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Resourcing for Effective Mission and Ministry in Local Seventh-day Adventist Churches: A Call for the Global Church to Think and Act Locally

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RESOURCING FOR
EFFECTIVE MISSION AND MINISTRY
IN LOCAL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCHES:

A CALL FOR THE GLOBAL CHURCH
TO THINK AND ACT LOCALLY

Presented

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of:

Master of Leadership and Management (Honours)

to the Faculty of Business and Information Technology

Avondale College

2009

Travis Manners
B.Bus, Grad Dip (Theol)

STUDENT DECLARATION

I, Travis Bruce Manners hereby declare that:

- (i) this thesis is my own work,
- (ii) all persons consulted, and all assistance rendered are fully acknowledged
- (iii) all references used are indicated in the text and accurately reported in the list of references,
- (iv) the substance of this thesis has not been presented, in whole, or part by me, to any University for a degree.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Table of Contents.

	<i>Page</i>
Student Declaration	ii.
Table of Contents	iii.
List of Figures	v.
Abstract	vi.
The Research Topic	
Starving our roots: something is wrong in a church that does a lot of things right	1.
Research questions	3.
Framework	
Congregationalism verses centralisation: searching for middle ground	5.
The world organisational structure today	8.
Loosing the voice of the local church	10.
The wrong way round	14.
Bring the Whole Tithe into the Storehouse	16.
Putting the tithing principle into practice	16.
Where the tithe goes? Example South Queensland Conference	19.
- Leaving the local area	19.
- Redistributing the remainder	24.
Staffing using tithe at the local level	28.
Church Offerings	32.
Main church offerings	32.
Education offering	34.
Putting it all together	37.
Sabbath School Offerings	39.
The last opportunity for local funds	39.
Sabbath school expenses	41.
Local mission?	42.
Hilarious Givers	44.
The Effect on	47.
the Local Church - Strangling the goose	47.
the Local Pastor – Looking for more morale	51.
Ron Gladden – the birth of Mission Catalyst	56.

Table of Contents.
Continued

	<i>Page</i>
The Concerns of the 24 Pastors	60.
Perpetuating the organisation	60.
Departmental matters	62.
Lip service . . . again	64.
Winds of Change	66.
Is a crisis coming?	66.
The Desire to Give Locally	68.
Putting a face on giving	68.
Steps in the Right Direction	72.
Funding for new church buildings	72.
Staffing-for-growth	77.
Commission on Ministries, Services and Structure	90.
Recommendations	99.
More local offerings / Less percentage passed on	99.
Greater portion of tithe to be used locally	100.
Staffing-for-Growth extended to all conferences	101.
De-departmentalisation	103.
De-Institutionalisation thinking	108.
Suggested tithe re-distribution	112.
Looking ahead	115.
Conclusion	117.
References	121.

List of Figures.

		<i>Page</i>
Figure 1.	Tithe Redistribution South Queensland Conference 2006.	28.
Figure 2.	Local Church Offering Allocation During a Calendar Year.	38.
Figure 3.	Priorities of a Pastor	79.
Figure 4.	Illustration of Structural Design Alternatives	93.
Figure 5.	Suggested Tithe Redistribution	112.

Abstract

Resourcing for effective mission and ministry in local Seventh-day Adventist

Churches: A call for the global church to think and act locally, studies the resources that are generated by, yet then taken away from, local Seventh-day Adventist Churches. While the Adventist church is a global movement, this study has limited itself predominantly to the structural issues affecting the local church in Adventism within the Western or developed world. It was found that 100% of the tithe that is given by a local congregation is remitted to higher administrative bodies of which as little as 40%, or less in the case of larger congregations, returns directly to the local church in the form of pastoral staffing. On top of giving tithes, Adventists give offerings of which only 38%, or 20 offerings per year collected during the main service remains in that local church. The local church retains nothing that is contributed for the main Sabbath school offering. Much of the extra money collected goes either to missions or to support the well resourced administrative structures above the local church.

This paper shows that the amount taken from the local church is excessive and detrimental to the local congregation's health and vitality and negatively affects the local church's ability to fulfil the great commission in its own neighbourhood. It argues for a balanced approach and looks to find the middle ground which avoids both the extremes of congregationalism and the present over-centralised system. This paper identifies encouraging steps that are being taken in this direction in the area of church buildings, staffing-for-growth at the local church level and the introduction of flexible structures. It recommends the retention of a greater portion of offerings in the local church and that a portion of tithe be available for the running of local missional

events. Further recommendations are that 60% of tithes given by the local church be “locked-in” to that same church for the use of staffing, that a process of de-departmentalisation be undertaken to reduce the number of administrative departments and make them more effective and, finally, a simplification of the administrative system where the administration of the church can concentrate more intentionally on enhancing its primary unit of mission – the local congregation. This paper reminds readers that the local church *is* the church and it suggests it is axiomatic that the stronger the local church becomes, the stronger the entire body will be.

The Research Topic

Starving our Roots: Something is Wrong in a Church that Does a Lot of Things Right.

Why did God invest the leadership gift in you? In part it was so that you could make a contribution towards leading and building one of these supernatural communities that would defy all of the sadness and hopelessness in this world, and that would one day result in groups of fired up people, loving God, loving people and solving problems and caring for the poor. Still to this day, 32 years into it, I'll say it.

There is nothing like the local church
when the local church is working right.

There is nothing like it!
(Hybels, 2007)

There is so much that is working right within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. With over 16 million members worldwide, the work of the church has been established in 203 of the 229 countries recognised by the United Nations and uses 885 languages in its publications and oral work to spread the everlasting gospel to the world. (*Annual statistical report - 2006*, p.1). In 2006 just over 1.1 million people joined the church, an average of 3,032 people every single day. Worldwide the church has an annual growth rate of 4.8%, and to accommodate this, five new churches are being established every-day. It is reported to be one of the fastest growing Protestant denominations in the world. (Johnson, 2008, p.2)

On top of this, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has established 63 publishing houses, numerous health food companies, an international development and relief agency, media centres, 138 retirement villages and 168 hospitals, many of them world renowned. Worldwide the church has over 7,000 tertiary institutions and schools. In 2006 church members contributed \$US2.4 billion in tithes and offerings (*Annual statistical report – 2006*). The Seventh-day Adventist church is truly a global church that God has blessed abundantly. There are so many things within the church that are working right.

Yet, perhaps it is because of the very high level of success in establishing the aforementioned institutions, and the governance and resources required to oversee this aspect of the work, that there is a feeling something is “not quite right” within the church. Worse still, this feeling of “not quite rightness,” comes from the local church itself. In an article written in the church’s publication for the South Pacific, *Record*, editor Nathan Brown (2007, p.2) writes

As I have travelled around various churches during the past few months, I have repeatedly fallen into conversations in which a wide variety of people have expressed their frustration that “the church” seems not to be “working.”

Brown continues to state that most of these people are not trying or wanting to be harshly critical of a church they believe in, yet realise that “we spend a lot of time (and money) keeping the machine running.” He continues by saying, “they sense that the church should be something so much more than that. . . None of us should ever forget that we are about changing the world.” (Brown, 2007, p.2)

It is hard to think that our church may be changing the world, when we are experiencing trouble impacting our own local communities. Responding to the article above, the current author (Manners, 2007, p.13) wrote a letter to the editor that was subsequently published in a following edition of *Record*. The letter states

I am one of the many who are most involved and very passionate about the church, yet can often sense the frustration of maintaining our very large machine. (Of Maintenance and Mission, May 26). While we need a balance between global and local mission, it seems to me that the balance is missing to the neglect of the local church.

The local church forwards 100% of its tithing income to the Conference (of which Conferences struggle yet strive to return 60% in field budgets.) The local church forwards on its Sabbath school offerings, and is often forced to have a dual offering system so that it can retain some money for its ‘Sabbath school expense.’ The local church is allocated only 20 Budget offerings per year. This means 62% of offerings collected during the main church service, leaves the local church.

Numerous other programs and events that are put on by the wider church on Sabbath mornings, while they can be beneficial, often take people away from their own local church and its initiatives.

All this makes one wonder, who is supporting who? Perhaps this sense of frustration that the church is not working as it should is occurring because we are starving our roots. Sure, churches aren't all about money and resources, but these are needed to be as effective as we can be in achieving our mission.

Our mission is not about people joining one of our institutions, it is to go and make disciples of Jesus, and get them involved and plugged into the Body of Christ – the local church.

Could this “starving our roots” be the reason why many feel frustrated that local Seventh-day Adventist Churches aren't working as well as they could? Is the letter above an accurate description of what actually happens with the resources of the church?

Research Questions

The central thesis that this paper sets out to explore is as follows; will increased investment in local Seventh-day Adventist Churches enable these same churches to increase their own health, strength and growth, and does this in turn increase the capacity of the corporate church to fulfil its global mission?

This paper will begin by looking at the extremes of congregationalism on the one hand verses centralisation on the other. It will then seek to place where the Adventist church currently sits on this spectrum and will argue that the optimal position is a balanced one in the middle of the spectrum.

Looking firstly at tithe, an examination will take place on where the tithe comes from and where the tithe dollar ends up going. This will be followed by an examination of the other main source of revenue for the local church – offerings. Using the South Queensland Conference of the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an example, it will be discovered just how much of the tithes and offerings leave the local church. The paper will then ask what this means for local congregations. It will explore the impact on current practices in terms of the

effectiveness of the local church and examine issues that arise for the local congregation and the local church pastor under the current system.

This paper will also ask what can and what is being done to bring a more balanced approach in church structure in favour of local churches. This will look at recent changes that have been made in this area that are steps in this direction. It will also look at improvements that can be made to bring greater health and life to the roots of the system, the local church.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the case for a greater proportion of the resources raised in local Seventh-day Adventist Churches to remain in these same local churches. While not neglecting the global responsibility of funding the preaching of the eternal gospel into all the world, an investigation will take place in order to discover whether, if by allowing the local church to invest more locally, will this lead to an increase in the health, strength and growth of these same churches? In turn, will this lead to increased health, and indeed if the right balance is struck, increased resources available to the corporate global church?

FRAMEWORK

Congregationalism verses **Centralisation: Searching for Middle Ground**

In the early days of Adventism, no one in their wildest dreams would have envisaged the kind of structure that the newly emergent church would have in the early part of the new millennium. The Advent movement found its organisational roots in congregationalism, and at that time it would have been unthinkable that the church would be organised beyond the congregational level. Many feared that embracing any form of hierarchical organisational structure would cripple the churches message or mission and become too much like other churches that some were labelling as “Babylon”¹ (Storrs, 1844 cited in Knight, 1999, p.51). Yet as time progressed it was realised that organisation was inevitable if the church was to reach the world with the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14. As Spangler, (1981, p. 20) explains in synergistic terms, “an organisation . . . can accomplish far more, in terms of world outreach, than if each church were left on its own.”

So organise the church they did, so much so that Knight (2007,p.69) states,

Seventh-day Adventist history represents the full spectrum of approaches to organisation. The movement began aggressively anti-organisational, but today it is the most highly structured church in the history of Christianity.

It is clear that as a church we have not only seen but have experienced the extremities of both ends of the spectrum, from congregational to a highly centralised organisation. Because of this, as an organisation we should know better than most, as Daily (1994, p.225) reminds us, that “both institutional and congregational systems have unique advantages and disadvantages. One system is not necessarily superior to the other.”

Yet the structure of the church has swung so far from its original beginnings that one

¹ Storrs warned that “No church can be organized by man’s invention but what it becomes Babylon the moment it is organised.”

author (Sickler, 1996, p.39) states that “congregationalism [is] the most obscene word in the Seventh-day Adventist administrative vocabulary.”² During the 1985 General Conference Session the G.C. president, Neal Wilson (cited in Haloviak, 1994, p.1) declared, “We cannot allow the beginnings even of congregationalism, or a congregational-type of church government and system. This could ultimately totally destroy the thrust and the world mission, and dilute the message which Seventh-day Adventists have.”

So perhaps it is with some irony that the local church still has many congregational traits. It could be argued that to a large extent local Seventh-day Adventist churches are self governing. The local church selects its own elders, deacons and officers. It can decide its own worship schedule, format and style. The local church decides what outreach events to conduct, when to run them, and what sort of need they are trying to reach. The local church even decides who will become a member of the church, and who they will disfellowship from that same membership. Yet the real congregational ingredient is missing, her resources, and hence much of her power and authority. These have all been transferred to the higher levels of the institutional structure.

In examining its place on the organisational spectrum, Adventism must not travel all the way back down the road to congregationalism. We can do so much more, locally and globally by being structured and organised. As Mustard (1987, p.304) explains, “Centralized government remains essential for coordinating the mission of a worldwide church, maintaining unity, and lending weight to the church’s sense of identity.” It is Johnsson (1995, p.18) who points to the fact that “all other – *all other* – Protestant churches are essentially *national* churches. Adventists are unique: we are a

² Sickler’s next sentence reads, “The tone of voice with which it is uttered is the same as one would use to announce a major outbreak of the Eboli virus.”

world church, not a confederation of national churches.” Yet with this centralised world system, “flexibility is . . . needed within these underlying considerations in order to meet changing social and cultural circumstances.” (Mustard, 1987, p.304). It also should be kept in mind as Knight (2001, p.169) states “too much organization could actually frustrate the mission of the church rather than facilitate it.” It is clear that a middle ground needs to be found, and for the sake of the local church it must be found sooner rather than later.

In searching for this organisational middle ground, we must keep in mind what the organisation is for. Again it is Spangler (1981, p.20) who states more clearly than most, the reason for organisation of the churches and the central argument behind this paper.

The purpose of our organisation is to bring strength to the churches . . .
It is axiomatic that the stronger the local church becomes,
the stronger the entire body will be.

“Axiomatic” is an older word which means “self-evident”, “it goes without saying”, “it is obvious”, “manifest” and “clear”. Perhaps part of the clarity should come about due to the church’s passion for mission. As Oosterwal (1972, p.15) states, “Mission is the heartbeat of the church. If it stops, the church ceases to be. Each institution, every program, and any activity of the church has meaning – and a right to exist – only if it participates in mission.” Lowell C. Cooper, (*Adventist News Network*, 2006) a vice President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, reminds us “mission and growth happen in a localised setting.” In fact Oosterwal (1980, p.25) states, “It is a well known fact that the rapid missionary advance of the early Christian church centered in local congregations which made themselves responsible for the

evangelization of their surrounding communities. The same is true for most of the Adventist Church expansion in our time.”

