17. Loose Ends and Concluding Observations

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There are a few topics worthy of mention that have not had a separate chapter devoted to them. They might be described as "loose ends" and they shall be discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, while much of what would normally go into a concluding chapter has already found its way into Chapter 1, Headline Results, nevertheless there are a few matters worthy of further thought and these are presented here as concluding observations.

Importance of Seventh-day Adventist Schools to the Health of the Local Church

There are churches in Australia that are dying – literally. Many local churches, some of which are Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Churches, have an average age of attenders greater than 60 (Bellamy et al., 2001; Powell, 2011; Voas & Storm, 2012). As the members of the congregation age and die, they are not replaced, and the church eventually "dies." But these demographically challenged churches are not churches with local schools, at least among Seventh-day Adventists in Australia. This, at least, was one of the unanticipated results of my observations of the many churches that I visited across Australia while collecting surveys on motivations for tithing among Seventh-day Adventists (McIver & Currow, 2002; McIver, 2016, p.

57–71). Churches that had local church schools had a healthy mix of all age-groups.

When I made this observation as an off-the-cuff remark in a paper that I was presenting at Loma Linda University, it generated some interesting discussion in the time for questions after the paper. The consensus was that the same was true in the North American Division (NAD) except in Spanish-speaking congregations. It is not too much to say, then, that Adventist schools are important for the future of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the NAD.

Things likely to cause administrators loss of sleep

There are one or two things that have emerged from this study that are likely to trouble the administrators of the Adventist Church and the administrators of the Adventist school system. Curiously enough, the commitment of the teachers to the Church and to the mission of the Church are not among those things (see the next section on things likely to encourage administrators). No, the most worrisome thing comes from the background material in the first few chapters.

Early in Chapter 2, Larry Blackmer, NAD Vice-president for Education 2002–2018, notes the sober statistic that between 1976 (the year of the largest number of enrollments in elementary and secondary schools in the NAD) and 2012, the number of students attending Adventist schools in the NAD fell by almost 14,000 students. Numbers have been slowly increasing since 2012 (see Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2), but there are a significant number of challenges facing schools in the NAD. Some of these challenges are illustrated by the case study found in Chapter 5. Soon after taking up his appointment as principal at Lake City Junior Academy (LCJA) in Coeur d'Alene Idaho, Adam Weeks discovered that while the elementary school classes at LCJA were well attended, there was a 72% attrition rate between Grades 8 and 9, which resulted in small class sizes for Grades 9 and 10. Adam points out that parents wish to do what is best for their children, but there has been a change in what is considered best. Sending children to an Adventist Boarding Academy was no longer seen as desirable, and parents were opting to keep their children at the same school for Grades 9 through 12, which ruled out LCJA which

did not offer Grades 11 and 12. Larger local secondary schools with better resources and less cost were also considered to be attractive to parents. Adam outlines the strategy that his school had adopted to meet these changed circumstances. But it is what he discovered about the changing attitude of parents that may represent real challenges for an unknown, but probably significant, proportion of Adventist schools in the NAD. Some Adventist schools, especially those located near large Adventist institutions such as hospitals and universities, are thriving with increasing student numbers. They have the critical mass to be competitive with the richness of their offerings, among other advantages. But not every school in the NAD is in such a fortuitous position.

I doubt that any of this is new to the Education administrators across the NAD. But I imagine that they all share a concern that many of the schools across the NAD are facing extremely challenging times.

