real world where he expects us to fulfil his commission utilising the systems that operate within our sociological, anthropological and economic context.

13. Unity in the Body of Christ
The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God who has adopted us as His children.

It is not easy to find a financial system which is best for all. A global Church can fall into one of two traps. On the one hand, it can commit too much funding to the global aspects of its mission. The result can be that the local church does not have sufficient money to finance its own evangelistic program. Because money is going somewhere else the level of ownership of the mission of the Church can diminish.

Alternatively, the Church may retain too many of its financial resources for local use. This can only result in a diminishing effectiveness of the global mission of the Church. Ultimately it will mean the rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer.

Neither alternative is desirable. Consistently, the system of organisation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has endeavoured to steer a middle course between these two undesirable alternatives and promote a balanced distribution of finances. A good system of organisation should continue to ensure that such is the case.

3. Unity in Diversity

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the most diverse organisations in the world. There is economic, racial, linguistic, cultural, and educational diversity in the Church. One only has to attend a General Conference session to become aware of this. Sometime, those of you from an "anglo" church in Australia, New Zealand or North America should take the opportunity to visit a black church in North America, an Aboriginal church in Australia or attend church on Sabbath morning in Jamaica. You will immediately become aware of diversity.

In the face of this wonderful diversity, it is necessary that a sound organisation promotes unity. Unity is a New Testament characteristic of the Church. Unity is the foundation of effectiveness. Unity is the difference between success and failure in the mission of the Church.

But unity is not uniformity. An organisation that demands uniformity will die. The secret to successful administration is the ability to maximise the diverse efficiencies of those who comprise the organisation in order to achieve the goals of the organisation. Unity in diversity is the key.

4. Order in the New Testament

Finally, if the Church is to be faithful to God it cannot neglect the New Testament call to organise itself. The churches at Corinth, Rome, Thessalonica, Philippi, Colossae, etc were organised. They had church officers—elders and deacons—who were responsible for the oversight of the work of the churches and for their spiritual condition.

Although the organisation was rudimentary at best because the Church was so young, there are indications that it was necessary to coordinate the functions of the Church beyond the local church level. In 1 Cor 16:2 Paul calls for an offering from the church at Corinth to help the believers in Jerusalem—financial coordination. In Acts 15 there is an important conference of Church leaders in Jerusalem to discuss the problems that had arisen between Jews and non-Jews over some important issues to do with the law—doctrinal coordination. Even though the Church was so small and so young, it was recognised that organisation, coordination, and order were essential.

> Think of as many reasons as you can why the Church needs to be well structured.

Conclusion

There are some voices around today which are saying that the Church does not need to be organised in order to fulfil its commission. While it would be unfortunate if organisation became an end in itself, and while the Church must continually monitor its organisational forms and retain a healthy flexibility, it cannot exist if it does not maintain a form of organisation. Voices which call for a dissolution of a global organisational structure are speaking without thinking through the ramifications of what they are saying. The basic

principles of organisation that have served the Church for the past 130 years have been most appropriate and while continuous discussion must shape the forms that those principles will take, the principles themselves are good. The Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to need organisation.