Borden (2004, p.31) agrees and is clear when he defines the local congregation as the “primary unit of mission in the world.” He states,

If we really believe that the local congregation is God’s basic and primary unit of mission in the world, then neither we [judicatories, or in Adventist terms - Conferences], nor our national denominational entities exist to demand anything of local congregations. Instead we exist to enhance their mission.

It seems obvious to the current author that, if supported and enhanced by higher administrative levels, local churches could invest more locally, ensuring that the local church is strengthened, which in turn strengthens the corporate church and its capacity to fulfil its global mission. This is a realisation that for good reason is beginning to challenge the overcentralised status quo.

The World Organisational Structure Today.

According the *Church manual* (2000, p.26), the structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has four levels that “lead(s) from the individual believer to the worldwide Church Organization.” These levels are as follows.

- 1) The first of these, and at the most basic level, is the local church which is described as a “united organised body of individual believers.”
- 2) The local churches are then banded together in a particular region, state, province or territory, to form a local “conference” of churches. (In some places, depending on a number of factors the “conference” can also be termed as a “field” or a “mission.” Australia only has conferences). As an example, in Australia there are nine such conferences with descriptive titles like the Western Australain

- 3) The next level consists of these conferences being grouped together to within a larger territory (often a grouping of states or even countries) to form a “union conference”. So for example in this part of the world there is the Australian Union Conference.
- 4) The final level is known as the “General Conference” As is explained on the church’s website, www.adventist.org, under the heading *World church structure and governance*,

The General Conference represents the worldwide expression of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. To facilitate its worldwide activity, the General Conference has established regional offices, known as divisions of the General Conference, which have been assigned, by action of the General Conference Executive Committee at Annual Councils, general administrative oversight responsibilities for designated groups of unions and other church units within specific geographical areas.

Although only four levels are listed most would perceive that there is a fifth. For as can be seen above the various “unions of conferences” are formed into “divisions” of the world field. So in effect a local church is part of a conference, which is part of a union, which is part of a division which is part of the General Conference. The General Conference has 13 divisions worldwide where each division “has its own administrative responsibility.”³ As an example, there is the South Pacific Division, which is a grouping of all the union conferences (currently four), in that region.

³ (http://adventist.org.au/about_adventists/organisation/church_structure)

In an effort to aid local churches and help them in various parts of their ministry, each level of administration has various departments. Examples of these include departments such as Youth Ministries, Personal Ministries, Health Ministries, Children's Ministries, Women's Ministries, Prayer Ministries, Ministerial Association, Communication, Sabbath school, Family Ministries, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and the like. The local church is encouraged to have corresponding ministries operating at the local level. In this way, these departments and departmental directors, can support, equip and train churches in these different ministry areas. While not always the case, it is not unusual to find each department duplicated at each level in the church structure.

As well as running ministry departments, conferences, unions and divisions also operate a variety of institutions. These range from schools to hospitals, retirement homes to media and publishing houses. As the website for the world church, www.adventist.org, explains, "Seventh-day Adventists see in the gospel commission and the example of the Lord and His apostles the responsibility of followers of Christ to serve the whole person. In their world outreach they have therefore followed the pattern of their beginnings in the development of educational, health-care, publishing, and other institutions." Where differences arise between organisations and institutions, appeals can be made to the next higher level of the church structure.

Losing The Voice Of The Local Church.

With so many different levels, church administrators are quick to point out that the Seventh-day Adventist church is organised with a "representative" form of church governance. Being organised in this way "means authority in the church comes from the membership of local churches" (www.adventist.org), or in the words of the

Church manual, the authority of the church “rests in the church membership, with executive responsibility delegated to representative bodies and officers for the governing of the church.” (*Church manual*, p.26). As the web site for the world-church, www.adventist.org, under the heading of *World church structure and governance* explains, “each level is ‘representative,’ that is, it reflects a democratic process of formation and election. Local churches elect their own officers and church boards by majority vote. Churches elect delegates to the conferences which meet ‘in session’ every two or three years.” When a conference is not in session executive authority lies in the hands of the “Conference Executive Committee,” which includes the executive officers (normally President, Secretary and Treasurer), all of whom are elected by the session. Ellen White (cited in *Church manual*, 2000, p.26) in 1903, explains this system further when she stated,

Every member of the church has a voice in choosing officers of the church. The church chooses the officers of the state conferences. Delegates chosen by the state conferences choose the officers of the union conferences, and delegates chosen by the union conferences choose the officers of the General Conference. By this arrangement every conference, every institution, every church, and every individual, either directly or through representatives, has a voice in the election of the men who bear the chief responsibilities in the General Conference.

Through the passage of time, however, some of this process has been lost. Delegates to local conference sessions can choose and vote on whom they would like to represent them at the conference level, they cannot, however, choose who they would like to represent them at higher levels. “The (current) practice calls for delegates to union conference and General Conference sessions to be appointed by conference and union conference officers and committees, respectively.” (Dederen, 1995 p.8). In a paper that was distributed to the world church as a supplement to the *Ministry* magazine, Dederen (1995, p.8), asks “Whom do such delegates represent if not essentially those who appointed them? Shouldn’t careful attention be given to the

feasibility of adopting a pattern closer to a representative process at all levels?” He continues by saying

Why couldn't delegates be chosen, i.e., elected, rather than appointed at all levels? Elected by their local congregations, the delegates to local conference constituency meetings would elect delegates to union conference sessions as their representatives. The latter, in turn, would elect delegates to represent them at General Conference sessions. This seems to me closer to our convictions regarding the priesthood of all believers and a representative model, not to mention the intent of Ellen White's advice.

Dederen (1995, p.8) concluded by admitting that the end result may not be significantly different, “but a new sense of participation and involvement, which must have characterized the early church at the time of the Jerusalem assembly, would almost certainly pervade the church.”

Walters (1994, p.15) admits that “in reality, the representativeness of Adventist church government has often been more symbolic than real.” If this is the case, what form of church governance actually exists for the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Raymond Cottrell (1984, p.42), former Associate Editor of the *Adventist Review* and the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* talks about this when he says, “At the local conference level the Seventh-day Adventist church has a representative form of government, above that level the polity of the Seventh-day Adventist is hierarchical: authority flows downward and members in local congregations have virtually no voice.” While there is nothing inherently wrong with a hierarchical system, and indeed perhaps it is unrealistic to expect that every local church can have a voice on the world stage, the higher one goes in the Adventist structure the less the needs and wishes of the grass roots congregations, for whom the structure exists, are heard. In addition, “because it is a top down system, it tends not to be based on local ministry needs in the church or community.” (Cox, 2001, p.144).

In a paper entitled *Reasons for considering adjustments to Seventh-day Adventist Church ministries, services and structures*, Cooper (2005b, p.4) believes that the church “must address the question of how the local congregation and the world church remain in dynamic communication, obtain feedback and provide timely response.” He goes on to note that “most pastors have limited direct engagement with the decision-making bodies of the Church.” To illustrate this point he gives the following example.

Five local churches generate just over one percent of the world tithe. Among the five senior pastors of these churches.

- One is on the local conference executive committee
- One is on the union executive committee
- No one is on the division executive committee
- No one is on the General Conference executive committee
- No one was a delegate to the GC Session 2005.

Having given this example Cooper is quick to point out that, “this illustration is not cited as an argument that these pastors should be on all the various layers of executives committees. But it does point out that relatively few local churches can exert significant impact on the whole denomination.” However as Parmenter (2006, p.10) notes, “If we truly believe that our structures are set up to serve the local churches these same churches should play a major role in informing us (administration and the wider church) of their needs.”

Cottrell (1984, p.42), would agree. Having looked at the lack of representation in the higher levels of church governance, he continues his description of the structure by saying

The Seventh-day Adventist church is a closed, self-operating, and self-perpetuating system, similar to the Roman Catholic Church, in which those in authority are not responsible to lower echelons. Above the local conference level, those in authority are not elected by, representative of, or administratively accountable to, local congregations or the membership at large."

More recently, Bull and Lockhart (2007, p.118) have suggested that the real authority of the church lies in two places, the administrative structure itself, and the institutions, as they have total control of the denomination's "electoral machinery." They note that while there has been a small increase in lay participation, the vast majority of delegates to the General Conference (GC) Session come from one of these two camps.

Talking about the GC Session they state

It is far removed from the average church member, who cannot be said to participate in any direct democratic sense, either in the selection of his representatives or in the election of the leadership. Adventism is not particularly different from other ecclesiastical systems in this respect. But it does not really recognise the authority of church members as the church manual claims. What the system does represent are the various administrative groups and institutional interests that dominate Adventist society.

It seems that in a system that purports to be representational, the ones who the system was set up to represent most have lost their voice. And in doing so they have also lost the majority of their resources.

The Wrong Way Round.

The thirteenth, and what would turn out to be the last, South Pacific Division session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was held in Melbourne in late August 2005. At the commencement of session, the then Division President, Laurie Evans gave his opening address. "This [following] quinquennium must be the quinquennium of the local pastor and the local church." He said, "This must be more than a slogan. It must be intentional, strategic and seen as a top priority." (Brown, 2005. p.2)

As Evans continued to talk, the reason for his impassioned plea became clear. From the year 2000 to 2005, the corporate church had spent a lot of its time, energy and effort in restructuring the administration and organisational aspects of the wider church, yet "none of these initiatives have resulted in appreciable growth, nor have

they resulted in a revival or rejuvenated church in the South Pacific.” As Brown (2005, p.2) who was reporting on the event states.

Pastor Evans admitted the church has paid lip-service to the importance of local churches “but talk and practice do not harmonise.” To this end, he particularly challenged church administrators and their allocation of resources. “In this division most conferences are using only 45 per cent of gross tithe in supporting field ministry,” Pastor Evans reported. “The remaining 55 per cent supports other activities of the conference and the corporate structure. But if the local pastor and church is the primary focus, it would seem the proportion is the wrong way round.

The wrong way round indeed! How is it that such a low percentage of church revenue returns to where it came, the local churches of the tithe paying members? Even with an “I can do all things through Christ” attitude, how can the local church realistically live up to its fullest redemptive potential, operating efficiently and effectively, fulfilling its mission, and ministering to the local community, when over half of its resources are employed in areas other than locally? Appealing to the administrators present, Evans suggested, “If we could apply 60 per cent of gross tithe directly to field ministry, this would be an additional amount of \$A6.5 million for this purpose in Australia and New Zealand. What a difference that would make to resourcing the growth of the church at the grassroots level.”

Clearly resource allocation is a major issue for the church today. Its solution calls for what Evans calls “visionary leadership.” “The church today is in need of administrators and pastors who can think big and strategise for the impossible,” he concluded (Brown, 2005, p.2). Though one wonders how an increased allocation of fifteen percent of tithe can be termed as either thinking big, or strategising for the impossible. However, this certainly is a step in the right direction. Before we can look at potential visionary changes that can occur, we first need to examine how the current system works. In doing this we will now turn our attention to major source of income for the church, tithe.

Bringing The Whole Tithe Into the Storehouse.

Putting The Tithing Principle Into Practice.

Seventh-day Adventists are firm believers in the tithing principle. In the Old Testament book of Malachi, God's people are commanded to

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” Malachi 3:10

In talking about this tithing principle, the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (2000, p.154-155) states;

Although the returning of tithe is not held as a test of fellowship, it is recognised as a scriptural obligation that every believer owes to God and as one of the spiritual exercises in which the giver should have part in claiming by faith the fullness of blessing in Christian life and experience.

There can be no doubt that many Adventists have put God to the test and have claimed by faith the fullness of God's blessing in their lives as they follow this tithing principle. This can be seen by the increase in tithe that the church collects each year. According to Kingsley Wood (Rogers, 2008, p.5), Chief Financial Officer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia, “Tithe collected in Australia in 2007 showed a "healthy increase" of 9 per cent over 2006.” As Rogers (2008, p.5) reports, “In the financial calendar year, \$A56,123,548 was received from Australian churches, with most states recording an increase in returned tithe. This continues a trend over the past few years, with a 10 per cent rise in 2005 and 3 per cent in 2006.”

While the monetary figure of tithe is increasing, and in fact Australian Adventist churches have been among the top ten contributors to worldwide tithe figures since 2004 (Rogers, p.5.), “a comparison of tithe income to the church membership suggests a disconcerting proportion of members are not returning tithe to the church organisation.” Perhaps this should be seen as a large warning sign that the denomination could be heading in the same direction as other mainline denominations

in what Mead (1996, p.2. cited in Zech, 1997, p.3) foresees as a “financial meltdown.” Mead states

I use the term . . . intentionally to suggest that something essentially irreversible has happened within the financial and organisational systems of the mainline denominations, and that the impact of this is only beginning to be felt. I see almost no response by denominational or institutional leadership that indicates awareness of the severity of the crises.

It seems that the future may be a little more rosy for Adventism than other denominations. As Vallet and Zech (1995, p.48) and the figures above indicate, “The Seventh-day Adventist Church is growing significantly in membership and in benevolence giving. There is no funding crisis.”⁴ However tensions are increasing as fewer people pay tithe and more become concerned about the way the church redistributes its resources.

While there is debate on the matter,⁵ Adventists have appointed the *storehouse* as referred to in Malachi, to be the local conference of churches. As Scripture clearly states in Malachi to bring the *whole tithe into the storehouse*, 100% of the tithe money that is collected by the local church is forwarded to the conference. That is, if a church member is faithful in giving 10% of their wage or increase, his or her tithe is collected by their local church. This tithe can be collected by using “suitable envelopes [that are] provided free by the local conference for the purpose of securing uniformity and regularity in the collection of tithes.” (*South Pacific Division working policy* (here

⁴ Back in 1985 W.R Beach and B.B.Beach (1985, p.35) could state with much confidence, “We believe this Seventh-day Adventist Church organisation meets today’s needs. Without crisis, in normal operation all problems can be handled and solved.”