Things likely to encourage administrators

There is much in the research data reported in this book that is likely to encourage administrators. Foremost among them is the very high quality of human capital that has been assembled to staff the schools. Some key statistics about the teachers:

- Educational levels are high: 98% had at least a bachelor's qualification, 51% a master's degree, and 5% a doctoral degree (see Table 7.3 in Chapter 7);
- 70% of them have worked for the Church for more than 10 years (see Table 7.7);
- 89.6% attend church worship services at least once a week (see Table 7.8);
- 95% report a positive commitment to the local and world SDA Church, and their most frequently reported level of commitment was "very strong" (see Table 7.8);
- 99.3% said that they had made a personal commitment to Jesus that was still important in their life (see Table B.86 in Appendix B);

- 98.3% believe in a personal God who seeks a relationship with human beings (see Table B.90);
- 94% pray at least once each day (see Table 12.1 in Chapter 12); and 96.4% have received a definite answer to a specific prayer request (see Table 16.2 in Chapter 16);
- 87.5% read their Bibles once a week or more often (see Table 12.1);
- 87.8% of them tithe at least 10% of their income (see Table 12.3);
- 95.9% expect Jesus to return (see Table 15.1 in Chapter 15);
- When asked what the mission of their school should be, the most common, unprompted response was, "Lead the children to Jesus" (see Table 8.1 in Chapter 8)
- 90% strongly agreed that they serve the mission of the Church through their work as teachers (see Table B.66).

These teachers are human: therefore they are not perfect. But they are a highly commendable group of people. They believe in the Adventist Church, its doctrines, and are committed to its mission. They have very active personal spiritual lives. There is much in the data reported in this book that will encourage administrators.

Practical Implications for Church Pastors and Administrators

The survey included several questions which related to how teachers perceived the support that they received from the Church, and how effective they considered various channels that are used to share the mission of the church with them.

When asked, "Which word best sums up your perception of the relationship between your organization and the larger Seventh-day Adventist Church organization?" (Question 6), 62% of the teachers said that the Church was involved in their school. Given the importance of the schools to the overall health of the Church, it is commendable that so many churches are actively involved. That 24% said the school was accepted (rather than involved) may indicate

that there is room for improvement. There were an additional 12 who felt that the school was either tolerated, held at arm's length, or left completely on its own (See Table 7.6 in Chapter 7). I have been a school-teacher and know the high demands of the role. I have also been a church pastor, so I can understand the pressures under which they work. Local church pastors are expected to be involved in all kinds of activities. One can imagine why they would think that the teachers in their local school are self-sufficient, and can be left to continue with their excellent services to the church while the minister attends to other crises that are taking place among his membership, and does not neglect the preparation required to present a stimulating sermon for the weekend worship service! But probably the message from the responses to question 6 is that the teachers may appreciate a little more affirmation for the important role that they are undertaking on behalf of the Church.

When asked to respond to the statement, "I don't think the Church leadership properly values what my organization contributes to the wider mission of the Church," 58% strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement (see Table B.67 in Appendix B). But what of the 37% who agree more than disagree, and the 29% who strongly agree with the statement? I ask these questions fully aware that church administrators are under many pressures. Some of these pressures are financial and they are forced to make difficult decisions. Financial short-falls need to be faced and managed. How to do this, while still conveying their understanding of the importance of Adventist schools is a great challenge. But perhaps if administrators are aware of the need to affirm the importance of Adventist schools, they can consciously ensure that this becomes a key component of their communications to their constituents.

In Question 8 teachers were asked to rate the effectiveness of the following in helping them form their understanding of the relationship between the mission of their school and the wider mission of the Adventist Church: (a) their orientation into their initial appointment in the school; (b) day-long meetings devoted to spiritual matters; and (c) formal education such as a graduate diploma or master's degree.

Table 17.1 Teachers' Evaluation of Effectiveness for Communicating Mission of Church

	8a. Induction		9b. Day-Long Meetings		8c. Formal Education	
	Freq	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
0 This does not happen in my organization	120	13.5	239	27.0	135	15.3
1 Poor	90	10.1	118	13.3	30	3.4
2 OK	180	20.2	207	23.4	124	14.1
3 Good	240	26.9	214	24.2	265	30.1
4 Very Good	261	29.3	106	12.0	327	37.1
Total	**891**	**100.0**	**884**	**100.0**	**881**	**100.0**