⁵ For example see Robert J. Kloosterhuis, *Where is the storehouse when it comes to paying tithe*, which was first published in the August 1997 issue of *Ministry*, to which J David Newman responded with “A reply to *where is the storehouse*.” Because of the controversial nature of Newman’s reply, *Ministry* did not publish his response. However some eight years later, *Adventist Today* republished Kloosterhuis original article with Newman’s response because “both offer significant content for the ongoing discussion within Adventism over the proper management of tithe. (*Adventist Today*, vol 13. issue 5, pp.10-14).

after SPDWP), FIN.30.55.5). However, increasingly church members are choosing to pay their tithe through online services provided by the internet.

Once the local church has gathered the tithe given by its members, these “funds must be returned to the local conference on a monthly basis using the standard treasurers report and supported with either a Church Managed Funds transfer (formerly known as Central Bank) or a cheque to cover the conference funds collected in the month.” (Hatting, 2008). Hence all of the tithe money that is collected by the local church is passed on to the conference where it is then redistributed. As one can imagine in large churches or in churches with successful business people, large amounts of money can flow through the local church and into the conference. One can easily see how tensions and frustrations can arise when, with the exception of triennial Conference Sessions, the local church has little to no say on how this tithe is then redistributed.

Before we look at how the conference redistributes this money, it is worth pausing and considering the promised blessing. Note that the blessing is given to the person who tithes, and is given regardless of how the “storehouse” determines to redistribute it. If, for example, a conference treasurer decided to discretely and deceptively redistribute some of the tithe money into his own pockets, the blessing on the tithe giver still remains. As one conference treasurer quite bluntly told me, “whether one pays tithe or not is a matter between that individual and God. As to where that tithe goes, it is a matter between me and God that I will one day have to stand before him and give account.” It is an interesting approach to take.

Where The Tithe Goes? Example South Queensland Conference.

So how is this tithe money redistributed and where does it go? While each conference differs, it will be helpful to briefly look at one example, in this case the South Queensland Conference, which although is one of the larger conferences in Australia, gives a typical picture of how this money is handled.

At the end of 2006, the South Queensland Conference consisted of seventy-four organized churches, thirteen companies and four groups, making a total of ninety-one worshipping congregations. (*South Queensland Conference, Seventy-third Triennial Session, 2004 – 2006. (here-after SQLD session report), 2007, p.21*). Collectively these churches contributed just short of \$10 million in tithe to the conference during 2006. (*SQLD session report, 2007, p.45*) This amounted to an eleven percent increase on the year before, which was the highest annual increase that the conference had seen over the past twenty years (*SQLD session report, 2007, p.33*). However, once collected, the money sourced from local churches becomes available for redistribution, yet the very source that this funding originated from is sorely neglected.

Leaving The Local Area.

In many ways, the local conference is in a bind. Not neglecting the tithing principle each conference itself pays a “tithe on tithe.” Ten percent is passed on to a union of conferences, in the case of the South Queensland Conference in 2006, approximately one million dollars was forwarded to Australian Union Conference. As has been previously stated, in 2007 a total of \$56.1 million was received in tithe from Australian churches which means that due to “tithe on tithe” \$5.61 million would

have gone to the Australian Union Conference. With this money it was reported that “The union continues to support conferences that have a low tithe base by contributing \$A700,000 back to their operations.”(Rogers, 2008, p.5) The remainder covers administrative costs and other commitments, and then can be used for Australian mission initiatives. However, very little of this impacts the local church which originally gave the tithe. Again, to stay true to the tithing principle, “the Union in turn forwards to the General Conference, or its Divisions, one tenth of its total tithe income.” As the *Church manual* (2000, p.153) continues to explain,

Thus the local conferences/mission/field, the union, and the General Conference are provided with the funds with which to support the workers employed and to met the expense of conducting the work of God in their respective spheres of responsibility and activity.

With ten percent of the tithe income gone, the local conferences still have one more obligation to fulfill before they can begin to redistribute tithe money back into ministry that is occurring within their own areas. Incredibly, on top of the “tithe on tithe,” the conference is also required to give a portion of the collected tithe money to what is known as the “Tithe Percentage Fund.” *South Pacific Division working policy* explains the rationale and the purpose behind this fund and it supports. The policy, (FIN.30.70.1 *Tithe percentage plan*) states;

In harmony with the divine principle set forth in the Bible and supported in the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy that all should share in the responsibility of supporting the worldwide work, we recognise the justice of our conferences and missions sharing their tithe.

Tithe percentage receipts can be used for, but not limited to:
Division Publishing Department (PUB.10.05)
Record (FIN.50.30)
Adventist Media Centre (ADM.30.10)
Avondale College
Union Conference Equalisation Fund (FIN.30.35)
Expatriate Staff
Appropriations to the Mission Field
General Conference 1% of tithe (in addition to what is remitted by unions) sent by this Division.

As this policy states, tithe allocated in this area is earmarked for “worldwide work” and as a whole has little bearing on the local church. Given this, it is surprising the

amount that conferences contribute to the Tithe Percentage Fund. As Graeme Drinkall (2008), Chief Financial Officer of the Greater Sydney Conference (GSC) explains,

The conference remits a further, in the case of GSC, 13% to the SPD (called a tithe percentage). This tithe percentage varies depending on the gross received by a conference. For 2008 the calculations are based on these thresholds;

\$0 - \$1,129,606	9.5%
\$1,129,606 - \$2,821,956	12.5%
\$2,821,956 -	14%

Hence in the case of the South Queensland Conference in 2006, an extra \$1.34 million was forwarded to the Tithe Percentage Fund at the South Pacific Division. So from the original \$10 million in tithe that was collected from local churches in South Queensland, only \$7.66 million remains to be redistributed in its own area! Just over twenty-three percent has already gone out of the state or region that gave it. Yet despite this, Chief Financial Officer for the South Queensland Conference, Scott Hopkins states;

The worldwide systems of tithes and offerings that the church embraces is truly a blessing to the church and enables God's work to progress in areas without such wider support would be extremely challenging. (*SQLD Session Report, 2007, p.33*)

While this is true, because of the large amounts of money flowing up the system, it also creates greater challenges for the local conference which in turn create larger issues for the local church than needs to exist.

To illustrate this, eventually a large amount ends up at the world headquarters for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The General Conference then has the job of redistributing this money back down the system to where it is deemed to be needed most. In a recent report entitled, *Adventist financial officers to review church's appropriations*, (Lechleitner, 2008, p.6) Robert Lemon, General Conference Treasurer indicated that "on the table is \$US68 million in annual appropriations for Adventist Church institutions and divisions worldwide." Taking into account

exchange rates, this represents a similar amount to the total tithe giving by members in the South Pacific Division! (2007 Division Totals of tithe amounted to \$AU83 million). As the title of the above article indicates, there is considerable debate on the best way to appropriate this money back to the “institutions and divisions” worldwide. Notice there is no mention of the local churches from which this money was derived.

How is it that the institutions and higher administrative levels came to have so much, while the local churches from which this money is sourced came to have so little of its own resources available for its own use? Much has been written and said about the history of the formation of the Adventist organizational structure that was adopted by the worldwide church between 1901-1903. However, for our purposes it would be prudent to highlight one of the main reasons why.

In an undated document located in the Adventist Heritage room at Avondale College, Barry Oliver (undated, p.9) who has gone on to be the South Pacific Division President writes, “There is little doubt that one of the precipitating factors which led to restructuring was the state of the finances of the church.” In a nutshell the General Conference and many of its institutions at that time were broke. Only a few weeks after assuming presidency of the General Conference in 1897, G.A. Irwin realising the dire financial situation the corporate church was in wrote to N.E. Allee that

the General Conference was “living from hand to mouth, so to speak.” He told Allee that some days we get in two or three hundred dollars, and other days we have nothing.” On the particular day that he was writing, he lamented that the treasury was “practically empty,” even though there were at that time “a number of calls for means.” In a circular letter to all conference presidents written the next day, Irwin quoted a statement regarding the desperate situation of the General Conference from I.H. Evans, who was . . . later to be the treasurer of the General Conference. The statement read: “Our finances are in a very embarrassing state... We have paid as little to our workers this year -- since January --as possible... We must have at least \$44,000 per annum more than we have been receiving, as we have nearly \$15,000.00 interest on notes we owe the brethren.” (cited in Oliver, 1989, p.146).

This financial crises, combined with the devastating effect it was having on the corporate church's ability to send missionaries overseas,⁶ led to the design and implementation of the current organisational system that the world church still operates under today. Even a casual observer will note that today the roles have been reversed. While admittedly not to the same extent, it is now the local churches that are struggling for finances and resources. Meanwhile the General Conference debates the best way to redistribute an amount equivalent to the entire tithe income derived from local church members in the South Pacific region. In solving one problem, another was created. One that more than a hundred years later still persists.

Before leaving this area, it should be noted that in the South Pacific Division there is one institution that contributes significantly to the work and the finances of the church. *Sanitarium*, a health food company that is owned and operated by the church, produces well known and best selling breakfast brands such as *Weet-Bix* and *So Good*. During a report presented at the Australian Union Conference *Pastors Summit* in February of 2008, *Sanitarium's* Chief Executive Officer, Kevin Jackson (2008), reported that for the first time ever in Australia, during the last quarter of 2007, *Sanitarium* overtook *Kellogg's* as the leading cereal producer in Australia from a volume perspective. Jackson also reported that global revenue from its food business for 2008 was expected to come in just short of \$600 million for the year and is projected to continue to grow rapidly. This is very exciting indeed especially as

⁶ It has not been often realized that in the last five years of the nineteenth century there was a slackening of missionary activity by the denomination (Oliver, undated, p.11). During the 1899 General Conference Session, Allen Moon who was the president of the Foreign Mission board reported that;

During the last two years we have opened up no new work in any part of the world, it has been an impossibility. There have been demands for opening the work in China. That work ought to have been opened a year ago, yet we have been utterly unable to do anything towards opening it. (Moon, quoted by Oliver, undated, p.11).

Sanitarium's website (<http://www.sanitarium.com.au/company/tax.html>) explains, "100% of Sanitarium's profits are given to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia" In his report to the Australian pastors, Jackson explained just how much the company gives to the church. He stated

In the last quinquennium that ended in 2005 we [*Sanitarium*] contributed \$76 million to the church, which was a 34 percent increase on the previous quinquennium. This current five year period which ends in 2010, currently we project to contribute to the church \$120 million which represents a 58% increase over the previous quinquennium overall.

Even when one converts this figure to a yearly amount, one can see that *Sanitarium* contributes significant finances to the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is revenue for the division on top of the tithe already contributed by the conferences through the Tithe Percentage Fund. However, from a local church perspective in both Australia and New Zealand, none of these large profits made by *Sanitarium* flow back into or make a positive impact on local church budgets! The local church is overlooked.

Redistributing the Remainder.

Let's return to the example from the South Queensland Conference. From its original tithe income of \$10 million in 2006, \$2.3 million has left the region as explained above. How does the conference allocate the remaining tithe that it has available?

By far the largest and most significant portion goes to support the field ministers or pastors that the Conference has appointed to minister and run the various churches.

As Hatting (2008) explains

The tithe received by the conference is used to employ ministers and the conference fully funds the total wages costs of a ministerial resource assigned to a local church including the provision of books and equipment, telephone allowances and travel. This is quite different to a number of other denominations where the local church is required to fund the cost of their pastor. The advantage of our system is that no matter how small a church may be they will still get a minister and all ministers regardless of the size of their church get paid the same scale. One could therefore argue that this is an indirect return of tithe to a local church.

Indeed it is. However when one looks at just how much of the tithe is used for this purpose, questions remain. In 2006 the South Queensland Conference spent just over \$4 million in this area (*SQLD session report, 2007, p.54*). In other words, 40% of the original tithe that was given is directly returned to the churches in the conference in the form of pastoral staffing. This does not mean, however, that the churches that give the most tithe receive the most pastors. As Hatting explained above, in South Queensland as in most other conferences the tithe is not “locked back” to the church that gave it. The system is such that the tithe collected from the churches that are strong financially may secure one or more pastors for their own congregation, but can also go to provide a pastoral budget or budgets for the smaller churches within that same conference. Therefore in 2006, some churches (in general the smaller congregations) would have received more than 40% of its tithe back in the form of pastoral staffing, while other churches (generally the larger ones) would have received less.

One is beginning to see that the system is set up in such a way that the stronger brother helps the weaker. While this should be encouraged to a certain extent, the danger is that by taking too many resources from the stronger brother, you only succeed in making him weaker, while perhaps making the weaker brother, only a little less weak. Of course the other danger is that the current system rewards mediocrity, instead of encouraging excellence in our churches.

It should also be noted that there is a practical element to this. What does it mean, for example if based on tithe figures alone a local church could provide for 1.2 pastors? Especially when traditionally, a field pastoral budget exclusively refers to pastors,

which usually means Avondale trained, and does not include say a worship pastor, or children's pastor, or any administrative staff at the local level. This is an issue that will be addressed extensively further below.

With 40% of tithe given to staff local churches, departmental ministerial staff and operating expenses in 2006 (*SQLD session report, 2007, p.54*) accounted for 13.4% of the total redistributed conference tithe at \$1.4 million. The various departments include Health and Children's Ministries, Women's Ministries, Family and Youth Ministries and Personal Ministries just to name a few. The leaders of these departments make themselves available to the local churches to come in and preach and run seminars and the like. This obviously, can be helpful to the local church. In the church where the author is currently a pastor, a call on a departmental director to preach or run a program may be made once or twice a year. However more often than not, the department leaders organise special weekends away – some of which are very good and beneficial but because many people go from churches to these events, it can often interrupt the program of the local church.

In many ways, the author believes that we have this the wrong way round. There is a tendency in Adventism, that if someone is doing something well, then we will take them out of that environment so that they can teach others how to do what they once did. It is argued, however instead of taking people out of the environment in which they excel, steps should be implemented to leave "directors" working in the local church and empower them to conduct church based training from their own local congregation. This issue will be taken up later.

In 2006, a further 14% of the tithe dollar contributed or \$1.4 million is taken up by administration, treasury and “other” office expenses incurred by the Conference.

(*SQLD session report, 2007, p.54*) The only other item that relates directly to the local church is in evangelism. Churches can apply for assistance in order to run some of their outreach programs. Through a complicated and lengthy budget proposal system, local churches submit their outreach plans to the Conference which then decides if this program will receive funding. “While these are specifically targeted funds it can be argued that this is an indirect return of tithe to a local church.” (Hatting, 2008). In 2006 a total of \$174,174 or 1.7% was allocated in direct local church subsidies, while a further \$50,000 went to “other” evangelism projects. (*SQLD session report, 2007, p.46*)

A representation of the above can be seen in Figure 1. It should be noted that tithe received from local churches represents about 80% of a conference’s income. The figure below deals exclusively with tithe.

Tithe Redistribution South Queensland Conference 2006.

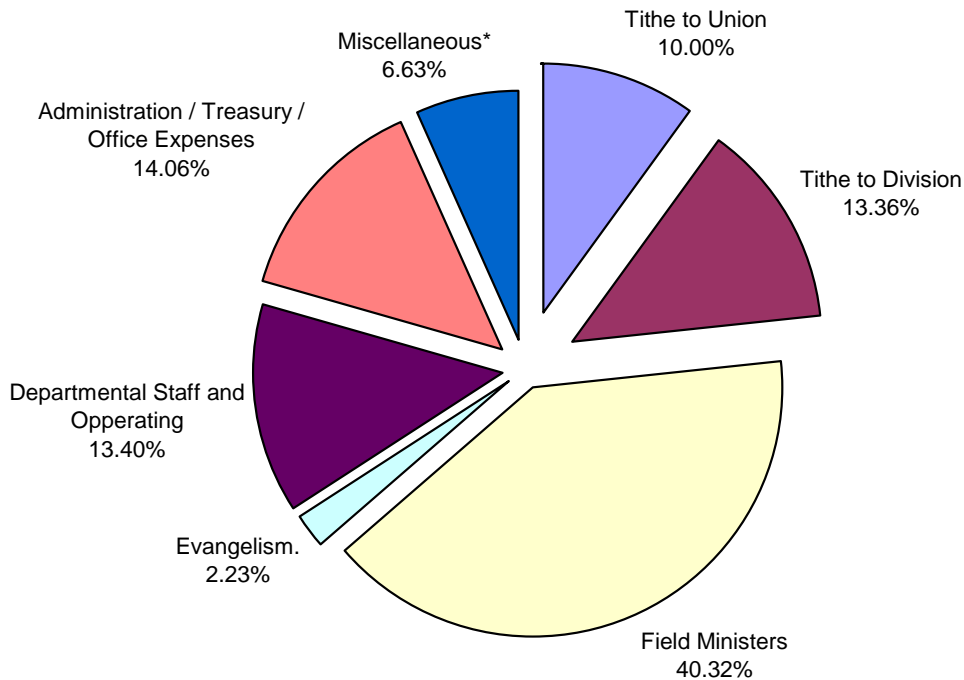


Figure 1

In looking at Figure 1, it must be remembered that the funding for the above came from the tithe paying members of the local church.⁷ Therefore it is disheartening to see how little of it is invested back into this area, and indeed how much of a say the local church has in the uses to which this money is put.

Staffing Using Tithe At The Local Church.

As has been mentioned before, the money allocated to field staff relates to trained pastors who are appointed by the conference to minister to and run the local churches.

In the South Queensland Conference, to the authors knowledge, no tithe is used for

⁷ The exception to this is that one can choose to have their membership on the conference roll and pay their tithe directly to the Conference.

administrative staff or other full time ministry positions (other than the pastors) at the local church level. Indeed the *Seventh-day Adventist Church manual* states that “the tithe is to be held sacred for the support of the work of the ministry, for Bible teaching, and for the *support of conference/mission/field administration* in the care of churches and of field outreach endeavors.” (2000, p.154. emphasis added). While it is reasonable for there to be administrative support at the conference level to deal with ministerial payrolls, insurance, legal issues and the like, it is unreasonable to assume that the local church, especially larger churches, have no need for administrative support.

The larger the church, the more time the pastor or pastors need to spend administratively, taking him or her away from what they are passionate about and what they are called to do. Klopp (2002, p.238) states, “You should have one paid support staff person (i.e. custodial, secretarial) for about every 170 people in attendance ... including children.” This simply does not happen in Adventist churches. More and more pastors can find their time taken up by giving out telephone numbers, photocopying materials for meetings, making booklets for training events, typing letters and then posting them, sending emails, making and organising and ensuring appointments are made and kept, and communicating to the larger church the decisions that have been made and the events that are coming up. Even in smaller churches, Johnson (1984, p.87) points out that

Too many pastors spend too much time being secretaries, . . . and maintenance people. These are not the jobs a minister is trained to do even though he or she may enjoy doing them. A minister is an educator, counsellor, worship leader, resident theologian, and administrator of a congregation. When these roles are not assumed by the minister they usually aren't covered. When the roles are performed poorly, the members are deprived of quality services.

This problem is simply exacerbated in larger churches. In effect because tithing money is not spent on administration staff at the local level, in the larger churches this can easily turn out to be what the pastor becomes.

This can be illustrated, by quickly glancing through the local telephone directory. In the 2007 /2008 Brisbane Telephone Directory, the numbers that are listed for the various churches in the city are listed under the heading “Church Pastor’s Residences.” Therefore to contact the church you need to ring the home of the pastor. While this might be acceptable for the smaller churches, it should not be acceptable for the larger ones, or the pastors who are at them. By default, the pastor’s wife, children and any house guests, can become the church’s secretary when the pastor is not at home.

A change has recently taken place and when one looks up a church number on the White Pages website on the internet, “Church Pastor’s Residence” is no longer listed but instead most churches are listed under the mobile telephone number that belongs to the pastor. One of the few exceptions to this is the church where the current author is a pastor. There the land-line number is listed, however if no one answers the phone, an event that will happen most of the time, then the call is transferred to the pastor’s mobile phone!

Not only does this example show the lack of staff, but also a lack of offices at the church and set office hours. Hence it also shows a lack of professionalism. Again some churches may be too small for this to happen or, on a rare occasion, churches may be able to find volunteers who can give a significant portion of their time to the

church during the week in fulfilling this task. This is contrasted with those who are at a conference level, or a level above who have access to receptionists, secretaries and personal assistants, supplied by tithe that has been derived from the local church.

The frustration of this can be seen in e-mail correspondence the senior pastor of one of our larger churches recently sent me. Andre van Rensburg wrote

I have been flat out with a lot of administrative things. I said to . . . (my wife) I would have my doubts if the departmental guys at the Conference have to do the amount of correspondence, writing letters and contact people and be involved in organising as much as I have to do.

It should be noted that just by adding new staff does not mean that automatically a church will grow. Staffing is only one of the many reasons why churches do not grow. However, as one author states, “Whatever you do; don’t miss this: Not adding staff at the right time will make certain that your church is done growing, even if you do everything else right.” (Gladden, 2003, p.14) Because local churches have little control over their tithe, money that is used to hire people in higher levels of administration could be better spent at the local church level. The issue of staffing will be taken up again later in this paper.

With the entire tithe now accounted for one wonders what resources may be left? Thankfully Adventists are generous people and the local church has another major source of income, offerings.

Church Offerings.

Main Church Offerings

“Grateful Christians cannot limit their contributions to the church to tithe. In Israel the tabernacle, and the Temple, were built from “free will offerings” – offerings given from a willing heart. . . Today too, the Lord calls for liberal giving as He has prospered us.” (*Seventh-day Adventists believe*, p.273). So in addition to tithes, the local church also collects offerings from the congregation. As part of Fundamental Belief number 21 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church explains,

We are God’s stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possession, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God’s ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellowmen, and by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church.

Offerings are needed to build, maintain, and operate churches. .” (*Seventh-day Adventists believe*, p.273). While those who preach the gospel receive their living from the gospel (1 Cor 9:11-14) through the tithes that are given, the everyday expenses that a local church faces should not be supported by tithe – which is holy to the Lord – but instead by offerings. Therefore every Sabbath, local Adventist churches collect both the tithes and the offerings.

The format of the church allows two main opportunities each Sabbath for offerings to be collected each week, namely Sabbath school and the main church service. By far the largest offering collected is during the main church service when the whole congregation is together.

In an average year there are 52 Sabbaths where the church has the ability to collect money, so one would initially think that as all of the tithe leaves the local church, the

local church should be able to retain most if not all the offerings it collects. Sadly, this is not the case. There are just so many other important budget items outside of the local church to support. Of the fifty-two offerings collected throughout the year thirteen go to either the General Conference, the South Pacific Division or the Australian Union Conference. A trend can be detected when one notices that this represents 25%, or a whole quarter's worth of offerings that leave not only the local church but also the conference. The South Pacific Division Working Policy FIN.30.65.1 shows what these offerings are and where they go. It states;

The following church offerings shall be included in the Division church calendar for Australia and New Zealand. In union missions the Planned Giving Program applies.

PROJECT FREQUENCY RECIPIENT

- a. Adventist Youth Biennial—Division Alternating with CSFB
- b. Annual Sacrifice Annual Division
- c. *Record* Annual Conference
- d. Avondale College Biennial—Division Alternating with PAC
- e. Christian Services for Biennial—Division the Blind and Hearing
Alternating with Impaired Adventist Youth
- f. Health & Temperance Annual
- g. Adventist World Radio Annual - Division
- h. Missions Extension Annual - Division
- i. Pacific Adventist University Biennial—Division
Alternating with Avondale College
- j. Pacific Islands Mission Annual Division Advancement
- k. Media Evangelism Annual Division
- l. ADRA/Disaster and Annual Division Famine Relief
- m. Union Institutions Annual Union

All of these offerings can be seen to have a valuable role in the corporate church, and some do have a positive direct impact back on the local church. For example, the offering given for Media Evangelism has allowed each local church to have their own centrally co-ordinated, easy-to-run web site. The *Record* is the church's communication paper and is printed and delivered to each local church every week. One can also notice the mission focus that some of these offerings emphasise that can help complete certain missions that a local church could not pull off on its own. However all of this impacts what the local church can do in its own area.

In the South Queensland Conference, a further seven offerings are used for projects and ministries within the conference. (This figure can vary slightly from conference to conference). Two of these offerings go towards the running of the Annual Convention, or “Big Camp” as it is affectionately known. There is also an offering for Health, ADRA Appeal Expenses, and a “Conference Wide Offering” to support specific conference projects. The two remaining offerings are also “Conference Wide Offerings” but the good news here is that (in QLD) the last two of these offerings are allocated to directly supporting local church projects. So, for example, all of the offering collected during the main service in churches in the South Queensland Conference on March 29, 2008, went directly to support a project at the local Inala church. The same can be said for the local Biloela church which was the recipient of a conference wide offering in August of the same year. Local churches can apply to receive the conference wide offering, which obviously causes a tremendous boost to the church and can go a long way in ensuring that the local project gets completed. However it should be pointed out that with 74 organised local churches in South Queensland, it would take thirty-seven years for every church to be the recipient of an offering like this!

Education Offerings

From the churches initial fifty-two opportunities to collect offerings for local ministry and expenses, twenty have been allocated to other areas, leaving thirty-two possible offerings that remain. This is in line with the *South Pacific Division working policy* FIN 30.65.2 which states; “in preparing the annual church calendar, local conferences shall ensure that a minimum of thirty-two local offerings, including education offerings, are reserved for local churches.”

It's that term, "including education offerings" that reduces the number of offerings retained by the local church even further. As Hatting (2008) explains,

In our conference we require that local churches near a school are expected to support the local schools by way of an education levy. As part of our offering calendar in addition to local church offerings we have a number of Education offerings. The local church that has been allocated an education levy is able to use the Education offering to assist with the payment of the Education levy and so they do not have to return that offering to the conference, however the local churches which have not been allocated an Education levy must return their Education offering to the conference.

The number of offerings that are allocated to help local churches with their education levy is twelve. Therefore once a month, the offering of the day that is collected goes towards education or a church's education levy. This levy is worked out using among other things, the membership of the church, its tithe, and how many children of the church attend the school. It may vary slightly from year to year, as can the money collected from the offerings to cover this levy.

Interested to find out if this has ever led to a situation where more money has been collected for the levy than is needed, and if so what happens to the extra money, an approach was made to a local church treasurer. The response received was hesitant, and this particular treasurer urged that care be taken in what was done with the information. As it turns out, for the particular church of which the enquiry was made, there has been a surplus collected for the last few years that is roughly equivalent to the amount this church would collect in one offering. (For one year it was equal to about two offerings.) The money that is collected over and above the education levy is put aside for "education assistance to needy families." However, as one can see, this fact is not advertised and the account is rarely drawn upon. This can leave local churches in this situation in a dilemma. It raises the question of what can be done with any surplus a church may have left over after fulfilling its commitments. Yet for fear

of losing this small surplus, this seems to be a question that no one is in a hurry to ask! However, the more serious question to be addressed is what happens when the offerings collected don't cover the education levy, a situation that in the past many local Adventist churches have experienced. These circumstances dictate that the shortfall will be taken out of the local church budget.

Either way the local church's commitment to the education system still takes up a large portion of that church's budget. This can be seen in the following calculation. If we assume that all twelve offerings are needed to cover a churches education levy, it is incredible to think that while local churches contribute 23% of their main offering collection opportunities to support church schools, figures for the 2006 SQLD session show that this equates to only 0.85% of the Education System operating income! (SQLD Session Report, 2007, p.66). All this is happening at a time when Seventh-day Adventist schools in Australia are increasingly receiving more financial support from the federal government. During the 2009 government stimulus payments, "Adventist schools in Australia . . . received more than \$100 million as part of the Australian government's education modernisation program." (Tan, 2009, p.3) Our schools are being looked after very well. Needless to say, local churches missed out on the governments generosity, yet continue to support the schools. With the drain on the local church, it is no wonder Johnsson (1995, p.51) asks, "Education: Did we create a masterpiece or a monster."