None of the three strategies for communicating the contribution of the school to the wider mission of the Adventist church is rated consistently very good, although formal education such as a graduate diploma or master's degree is rated as the most effective of all three. At orientation, the traditional time for the discussion of the overall mission of the employing body, a great deal of other information must be communicated at the same time, and it is not surprising that the message about the overall mission of the school is lost in the clutter. It is not possible, given that the surveys are anonymous, but it would be interesting to check back with the school administration of the 120 respondents who stated that communicating the organization's mission and its relationship to the church's mission as part of my orientation / induction when I began working at my organization did not happen. As has already been said, it can be lost in the clutter. But if this is true, then perhaps this is a gap in the orientation process that could well be addressed. It is also noteworthy that 27% of respondents (239 of them) report "Day-long meetings devoted to spiritual matters" do not happen at their school. While it is not unlikely that something done in an orientation process might be overlooked, one would imagine that those filling out the survey would indeed remember if the mission of the schools had been discussed at a day-long meeting. Professional development meetings are a regular feature of a teacher's life. If the school is working closely with the local church, it might be expected that the link between the activity of the school and the mission of the wider church should be an appropriate topic of dialogue at professional development meetings.

Are Teachers in Adventist Schools in the NAD Fundamentalists?

The five distinguishing beliefs of Christian Fundamentalists, at least as defined by Americans, was noted in chapter 12. They were,

1. "The inspiration and infallibility of Scripture.
2. The deity of Christ (including His Virgin birth).
3. The substitutional atonement of Christ's death.
4. The literal resurrection of Christ from the dead.
5. The literal return of Christ in the Second Advent." (Falwell, Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 7)

So, according to these criteria, are the teachers in Adventist schools in the NAD Christian Fundamentalists? Question 62g, "I believe that Jesus was born of a virgin," was deliberately included in the survey because it is so clearly identified as one of the distinguishing characteristics of Christian Fundamentalism and is found in other surveys as well. Ninety-five percent of teachers strongly agreed that Jesus was born of a virgin (see Table B.95 in Appendix B). Furthermore, 95% agreed with the statement in questions 62o/86g "I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (i.e. I believe in the doctrine of the Trinity)" (see Table B.103 in Appendix B). It therefore seems safe to conclude that teachers in Adventist schools in the NAD would believe in the deity of Christ (item 2). Ninety-six percent of teachers agreed that Jesus will return to earth a second time (Question 62m / 86f; see 101 in Appendix B). The question does not use the term "literal return," but given what is understood by the second coming in SDA circles, the participants would understand this question to mean a literal return of Jesus. Consequently, one would be justified in stating that the participants in the survey believed in the "literal return of Christ in the Second Advent," item 5. There is no explicit question on the survey about the substitutional atonement of Jesus, nor about the literal resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If my memory serves me correctly, because the survey was already very long and it was deemed that one might assume that Adventists believed in the resurrection of Jesus (i.e. they almost certainly would qualify on item 4), this question was not asked. It was also considered that the technical language of substitutional atonement was unlikely to have been part of the education background of teachers, even if the concept had been taught to them. Within Adventism, while there is

some debate on substitutionary atonement in terms that reflect wider theological discussion on the topic, most Adventists would probably agree that Jesus died in our place as an atonement for our sins. So it is likely that most of the teachers would also meet the third in the list of characteristic beliefs of Christian Fundamentalists.

It is with item number 1, "The inspiration and infallibility of Scripture", that the teachers parted company with Christian Fundamentalists. This has been discussed in more detail in Chapter 14, Teachers' Understanding of Scripture and Authority. Table 14.2 contains a report of how the teachers understood their Bible. Only 1.4% of them chose the option that was closest in expressing the inerrancy of Scripture: "The Bible is the work of people who copied what God told them word for word, and who wrote without being influenced by their own place and time." By way of contrast, 96.9% chose an option that included the words, "The Bible is the work of people who were inspired by God and who represented God's message in terms of their own place and time" (see Table 14.2 in Chapter 14). Thus we may say that most teachers would agree that the Bible is inspired; they would be unlikely to agree that it is inerrant. It would be of interest to provide a question in future surveys that used the adjective infallible in conjunction with the Bible. But it is likely that the participants in such a survey would not strictly qualify under item 1: "The inspiration and infallibility of Scripture."