In these days of heavy government support and grants for private schools, one wonders why the local church is still paying such a high price for the school system, especially when the combined contributions of the churches in the conference amount

to less than one percent of the schools income. In other words, the difference it would make to the local church if it could retain these twelve offerings (23% of its collecting opportunities) would be much more pronounced, than the difference it would make to our schooling system if they didn't receive this money. It should be noted, however, that the author believes that local churches should support our church schools to maintain the link between the school and the church but with further reduced contributions.

Putting It All Together

A visual representation of the number of offerings that are retained by the local church is presented in Figure 2. What this doesn't show however is when, or on what Sabbaths, these local offerings have been allocated to be collected. For example the 2008 offering calendar for the South Queensland Conference reveals that December 27, and January 5, 12, and 26 (A public holiday) are listed as local church budget offerings. This is during the peak holiday season when many of the church members are away, resulting in a lower amount collected. Often other events such as Youth Rally's, regional days, conference wide training events and the like, can occur on local budget offering Sabbaths. When this happens, it has an effect on the amount collected from the local church.

As can be seen in the figure below, thirty-eight percent, or only twenty offerings per year, form the backbone of the local church budget.

Local Church Offering Allocation During a Calender Year

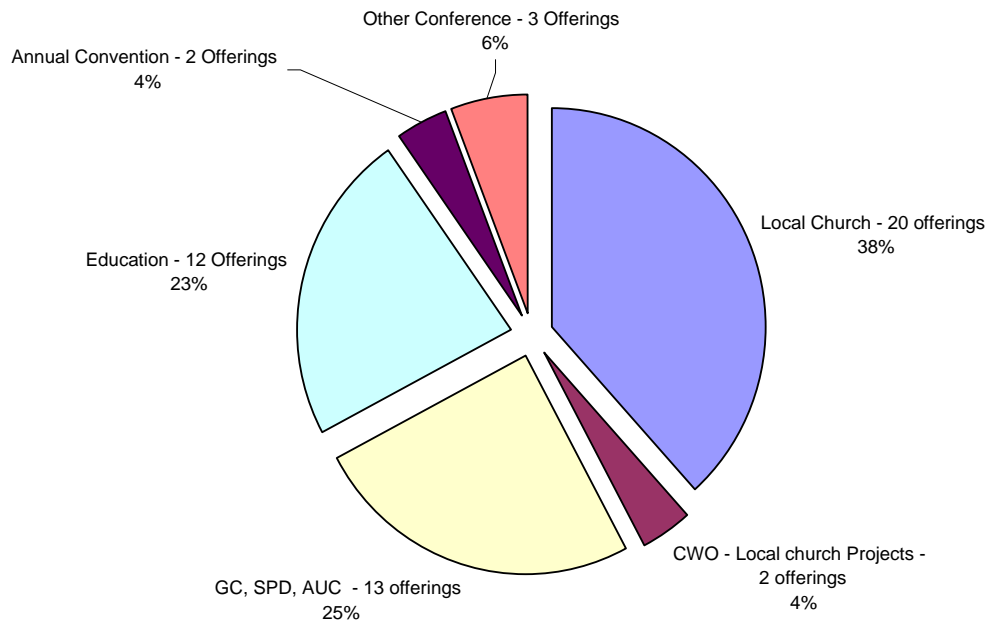


Figure 2

Before moving on, it should be noted that in each worship service there is to be only one offering taken up. However as SPDWP FIN.30.55.6 entitled *One collection per service*, explains, “no more than one collection shall be lifted in any one church at the one service except to meet a special need for a specified limited time.” Because of the lack of funds that the local church retains, the author is currently the pastor of a church that has for over twenty years, been consistently collecting a building offering. This offering was originally set up to fund the new church building built in the 1980s. When that project was completed and paid for, the offerings simply continued, looking forward to the next building project which would take place some decades down the track. Many other churches have been guilty of the same practice.

Sabbath School Offerings

The Last Opportunity For Local Funds.

There is however one last opportunity that local churches have to collect funds from those who attend their main services. This last opportunity has enabled what has been called “our most widely used method of regular systematic giving.” (*Church manual*, 2000, p.155). On a Sabbath morning, traditionally at 9:30am, before the main church service begins, members of the congregation meet together in smaller groups to discuss the Bible, learn more about Jesus and how to be effective in telling others about him during “Sabbath school.” As the *Sabbath school & personal ministries South Pacific Division* website (2008) explains, these Sabbath Schools exist to meet four main objectives, namely

- 1) Study of the Bible,
- 2) Friendship
- 3) Community Outreach and
- 4) World Mission Emphasis.

With these four objectives in mind, it is interesting to note that only one of these objectives receives the benefit of the offering collected during this time. As the *Seventh-day Adventist Church manual* (2000, p.155) explains, “The Sabbath School offerings are devoted to our world mission work. Sabbath by Sabbath large sums come in through these channels.” Just so we are clear SPDWP FIN.30.58.5 states “The whole of the regular Sabbath school offerings shall be paid to the South Pacific Division through the union conference concerned.”

The *Sabbath school handbook* (p.6-7) reveals how this came about.

In 1909 the General Conference recommended that the Sabbath School give all offerings to missions, providing for their expenses in some other way. Goals and devices to record the amounts were introduced to stimulate the missions' offerings. By 1913 all regular Sabbath School offerings were going for missions and a special offering was taken for expenses.

This system that was established for foreign mission outreach during the early part of the last century is still the system in use today. Again it is the *Seventh-day Adventist Church manual* (2000, p.100) that explains;

With the exception of the expense fund, all Sabbath School Offerings are General Conference Offerings and are to be passed on in their entirety by the church treasurer to the conference/mission/field for transfer to the General Conference. These funds include the regular Sabbath School weekly offering, the Thirteenth Sabbath offering, Sabbath School Investment, and Birthday-Thank offering. They are all mission funds, each of which is to be identified as a separate fund in the regular systems of records from the local church to the General Conference. . . No mission funds may be retained by the local church or conference/mission/field.

One can quickly note the other special offerings, such as Sabbath school Investment, and Birthday-thank offerings, that are recommended to be collected at this time.

However, based on the author's experience, these extra offerings have largely disappeared from many Australian churches. The Thirteenth Sabbath offering is still strongly emphasised and supported. As the name suggests these offerings are collected on the thirteenth Sabbath of each quarter, and a percentage of the offering collected (25% from Sabbath schools worldwide) goes to pre-selected mission projects around the world. The church is well aware of these projects as every quarter they are listed and shown on the back of the Sabbath school lesson pamphlet.

As an example, in the South Pacific Division, the director of Adventist Mission, Ray Coombe (2007, p.6) notes a record 13th Sabbath school offering in the third quarter of 2006 which supported a University Church in Suva and a mission plane for Papa New Guinea. In fact, Coombe states that "analysis of mission giving in the South Pacific over the last two years shows encouraging signs of an increasing trend... Except for a seasonal dip in the first quarter of each year, mission offerings have risen to a level

above 6.5% of tithe.” In 2006, Sabbath school offerings combined with other mission offerings, from local churches in the South Pacific region, totalled US\$3.796 million. “We are grateful for the generous giving to mission by our membership,” says Pastor Coombe. “But this still only represents 18 cents per member each week, and only 6 cents in every dollar of tithe, compared to 64 cents in 1930.”⁸ Coombe (2007, p.6) however also recognises that “much more is given directly to missions in our region through Camp Mission Offerings, Fly-n-builds and other personal projects.”

Sabbath School Expenses

As has been noted above, with the Sabbath school offerings going entirely to the mission field, Sabbath schools must provide “for their expenses in some other way.” (*Sabbath school handbook*, p.6) However as the *Church manual* (2000, p.100) explains, “The Sabbath School expense offering and the mission offering shall not be taken as one offering and divided according to an agreed-upon formula or percentage. Sabbath School expense offerings must be kept entirely separate from the mission offerings.” To accommodate this many adult Sabbath schools simply take up another offering. However, as “no more than one collection shall be lifted in any one church at the one service” (SPDWP FIN 30.55.6), instead of passing around the offering bag twice, many Sabbath schools now have a dual offering bag system. This allows the giver to contribute to missions, if they put their offerings on say the left hand side of the offering bag, or to Sabbath school expenses, if the offering is placed on the right hand side of the offering bag. In this way, while two offerings are being collected, the offering bag only circulates once.

⁸ As an aside it is interesting to note the similar trend in both tithes and offerings. While it seems that both have increased, those who actually give seems to be decreasing.

It is perhaps a little ironic that with so many offerings and appeals for the mission of the wider church, it can be damaging to the local church not only in terms of resources but also in terms of retaining first time visitors. Strobel (cited in Zech, 1997, p.28) says, “seekers are often highly allergic to talk of money, and the church must recognise that.” While the Adventist church may recognise this, the many offerings still must be collected.

Local Mission?

Of the four objectives for Sabbath school listed above, offerings are collected for a world mission focus (objective 4), and money can also be collected for Sabbath school expenses such as lesson pamphlets which aid in the study of the Bible (objective 1). One would hope that the second objective, friendship does not require financing, but reaching out to the local community (objective 3) can and does. If a Sabbath school class sees a need in its local community or beyond that it wants to address, the church has no official means of raising funds to help meet that need.

Instead individual classes are invited to give again. The *Sabbath school and personal ministries* website (2008) suggests,

As a class, identify a need in your community. For example, a church member may have just returned home from a stay in hospital, you could pool your financial resources to purchase a basket of grocery items for them.

It is a little ironic that it is only after a member

- gives 10% of their income to tithe,
- contributes to the allocated offering of the day,
- gives to the building fund (if it is collected during the church service)
- gives to the main Sabbath school offering for worldwide mission
- and then gives a little to contribute to the Sabbath school expense,

only then are they are encouraged to “pool your finances” and look at meeting the local needs of those around them.

In this environment it is interesting to note the work of Sahlin (2003, p.33) in which he shows “growing (Adventist) churches spend more money on local mission work than do declining churches.” If the church is to do as Jesus commanded in Acts 1:8, to be witnesses first of all in Jerusalem (local), and in all Judea and Samaria (national) and to the ends of the earth (worldwide), then perhaps our resources should be distributed to reflect more of the same sequence. Surely, this is the Biblical model. Concentrating evangelism and mission in the local setting first, should also be where the greatest support for the same evangelism and mission occurs. The words of Jesus in Acts 1:8, should serve as a reminder for a global church on how to best “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) and fulfill the gospel commission. One must start, and resources must be directed, locally.

Hilarious Givers.

Despite the lack of opportunities and funds that stay in the local church, Adventists still contribute generously. In the 1980s the Columbia Union Conference asked church growth expert Carl George to study Adventism and present his findings in order that the union could work towards their “Vision 2000,” – a vision of what the Seventh-day Adventist Church could look like in that year. The number one priority of that vision was that, “the local church will be the driving force and central focus of the denomination.” (Wisbey. R. 1998, forward to George *Empty pews, empty streets.*) George’s study concluded that Adventists were “hilarious givers.” In his book, *Empty pews, empty streets*, (1988, p.33) he asks, “What do you do with people who are hilarious givers? You leave them to God. He keeps filling their pockets.”⁹ He continues by saying;

There is a prosperity in Adventism that cannot be accounted for other than by describing an intentional approach to finance. Anybody who tithes on purpose has to do a little planning in order to make that work. You don’t just trim 10% of your living expenses without shifting your lifestyle a little bit. So you make a commitment. Then you find there are other things that need to be done, so you wind up giving more. Having done that you have to plan in order to maintain your commitments to God and to man. You just can’t live without a budget. It doesn’t just happen that you give an offering above the tithe. It has to be planned for, prepared for, thought ahead about, committed to, and worked for. Choices are made. Your vacations, the house you live in, where you send the kids to school, how you save. One’s life has to be ordered around this tithing principle. But that means one’s life is ordered. Not only that, you have the clear conscience of knowing that you have not robbed God. . . . Adventism, without getting beyond the Sabbath and tithing, fixes people up so their blood pressure can be lower, their lives can be in rhythm. You’ve broken the tyranny of the urgent with the Sabbath. You’ve broken the tyranny of materialism with tithing. (George, 1988, p.33-35).

Through all this giving one can see prosperity in the lives of those who give, and also in the corporate church and its institutions. God is doing what he promised; he has opened the floodgates of heaven. Yet George (1988, p.35) states, “Unfortunately,

⁹ Bull and Lockhart, (2007, p122-123) show just how much God fills the pockets of the church financially when they state;

The Adventists’ exceptional rate of per capita giving enables the church to raise, and spend, more money than states like Idaho, the Dakotas, Wyoming, or Vermont. If Adventism were a country, its global income, which was \$1.7 billion in 2001 would place it 152 out of the 208 in the World Bank rankings of world economies.

Adventist ministers don't understand what power they have to put into the hands of people through the teaching about tithing. I am amazed that Adventist ministers are trained to be timid about teaching people on the subject of tithing. ”¹⁰ While it is not true that local Seventh-day Adventist pastors are trained to be timid on this subject, nor do they shy away from teaching on the topic, one is beginning to see why, with all these “hilarious givers” in their congregation – giving to offerings that don't invest back into their own setting – many local churches and pastors are beginning to not see the joke.

George recognised this as well. He indicated that he has seen a rising current of “distrust, dismay, infighting and friction” over the issue. He noted that because of the current system of money flowing upwards into the conferences, the union conferences, and the division, this “has meant that your leaders have an enormous amount of clout in directing resources.” (p.55) Back in 1988 he stated,

Now you are torn between two alternatives: Do you let the local church, where most of the money is raised, have more say as to how to it is spent? Or do you keep the impact of a nationally directed denomination? I see continuing and relentless pressure in favor of the local church gaining more say in spending. (George, 1988, p.55)

However he did warn of the dangers this step could take. He predicted

The stress generated by the issue will increase as time goes on, if a clearly reasoned defense of centralization of these resources is not maintained. You are a strategic church. Deploying resources to the hands of insightful people benefits the growth of your church. To take those resources and perhaps dissipate them among the local congregations would be tragic. Little debate has centered on that aspect of giving local churches more say in determining how church resource will be allocated. (George, 1988, p.56)

¹⁰ George continues by saying, “They brag, ‘I preach only one tithing sermon a year.’ I say to them, How can you be so irresponsible! . . .I have never met a tither who understood tithing that regretted his tithes. As a matter of fact, if ministers are too timid to preach it, they should ask the tithers of the church to identify themselves and give them time to give testimonies. Their testimonies will convert the hardest-hearted, stingiest people in your congregation, when you realize that tithing is not laid on you for obligation. It is not a duty we begrudge, but the door to the treasury of heaven.”