Thus, from the evidence of the responses to the survey questions, it might be concluded that teachers in Adventist Schools across the NAD are not Christian fundamentalists. Their sophisticated understanding of the Bible prevents that conclusion. But they are conservative theologically when compared to other Christians in the United States of America. If they are not Christian fundamentalists, they stand near to them on the theological spectrum.

Contribution of Universities, Hospitals, Media Centers, etc.

In Question 74 participants were asked: "Church organizations contribute to the mission of the Church to some extent or other. Please indicate how much you consider the following types of organizations to contribute to the mission of the Church." Participants were asked

to rate 74a. Primary Schools; 74b. Secondary Schools; 74c. Colleges and Universities; 74d. Clinics; 74e. Hospitals; 74f. Publishing Houses; 74g. Media Centers; 74h. Health-food factories; 74i. Retirement villages; 74j. Nursing homes for the aged; and 74k. ADRA and other relief agencies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, according to the following scale: 1 = Very little; 2 = Some; 3 = A good amount; 4 = A great deal; 0 = I really don't have an opinion

Tables 17.2 and 17.3 record the assessments made by teachers of the contribution to the mission of the church made by other organizations of the SDA Church. These are expressed as a percentage of the total number who answered the question. The actual frequencies may be found in Tables B.54 through B.64 in Appendix B.

Table 17.2 How Much Do … Contribute to the Mission of the Church?

	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Universities	Clinics	Hospitals	Publishing Houses
0 = No opinion	1.7	1.1	1.1	8.1	5.7	6.6
1 = Very little	0.0	0.6	1.7	0.6	3.4	2.4
2 = Some	2.3	1.1	5.7	10.5	13.8	11.4
3 = A good amount	14.9	17.2	23.4	36.6	31.6	30.5
4 = A great deal	81.1	79.9	68.0	44.2	45.4	49.1
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Table 17.3 How Much Do … Contribute to the Mission of the Church? (Continued)

	Media Centers	Heath Food Factories	Retirement Villages	Nursing Homes for the Aged	ADRA etc
0 = No opinion	7.1	8.3	13.2	13.6	4.7
1 = Very little	2.4	12.4	9.0	5.3	0.6
2 = Some	12.5	31.4	32.9	32.5	3.0
3 = A good amount	32.1	32.0	29.9	28.4	18.3
4 = A great deal	45.8	16.0	15.0	20.1	73.4
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Teachers in Adventist schools in the NAD can see real value in the other organizations of the SDA Church. Quite understandably, they value the work of elementary and secondary schools above all the other institutions, but still see the contribution made to the Church's mission from universities, clinics, hospitals, publishing houses, media centers, health food factories, nursing homes for the aged, and ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) and other welfare agencies of the SDA Church.

Does What Teachers Think the Church Should be Doing Correspond to what they Think their School Should be Doing?

When asked what their schools should be doing, teachers in Adventist schools in the NAD spontaneously used words that suggested: "Lead the children to Jesus; Education; Preparation for this world; Service learning; Eternity focus; Share the Good News." When they were asked the same thing about their church, they used words that would suggest, "Share the good news about Jesus Christ; Leading people to Jesus; God's love; Preparation for the future; Reflecting and Representing Christ."

The overlap between these sets of goals, one for schools, and one for the church, is impressive. Both schools and churches should be about leading people to Jesus; both should be about preparing for the future. In other words, there is a significant congruence between what teachers in Adventist Schools in the NAD think their school should be doing, and how they perceive the wider mission of the Church.

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