This may be true, and is the exact reason why we must not travel all the way back down the road to congregationalism. Yet the central argument of this paper is that by using a balanced approach, it should be self evident that the stronger the local church becomes that stronger the entire body will be. (Spangler, 1981, p.20). In looking at the area of evangelism Larson (2008) writes

We are financially starving many of our local congregations on behalf of our global efforts. It is dispiriting for congregations to have exciting and effective plans for ministry but not enough money to implement them. One reason why mega churches emerge next door to struggling Seventh-day Adventist ones is that our congregations often have so much less money to work with. This is a big problem. If the world church allowed more local congregations the resources they need to flourish, it would not be long until it had more too.

In other words, by allowing the church to invest locally, this will produce greater excitement, vision, passion, and growth in these local congregations, which in turn will increase the resources available as more people join and then give to the church, which in turn means that while percentages going to administration levels would be reduced, actual monies in dollar terms could actually be increased, and the work of the church and the kingdom of God increased. Under the current system instead of empowering local churches with resources and strength, the local church is taken advantage of and is exploited.

The Effect On . . .

The Local Church – Strangling the Goose

Local church pastor, Greg Taylor (2001, p.14) reminds us of the famous Aesop fable where a farmer discovers that his goose had laid a golden egg, and then continues to lay one golden egg every day. Soon the farmer became fabulously wealthy, and a little impatient. So on that fateful day, the farmer decided to hurry the process by cutting the goose open. He found no golden egg inside, and the goose was now dead – no more golden eggs. Taylor continues by saying, “unfortunately much the same thing is taking place in the Adventist church. . . , except that it is a case of strangling, not surgery. The goose is the local church and the owner is the church hierarchy.” It is not much fun being called a goose. As Ronsvalee (1996, p.85) points out, local churches and “pastors who feel the denominational structure does not reward them as it should may feel alienated (and frustrated) from (and by) that structure.” Yet Taylor (2001, p.14) continues, “Little is being done to change the denominational structure that is strangling its primary source of growth, vitality, evangelistic presence, and income – the local congregation.”

Just how much it is being strangled is evident when one looks at the recommended amount that local churches should retain to run their own ministries. In their book,

Money matters in the church, Malphus and Stroope (2007, p.59), recommend

that the church designate about 50% of its budget for personnel. Often in large churches it can be a little less (45-50) and in small churches a little more (50-55%). Why so much? People are God’s human agents for ministry effectiveness (1 Cor. 3:5-9) God prefers to accomplish his purpose through people. (Phil 2:13) and then bless them in return

With the remaining percent available, Malphus and Stroope (2007, p.60), “advise churches to allocate between 20-25 percent of funding for their facilities.” They also recommend (on page 59) “that a church puts approximately 20 percent of it’s funding towards the vital area of programming. (Everything that doesn’t fit into other areas

falls here – copiers, supplies etc). Finally, Malphus & Stroope, (2007, p.59-61) state, “We believe that a church that desires biblical, numerical growth along with spiritual health will allocate about 10 percent of its budget for missions. . . .we found that these are general allocations for a healthy church with room for variation.”

With a recommendation that local churches retain 90% and give away only 10%, one wonders what the above authors would say about the figures in Adventism! Even though the above percentages come from churches with a congregational structure, the implication is clear. Strangling local churches of their resources and the power to allocate a significant percentage of their resources appropriately, means the churches struggle to be healthy and grow. Perhaps this is a clear indication that poor resource allocation is a major contributing factor as to why there are very few large Adventist churches in the world today.

Before he became the South Pacific Division President of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Barry Oliver (undated, p.19) candidly stated that

Present organisational structures are reducing the effectiveness of the local church to a critical extent. The advantages of a universal organisational structure can be disadvantages to the local church. At the present time, the organisational system of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is taking too much from the local church. Local churches need a greater share of the financial, personnel and expertise resources. . . . We have not given enough thought to the possibilities. Some other organisations have done much more.

Some of these other organisations that have done much more, go so far as to suggest that a common question the local church should be asking is “are we getting our money’s worth from our denominational support? You may want to evaluate any money that your church may have budgeted for its denomination.” (Malphus & Stroope 2007, p.76). The authors continue by giving an interesting example of the

local churches attitude towards its denomination that exists outside of Adventism.

Talking of Steve Stroope's church they say,

Lake Point is Southern Baptist by heritage, but we would never support our denomination simply because it is expected. We monitor where our denomination is doctrinally, what it's doing to make a difference for the kingdom, and how it's helping churches be the very best they can be for Christ. Even though we still support our denomination financially, we find we are redirecting some money, which before would have flowed through the denomination, to give direct support to missions and world causes. This allows us to support, with a group of churches, our denomination's efforts, while at the same time supporting ministries that are particularly meaningful to our own church. (Malphus & Stroope 2007, p.76).

This type of thinking doesn't happen within Adventism for a number of reasons. First, the current structure doesn't allow for it. If a local Adventist church began redirecting its tithe, the congregation would find itself being redirected outside the umbrella of Adventist churches. Second, without the support of the local churches the system and the denomination would collapse. It is the very unity of the churches and their commitment to send their resources on that enables the whole system to operate. Again, let's not forget the advantages as to why churches are organised; it is in order to accomplish more for the kingdom together than they can apart. As has been said before we can do more together than by being separate and hence must remain a resource sharing organisation. However as Oosterwal (1972, p.59) notes, "if institutions absorb too much of a movement's money and personnel, stagnation results. We call it *institutionalism*." Surely churches should avoid this extreme. Surely it is still possible to share without local church resource strangulation.

The final reason has to do with power. As Malphrus and Stroope (2007, p.7) ask, "How does your church decide where it will invest its financial resources? That's a power question. And the answer depends on who has power in the church along with the authority to exercise that power." Having taken away most of the financial resources of the local church, the current administrative system has also taken away

its power. This church is meant to be based on a representative system, yet local church pastors and lay members are usually outnumbered in many higher administrative committees and decision making bodies. Again it is Oliver, (undated, p.19) who states,

. . . until they [current organisational structures] are changed, the local church will remain the most powerless unit in the structure. Yet the local church is supposed to be where the “action” is. Something is wrong with a structure, or its administration, when the needs of the local church are of least priority, even if those needs are supposed to come first in theory.

It is clear that Adventism, the “most highly structured church in the history of Christianity,” (Knight, 2007, p.69) is too centralised, and for the sake of the local church and the kingdom must change. Yet it must be said that in the South Pacific, change in the structure was what the church attempted to do during the 2001-2005 triennium when a number of unions in the division combined. However any financial gains made during this process, or freeing up of personnel that may have occurred, did not have any impact on the local church. All the local churches resources continued to be drawn away from where they were needed most, and hence it is no surprise at all that, as Evans (Brown, 2005, p.2) says “none of these initiatives have resulted in appreciable growth.” The goose continued to lay its golden eggs oblivious to the changes that were happening well above her. Oblivious – because none of these changes, changed her world or reality at all. She simply kept offering up her precious eggs.

All the attempts that have been made previously to reform the structure have all started at the wrong end. To see growth in the overall church, Roozen & Hadaway (1993, p.49) reminds us in simple terms that “denominations grow as individuals join congregations.” For Adventist churches to grow this is where the focus should be placed. Yet reforming the structure from the local church point of view has also had

limited success as local churches are the “most powerless unit in the structure.” Bull and Lockhart (2007, p.122) show why. They state,

Adventism is a centralised society that accords its leaders absolute authority. The church puts more value on institutions than on lay membership and regards collective responsibility as more important than individual judgement. The church’s financial structure and general attitude towards money reflects these principles. From an economic point of view, the church’s resources are concentrated on administration and institutions rather than on individual churches and are controlled by central planners instead of local members. . . The local congregation . . . has no say in the disbursement of this fund (tithes) and must meet its own expenses through separate offerings and contributions from its members. Because of this, the local church has been the source of the most instability in the Adventist hierarchy. No conferences, unions, or divisions have ever broken away from the denomination, but some individual congregations have, largely on account of not being able to control the tithes they raise. To benefit directly from the Adventist economy, church members must follow the same route as their contributions: they must leave the local congregations and enter the church’s administration or institutions.

These words bring little comfort especially when one’s calling, passion and heart, is in the ministry and mission of the local church.

The Local Pastor – Looking For More Morale.

It does no good for a local church or local pastor to hear that they are the most important piece in the picture, and then see in reality that it isn’t really so. Effective pastors lie awake at night wondering how they can make the congregation(s) under their care healthier. They pray and plan and enact on ways to bring out the very best in the local church. They want to bring hope and healing to their community. They desire the local church to function to its fullest redemptive capacity. They crave for the local church in which God has placed them to make a big impact for Christ and His Kingdom.

Perhaps then it is no surprise that as Bryan (1998, p.8) points out.

A prophetic cry can be heard most clearly from hundreds of Seventh-day Adventists who each year attend church leadership conferences at large, vibrant evangelical churches. Many Adventists question why their fellow believers would go “outside” our denomination to learn about how to do church better. The answer: They long for local churches to be growing, dynamic, relevant, spirit-filled bodies again. They have an immeasurable hunger to be part of a life changing local church community, to capture the spiritual adrenaline of the Acts church. It is this vision for the local church that draws so many Adventists to Willow Creek and Saddleback. It is this vision for the local church they find absent within our denomination.

Yet it is the vision of vibrant, healthy, growing, dynamic local Seventh-day Adventist Churches that fuels many pastors and keeps them going. They are committed to the Adventist message, yet find that organisational, structural and resource issues dampen their enthusiasm for what the local Adventist church under their care can achieve.

White (1997, p.94) in his book *Rethinking the church*, states the following:

A church's structure can either serve the church or bring it to a standstill. It can energize a community of faith or lead it towards ever deepening levels of discouragement. It can enable men and women to use their gifts and abilities for the kingdom of God or tie the hands and frustrate the most dedicated efforts of God's people. Why? Because the structure of any organization directly affects morale, effectiveness, and unity.

How does the structure of the Adventist church as outlined above effect the morale of the leaders of these churches, in particular the local church pastors? In citing James's (1996, p.99) *Business wisdom of the electronic elite*, White (1997, p.94) continues by saying

In essence, structure dictates morale, and the type of structure that has a negative impact is one that does not treat people with respect. Traditionally, companies define complicated rules, procedures, and guidelines to govern nearly every aspect of working life. These rules suggest to the employees that they are not trustworthy, lack common sense, and have even less capacity for making important decisions.

Could it be that one of the reasons that so much of the resources are taken from the local setting is because the church administration do not trust their pastors and their congregations, they believe they lack common sense, and have no capacity to make the really important decisions? The author doesn't necessarily believe that this is the case, however with very little of its own resources left, and hence less power and influence available to them, it is easy to see how it can come across that way. It is also easy to see why many field pastors may get frustrated in their current positions and "follow the same route as their contributions" into departmental work or other level of church administration. Bryan (2009, p.9) comments, "A particularly troubling consequence of comparatively well-resourced hospitals, conference offices, and

educational institutions is a movement of the most creative and gifted pastors *away* from local churches to these preferred environments.” He goes on to say,

A majority of pastors say they often feel lonely and isolated in their local church leadership. Promotions in professional Adventist ministry are almost always viewed as *calls* to one of the Adventist mega-centers. And so, local congregations are left starving for both material and visionary leadership. (Bryan, 2009, p.9)

With this in mind perhaps it is no wonder that Bull and Lockhart (2007, p.298) argue that if by the time an Adventist pastor reaches the age of forty and “they have not been appointed to conference offices or become notable evangelists, they may grow increasingly restless.” In an *Institute of church ministry* survey that looked at the morale of Adventist pastors, one pastor responded by saying that “being a pastor is the loneliest job in the world. You are not really a conference official, so you don’t feel fully accepted there; you are not really a church member, so they cannot fully accept you. You have no one who is your minister, no one you can fully trust.” (cited in Bull and Lockhart, 2007, p. 297). There is no indication of an exciting vision for the local church in these pastor’s words. As Parmenter (2006, p.10) states, it is clear that “we need to build a new culture that elevates the local church pastor in the eyes of our church members (and maybe in his or her own eyes), so that these positions (in the local church) are sought after more than departmental and administrative positions.”

James Cress is known as the pastor’s pastor. He is the Ministerial Secretary of the Ministerial Association at the General Conference, and as such his defined flock is Seventh-day Adventist pastors’ world wide. In his book, *More common sense ministry*, Cress (2005, p.122) writes;

Of course there is growing dissatisfaction among pastors, as well as laity, when church administration is perceived as consuming resources more urgently needed at the local church

level. Too often pastors see resources sacrificially generated at the local level wasted in bureaucratic structures on high. I felt concern for this as a pastor, and I feel the same today.

This dissatisfaction and restlessness has caused some to leave ministry altogether. In a major study entitled *Leaving the Adventist ministry*, Harry Ballis looked at the reasons why pastors in Australia and New Zealand left the ministry. While the study was conducted during a time of theological turmoil within the church, (the study was conducted of pastors who left the ministry between 1980 and 1988 and hence traced the period following the dismissal of prominent Australian theologian Desmond Ford in 1980), Ballis (1999, p.38), found that

A significant proportion of continuing pastors in Australia and New Zealand report their ministry is not fulfilling or satisfying, and a significant minority (40 percent) report that they do not consider themselves successful in what they are doing or believe they are making a contribution. Overall . . . the morale of continuing pastors in the South Pacific Division is far from healthy and should be a matter of concern for the authorities.

While examining different areas as to why morale may not be as high as it should be, the study

highlights a need to shift our focus of attention from preoccupation with individual demographics and background factors to the social and organisational processes that led committed and successful Adventist pastors to exit. If as a group expastors are not very different from continuing pastors, then there is reason to suspect that exit may have something to do with structural problems in the Adventist church itself rather than with background factors predisposing pastors to exit. (Ballis, p.40)

Could it be one of the major “structural problems” that some pastors struggle with is the task of continually trying to revive a structurally strangled goose! After a while the task becomes so hard that the pastor leaves. In some cases when a pastor leaves the Adventist ministry, because of his concern and empathy for the goose, he takes the goose with him! That is the entire congregation decides to follow its pastor and leave the sisterhood of Adventist churches. One can see the great temptation here, after all the goose does lay golden eggs! However, most Adventist pastors who desire to remain in ministry do not want to take this step. In fact one of the main reasons the

pastor may feel frustration is because he or she solidly believes in the Seventh-day Adventist church and its message, and knows that under different circumstances, the church under his or her care could be doing so much more.

Another example of how the current structure can affect the moral of the local church pastor can be seen when the issue of pastors' salaries arises. It should be quickly pointed out that, one of the great benefits of the system, as opposed to a congregational approach, is that pastors are well paid and secure in their work.

However issues can come to the surface when looking at the differences in pay between pastors in the field and those who work in the higher levels of administration.

One pastor wrote to *Adventist Today* an open letter to the presidents of the church entitled, *Don't pay me more!* The author, Walter (2002, p.10), in talking about his church and his position writes,

Although there are dedicated people in these churches, there isn't the same spirit of excellence I'm used to... I keep turning down the volume on my dreams. I keep scaling back my vision. I've stopped expecting people to get excited about the potential in [my community].

Many local church pastors look at the community and the church that they are called to minister in and envisage all that could be done and achieved in the area. But because the resources they collect continue to flow out of their area, many times they are forced to scale back their vision, and turn down the volume of the dreams as the excitement about the potential of the local church dwindles. Walter concludes by saying

I don't need more money. I'm at the bottom of the pay scale. . .The answer is – let me use my gifts, talents, education, and experience to achieve the vision God has put in my heart. Allow me to work with people who are ready to pursue the full potential of His Church. Living up to my potential is the greatest motivator of all. Don't pay me more, just turn me loose!

Curious as to what happened to Walter, the author discovered his online "blog" showing that he had become a church planter in another conference and was doing well – until, as he claims, the conference had to change his appointment because the

new church was not bringing in enough tithes. This led to a heated online discussion on the frustration of resource allocation within the Seventh-day Adventist church. One of the comments posted there was “I feel bad for you guys. Many words could be written to explain why, but I’ll spare you! Chuckle, chuckle. 😊 Ron Gladden.”¹¹

Ron Gladden – The Birth of Mission Catalyst.

In the year 2000, the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, supplied pastors in the English speaking world with a book entitled *Plant the future: So many churches! Why plant more?* In the North New Zealand Conference the book was supplied with a cover note encouraging local church pastors to read *Plant the future* with their church boards, which the author did. As the title suggests the book encourages the planting of more Adventist churches. Its author was one of the best strategists, church planter and coach within Adventism, Ron Gladden. Gladden has the experience and the passion to plant new churches and has supervised scores of church plantings across America and beyond. The reason he gives for planting new churches is because as John 4:35 says the fields are ripe for the harvest.

In this passage Jesus urges, “Don’t wait for some future time when the harvest is going to be ripe. It is ripe now!” Our mandate is immediate. It requires experiment and risk. We have to think of ways, find ways, probe for ways to reach the harvest. We can’t be satisfied with what we did last year. Nor with what other churches are doing. What we think we can do is irrelevant. We must look to the harvest and then design God-shaped, God sized strategies based on the vast needs. (Gladden, 2000, p.11).

This is a powerful little book which is still in demand today.¹² In Gladden’s more recent book, *The 7 habits of highly ineffective churches: Why your church has stopped growing and what you can do about it*, he ends each chapter with the words, “every

¹¹ Walters “blog” and Gladden’s reply can be found at <http://churchfromscratch.wordpress.com/2008/09/12/the-system-is-broken/#comment-54>. retrieved on Dec 12, 2008.

¹² Graeme Humble, theology lecturer at Pacific Adventist University, recently sent out an email request looking for more copies of this book for use by students.

church stops growing when the price gets too high.” (Gladden, 2004, p.14, 24, 39, 77, 101, 128, 140, 148).

Unfortunately, for this very creative, high capacity, valuable employee of church, the price of seeing all the resources leave the local church eventually became too high. Later in that same year, August 2004, after trying to alter the situation from within Adventism for decades¹³, the tipping point was reached. In talking about this, Gladden recounts how the “administrators expressed their strong support for the work of the Church Planting Center, but decided to discontinue funding.” (Carpenter, 2004, p.6) This became too much for Gladden and he felt he could make a greater kingdom impact outside the current structure, and in so doing Adventism lost one of its leading lights.

Gladden started an organisation called *Mission Catalyst*, whose mission is “to do whatever it takes to equip local churches to accomplish the Great Commission”, and it’s vision is “to be a catalytic network of thousands of churches that are becoming a significant force for Christ.”¹⁴ The number one core value is stated as “We value **the primacy of the local church**, because it is where ministry actually happens. This means that our default position is one of trust toward local church leaders.”¹⁵ Gladden has been deeply concerned about the growth of the church in developed countries he says;

If you close your eyes in front of a map of North America and point at it, any Adventist church in a town near your finger tip will probably have a membership no larger than it had 20 years ago; it may have even fewer members. Mission Catalyst emerged in 2004 with a passion to take the church off “pause,” to push the “play” button, or maybe even “fast forward”.
(*Adventist Today*, 2006, p.6)

¹³ Gladden was an employee of the Adventist church in various positions for over 25 years.

¹⁴ (<http://www.missioncatalyst.org/article.php?id=16>).

¹⁵ (<http://www.missioncatalyst.org/article.php?id=17>).

Yet *Mission Catalyst* fully embraces the beliefs of Adventism. Their website

www.missioncatalyst.org¹⁶ proudly states.

Mission Catalyst is an association of independent churches that embrace the core beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a grace-filled manner that you might never have experienced or thought possible. The *Mission Catalyst* dream is a healthy, happy, unselfish church in every city in America. The kind of church we all wish was in our neighbourhood. A church where we're always proud to invite our friends. A church that makes Jesus first and gladly shares the Adventist message. *Mission Catalyst* began in 2004 in response to God's call to plant churches that never stop making an ever-larger impact for the kingdom. Our deep passion for reaching the lost with the Seventh-day Adventist message, coupled with the almost unanimous conclusion among Adventists that our current structure is inefficient, makes an alternative necessary.

Their belief in the Adventist message is so strong that yearly the churches that choose to belong to this network have to sign and agree that they will teach Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and doctrines! No Adventist church or member has to do that. In further explaining why they came into existence the website states,

We love the Seventh-day Adventist church. . . . We are loyal Seventh-day Adventists who love the message and whose hearts break for the lost. . . . We believe that we could be and should be reaching thousands more for Christ with this message but that the present structure of the church actually impedes local church growth in the world divisions that need it the most. Discussions with church leaders have not been productive in seeking an effective redistribution strategy for funds. . . . The Bible is full of instruction about doctrine, but silent about the structural system under which the church should operate. In view of the fact that (a) the Seventh-day Adventist structure has not substantively changed in over 100 years, and (b) no means exists to address the situation, we are creating a second way for Adventists to preach the message they believe and love.

The attraction towards *Mission Catalyst* is that it works at the other end of the spectrum. The local church determines how to spend 90% of its income, which includes salaries for pastors and staff etc, but also must include a mission project at least 100 miles from its local community. Only ten percent of the churches tithe and local giving goes to the network support office in order to plant more churches and resource congregations. In the past many congregations have one-by-one broken away from the Adventist Church, but in this case it wasn't only a single congregation – but multiple congregations. As Gladden says, “Mission Catalyst Network provides a

¹⁶ quote found by adding the extension /article.php?id=24

second way of proclaiming the same message with the opportunity to reinvest the lion's share of the tithe back into the local mission." (Carpenter, 2004, p.8).

Reflecting on this, Burrill (2004, p.4), a fellow prominent church planter states

My problem with what Ron Gladden has done is not with the organizational issues he raises. Many of us share those concerns. My problem with him is that he has chosen to do so outside the church. The track record of so doing . . . is not good. He had much to offer the denomination, and I am saddened that he has chosen to leave.

Gladden's defence is simply "Our sole issue is the structure that has severely drifted from its priority of winning souls." (Schwisow, 2007, p.7). Be that as it may, on March 14, 2007 the North Pacific Union Conference Executive committee voted "to recognise and accept, with regret, the voiding of (Gladden's) ordination from the Seventh-day Adventist gospel ministry." (Schwisow, 2007, p.6). Gladden's response. "Apparently they don't want someone to preach their message without their control." (Schwisow, 2007, p.6)

The experience of *Mission Catalyst* shows the incredible and increased tensions that this issue has and will continue to cause within the local congregations, unless it is properly addressed. However, from this author's perspective, *Mission Catalyst* has swung too quickly and too far to the other extreme – that of congregationalism. In doing so, they still use many of the resources produced by the centralised Adventist church, such as Bible study lessons and websites, they send their children to Adventist schools and universities, and use our hospitals. However, more tellingly is perhaps the very thing they are trying to capitalise on, mission, has now lost its global impact and focus. Adventism has a message for every nation, tribe, language and people (Rev 14:6), so while there is no question that more resources need to be invested in the local church, this does not require us to abdicate from our global responsibility. A balance between the two extremes is needed and achievable.

Concerns of the 24 pastors

Perpetuating The Organisation.

Way back in 1981, twenty-four pastors from across North America were invited by the then vice-president of the General Conference, C.E. Bradford to “resonate to the various problems” field ministerial forces face in their work. As Spangler (1981, p.20) who reported on this event states, “If the pastor is indeed the key figure in the organised work of the church (as we are fond of declaring), then his position and ministry should be enhanced in the ecclesiastical structure.” The spirit of the meeting was not as a “gripe session” rather they wanted to respond genuinely to the request of denominational leadership to voice their ideas and make concrete suggestions for strengthening the pastors and the local church. The pastors were split into three groups, yet many of the concerns raised were held in common by all three of the groups.

One of the groups of pastors noted that,

In actual financial practice ‘the churches exist to perpetuate the organization. We find it incredible that the tithe dollar supports the entire church structure, including plant and equipment and secretaries salaries – conference, union, General Conference – but not (with the exception of the pastor’s salary) the local congregation that gives it.’ So the local church that is supposed to be the focal point of ministry is poorly funded and crippled while organisational overhead has grown and grown. (Spangler, 1981, p 20)

A powerful visual example of this situation can still be seen today. Taylor (2001, p.14) makes the following observation;

Visit some of the smaller churches in your conference and you will see a dramatic demonstration. The carpet is old, the lighting terrible, the sound system inadequate; there is no video projector. Usually the pastor is shared with one or two other churches. Morale is often low. Now visit the local conference office. There you find top-notch computer systems, a paid secretarial staff, the best in video and technological support – all funded by tithe dollars from the local church. *Why should those who supervise the work have better equipment than those who do the work?* (italics mine)

This is a very good question. In looking at this we should not forget the reasons for the existence of both the conference and local churches. Borden (2003, p.9) reminds us, “the church as a body of Christ is about mission to all peoples, not institutional

survival or even care of the membership, and the congregation is the primary unit of that expanding mission.” Yet institutional survival or the feeling that the local church existed simply to perpetuate the organisation was the very concern raised by these twenty-four pastors. Oliver (undated, p.17) continues this line of thinking when he states,

“Why maintain a structure which is based on a commitment to mission when it seems more important to maintain that structure than to demonstrate the commitment to mission by thorough theoretical and practical restatement and innovation? Do message, mission, and structure still go hand in hand, or has there been a discontinuity somewhere which should be reflected in the structure of the church? Alternatively has the perpetuation for structure taken priority over the message and mission of the church?”

Surely the best way to keep the priority of the “message and the mission of the church” is to allocate the largest majority of the organisation’s resources to its “primary unit of mission” – the local congregation. Yet perhaps the church’s true priorities are revealed as Minatrea (2004, p.105) reminds us that “how a church spends its financial resources reflects the priorities and the understanding of the nature of the church.” Could it be that one of the first steps that need to be taken to rectify this situation is that Adventism needs to go back to the Bible rediscover its theology about the church?

The twenty-four pastors were tired of seeing their financial existence as simply ensuring the corporate organisation continues on. All three groups expressed a desire to reduce and simplify administration and departmental structure. They recommended that “a percentage of tithe be retained by each local congregation to enhance that church’s outreach efforts.” They admit that careful study should be given as to the exact percentages and procedures, but “10 percent should be a starting point with gradual increase as overhead structures are eliminated.” (Spangler, 1981, p.20). Another group suggested that “there should be a redistribution of tithe percentages; a

reduction in General conference percentages; a substantial reduction for the union conference; a larger percentage for the local conference; a percentage for the local church” (Spangler, 1981, p.20). Years later a somewhat cynical Moore would look at all increases that local churches were suggesting. If churches were able to retain more of their tithe, Moore (2004, p.18) believes that “many local churches will use the extra funds for the same purpose they are being used for now: maintaining the institution and the educational system – on the local level. The monies will probably not be used for evangelism and church growth.”

Departmental Matters

One area repeatedly mentioned by the twenty-four pastors is the issues that arise with the departmental structure. All of the pastors agreed that “at the present time (in 1981) in North America there is almost a one-to-one ratio of administrative workers to workers in the field. The pastors said flatly that “this costly structure – departmental secretaries duplicated in conference, unions, and the General Conference – is not useful.” (Tilton-Ling, 1983, p.2) Not useful indeed! Spangler (1981, p.20) reported that pastors and laymen are increasingly asking “what are we getting for our money?” “Positions and programs have been developed for which there is little or no market.”

Unfortunately these words still ring true today. The current author was recently searching for a follow-up series after an outreach event that could be run at the church that focused solely on Jesus. He came across a DVD series produced by the Adventist media centre in Sydney that could work quite well, but he wanted to have a small group discussion guide to go with it. On contacting the media centre he was told that

there was no such guide available. The Associate Director of Media Ministries and Internet courses, David Price replied in an email;

I am really excited by what you are trying to do up there and want to support you. . . . Think how disappointing it is for us to have all these Resources which seem to be ignored by the field! That is why no one else has done what you are suggesting needs to be done. In the future this needs to be a part of anything we release here to make it more user friendly for the pastors. So be encouraged that you are on the right path.

Reading this, one wonders how many other resources are created in the church departments where there is little or no market. Yet the amazing flip side to all of this is for all the resources the departments create, it can be difficult to find exactly what is needed for the local setting.

This was the situation the Springwood Church found itself towards the end of 2006. The church wanted to run a preaching /small group / daily devotional series on hope. None existed, so out of frustration the local church created its own resource called *Journey of hope*. Preparing this book and resource took up much pastoral time and finances – both of which should already be covered under the current system. Yet the response of the congregation was so overwhelming that in conjunction with Avondale College Church the following year another book was written by these two local churches entitled *Living in the light*. How is it that all these church departments exist and are duplicated at every level, yet the resources they produce for the local churches can stay on the shelves not being used, while the local churches themselves feel forced to produce their own material for their congregation and community? This indeed is not useful. It also helps to illustrate that the local church, rather than a distant church department is best positioned to identify and respond to its own needs.

Cox (2001, p.145) highlights another danger that can exist at the other end of the spectrum. He states,

A weakness [in the current system] is that it tends to make us dependant on available resources. Rather than create new and evolving ministries for a specific local situation, we tend to limit ourselves to existing materials for Revelation Seminars, marriage and parenting workshops, or five-session courses on healthy living. Adventists are often reluctant to use the much wider range of non-Adventist programme materials that are available, and fail to use the creative gifts of local church members to develop new ministry tools designed specifically for the local situation.

In other words these same departments that use finances from the local church to create new resources that the local church can use, may actually be hampering the ministry of that same church.

The twenty-four pastors proposed that “instead of office-based departmental secretaries in each conference, pastors be recognised as field-based specialists to whom others may come and learn. Not only will this greatly reduce overhead costs but it will give credibility to the teaching process.” (Spangler, 1981, p.20). It is maddening to think that such a great idea and practical solution like this is still not happening. This suggestion will be taken up again in this paper.

Other recommendations that were made included “a minimum of 10 percent of all trusts and annuities, upon maturity, automatically be returned to the local congregation of which the donor was a member at the time of contractual agreement.” Also they would like to have seen more “input into administrative decisions” that affect the pastor and the local church.

Lip Service . . . Again

Reporting on the meeting of the twenty-four pastors with administrative leaders, Spangler (1981, p.21) noted that

Underlying these concerns, it seems, is a feeling on the part of pastors that in spite of lip service being given to the importance of their role, the policies and operation of the church give them cause to feel that they are not really so considered. Unless present perceptions of

success in ministry change, pastors will naturally tend to see themselves as something less than successful should they remain a pastor for life.

Bradford explained it this way, “in Adventism, it seems, there is a pecking order, and unless you are called to the conference office, you aren’t entirely fulfilled.” (Tilton-Ling, 1983, p.3). Obviously, the pastors would like to see this situation changed and recommended that one way that this could happen was greater parity between the wage of the pastor in comparison to those in administration and departmental positions.

However the greatest concern of these pastors when they were interviewed by *Spectrum* Magazine two years later was that nothing was happening. Tilton-Ling (1983, p.3) reporting on the event states, “the lack of tangible change since the first gathering makes one of those who attended concerned that further discussions may be “an exercise in futility.”

If the changes suggested by the pastors are not quickly implemented by leadership, particularly in the area of finances, change may come forcibly in the midst of a crisis. Both point to increasing awareness of the laity, particularly in the area of tithe distribution, as a force that must be reckoned with by church administrators. (Tilton-Lang, 1983, p.3).

Somehow, some 28 years later the church has managed to stay financial hence averting a crisis and little has changed. The same issues that were raised back then, are the same issues facing the church today. The question could be asked, why were these recommendations from the pastors ignored, and not acted upon. However, perhaps the answer has already been given. The local church and its pastor is the most powerless unit in the organisation.

Winds of Change

Is a Crisis Coming?

While the church may have avoided the financial crises in the past, at the time of writing the world is facing what has been called the *Global Financial Crisis*. Faced with an economic downturn and the falling U.S. dollar, the General Conference recently announced measures to weather this latest financial storm. These measures range from “delaying pay increases [for General Conference staff] and budgeted increases in appropriations to reducing travel budgets and relocating executive meetings. Also, a hiring freeze is in effect for the church’s General Conference” (Oliver, A. 2008) which employs 820 people in the Silver Springs office (Dongu, 2009). Because of these measures, “headquarters has saved an annualized net of about \$(US)1.6 million recently by leaving some 20 employment vacancies unfilled. A 20 percent reduction in travel and a reduction of overall budgeted expenses have saved an additional \$(US)1.4 million.” (Oliver, A. 2009). An added reason for the cutbacks was confirmed when the annual tithe figures were released. While compared to 2007, overall tithe was up 8.5% in 2008 to \$1.93 billion, there was a five per cent decrease in the tithe and offerings received by the churches headquarters during the fourth quarter of 2008. (Oliver, A, 2009) The world church treasurer, Robert Lemon admits that “part of that is due to changes in the exchange rates, but some of it is due to actual decreases in tithes and offerings in the U.S. because of the economy.”

Yet it seems that none of this will have an impact on the local church. A spokesman for the world church, Ansel Oliver stated that, “Although travel reductions will affect Adventist-sponsored programs, church programs will remain. We’re pretty decentralised and outreach happens [locally],” he said (Dongu, 2009). If this is the case then why are so much of the churches resources tied up centrally? One wonders

if this Global Financial Crisis will force the church to redirect its resources to where the outreach happens, at the local level. After all, one would be at a stretch to find an Australian church which has more active members than the General Conference employs at its headquarters alone!

There are also other factors at play. As Lemon reports, “Since its beginning, the Adventist Church has always received more tithe from its North American region than from the other 12 regions combined. But in 2008, that changed – gross tithe from North America totalled \$894 million and tithe from other regions totalled \$1.04 billion.” (Oliver, A. 2009). Perhaps one reason for this can be seen in another first for the church. As a major survey commissioned by the Secretariat of the North American Division of the General Conference and conducted by Monte Sahlin reveals,

In 2008 the Adventist Church in North America stepped onto a threshold. The white membership is now down to just half of the total membership, while the other half is made up of ethnic minorities—African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and immigrants from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, etc. This is a new reality for Adventists. Up to this point there has always been an ethnic majority of whites and several minority groups. In 2009, as the trend continues, whites become just another minority group in the multicultural mix. (Davies, 2009).

The face of the church is changing. It is losing its Caucasian impact in Western areas. So much so that after reflecting on this data, Sahlin stated, “My guess is that the next General Conference President will not be white” (Davies, 2009). Will these factors bring about reform? Will it affect giving habits? Or will the church be able to sail yet again through this latest financial storm without changing her structure or her course? What if those who gave could see more of their money invested in the kingdom locally? Would that increase giving? Would that be more beneficial to not only the local but also the Global church? This is the question that we now turn our attention.

The Desire to Give Locally.

Putting a Face on Giving.

The central argument to this paper is that if local churches could invest more of its resources locally, then people will give more as they see the difference that their giving is making. This in turn will also increase the likelihood of more people joining the church and having them contribute to it as well, which increases the total funds that are available. So the question needs to be asked, “Will giving increase when more funds are directed locally?” Experience shows that this can happen, and does happen even with the system unchanged. One would think that with all the offerings already taking place, members would not want to give to anything else. If you thought that you would be wrong. There is incredible power released when as Chris Blake states, one can “put a face on our giving.”

During 2008, Springwood Church of the South Queensland Conference invited Chris Blake and his wife Yolanda to a special week at the church. Blake is the author of *Searching for a God to love* – an excellent apologetic book written in everyday language that can reach out to people and introduce them to a God they can love – and also the co-author with his wife of *Reinvent your Sabbath school*. Both of the books are excellent resource material for the local Adventist church. Therefore it surprised us greatly when Blake told us that he had never before been invited for a whole week to a local church. In the nine years since his first book came out he has presented at many camp meetings, universities and the like, but never a full week at the local church level. In fact, when he was telling his colleagues that he was coming to Australia, they were amazed that he was coming to a local church and not a camp

meeting. One wonders with the excellent resources that he brings if a lack of finances at the local church level is one of the main reasons for this.

The book *Re-invent your Sabbath school* is subtitled, *Discover how exhilarating a ministry-driven class can be*. The Blakes' emphasise five main ministries that each Sabbath school class should be involved in, namely; Prayer, Time, Money, Social, and Study Ministry. They concede that "money ministry has astounded us. We had no idea that this . . . ministry would create so much goodwill, so much tearful evidence of God's miraculous leading". (Blake & Blake, 2001, p.30) That evidence would soon be visible in Springwood church as well.

On the first Sabbath of the Blake's visit, the situation of a family in need was presented to the combined Sabbath schools classes in attendance. This couple had been attending the church but were not yet members of it (and were not present on that day). Their car had just broken down making it very hard for them to continue their work as it was based around their vehicle. They had no money to fix it. Hearing about this, an offering was taken up and over \$1,500 was raised. When the figure was announced there was clapping and cheering. (A very rare event for the collection of offering.) The following week, those cheers turned to tears of thankfulness as the recipients came and offered thanks as they shared what a difference that contribution made. A few months later they became baptised members of the church. What happened not only made a difference for them, it also made a tangible difference for those who gave and physically saw the difference that their contribution had made.

On the Friday before the second Sabbath of the Blake's visit there was a horrific accident in the local community. A mum was taking her children to school, when a truck slammed into her car, killing her and putting her children into hospital in intensive care. Though she had no connection with the church what so ever, this was part of the church's community and they simply wanted to help. Another collection was taken up and a total of \$1629 was raise which went directly to the family.

Fairly soon the individual Sabbath school classes were following the lead also taking up their own collections. Within the next few weeks, one Sabbath school class raised \$500 for a church member's next door neighbour whose husband was very frail and needed special care and they were concerned they might loose their house. Another \$600 went to a refugee woman who wanted to bring her family out. On hearing her plight a single donation of \$1,200 was given. A social event raised \$3,000 for an overseas need, and another Sabbath school class purchased a new wheelchair for a disabled person.

The author also witnessed and actually timed an event that occurred after a need was presented to a Sabbath school gathering. A group of young people from the local church were going on a mission trip to build orphanages in Botswana to house AIDS orphans. The presentation given was not an appeal for money; it was an explanation of where this team was going, and what they were going to do. After the presentation, Sabbath school classes formed for their lesson time. However, it took the main presenter 20 minutes to get from the front of the church to the back as people kept stoping him asking, "could you use some extra tools" here is some money to support this, can I have your address so that I can send you a cheque.

Commenting on all that was happening, the Senior Pastor of Springwood Church, Andre van Rensburg in a pastoral meeting stated, “The outflow of all this is not just money. People are being cared for and they are saying these people are caring. They are saying, ‘Hey, here is Christianity in action and we are proud of our local church.’”

This is very evident in an email that one of the church members, Judy Fua (2008) sent to the Springwood pastors.

It’s interesting isn’t it that we’re starting to find that the more we give, the more we want to keep giving. I just don’t believe that giving to one project diminishes what we give to another one. We proved that in our SS class just this last week. We contributed \$1000 to a Muslim family. The father has just lost his job as Imam of the Muslim school, and the mother has been diagnosed with cancer. Imagine the impact that will have on that family. Chris Blake really started something at Springwood didn’t he? People are saying, ‘Springwood is different somehow. Something is really starting to happen here.’

People are longing to make a difference within their sphere of influence. They want to see changed lives, and see that what they are doing makes a difference. This is why giving to something local, or a locally known person who is doing something global is so important. As Chris and Yolanda Blake (2001, p.30) say

The premise of money ministry is to put a face on our giving and to make an immediate impact. Church giving doesn’t always need to be faceless and fathomless. We know precisely where the special offering is headed, and we know that we’re making a tangible, practical difference every Sabbath. We sometimes hear what a difference it makes in others lives; we always know what a difference it makes in ours.

Too much of the local churches resources are allocated to what can seem to be “faceless and fathomless” giving. As has been seen in the experience of one local church, local giving revives the church and the people in it, which in turn increases even more giving. How much more could the overall giving patterns of church members be enhanced if less were directed toward faceless and fathomless causes, and more were directed towards local ministry and mission projects? Some pioneering conferences are beginning to find out.

Steps in the Right Direction

Funding For New Church Buildings

In May 2006, a delegation from the local Springwood Seventh-day Adventist Church travelled from Brisbane to Sydney in order to visit the South Pacific Division President and Treasurer. The reason for the trip was to talk about the building policies that existed, and the loan arrangements that local churches received when they were constructing or extending worship facilities. Klopp (2002, p.223) explains the importance of church buildings when he says “churches face many problems related to facilities. The crucial thing to remember is that the purpose of facilities is to facilitate.” Without adequate facilities the local churches health and growth can be hampered. In fact, Wagner (1996), author of *The healthy church*, has used the term “sociological strangulation” to describe facilities that are inadequate to meet the needs of the church. He writes,

What is sociological strangulation? It is the slow-down in the rate of church growth caused when the flow of people into a church begins to exceed the capacity of the facilities to handle it. In other words a church, like a plant, can become pot bound. If the root system gets too big for the pot, the plant will grow less and, as Japanese gardeners know, what growth there is may turn out to be grotesque. This is an interesting diversion for gardener, but not for churches. Healthy, vigorous church growth requires space.

Space is something that Springwood church desperately needed but was being frustrated by the church policy at the time. SDPWP FIN.30.35.3 *Financing of church buildings* in part stated; “In no case shall construction commence, or any contractual commitments be undertaken, unless 55 per cent of the entire cost of the building, including initial furnishings, is in hand in cash or in readily negotiable securities.” SDPWP FIN.30.36 *Church and school building loans* continued to outline the conditions of taking out a loan. It stated;

3. Loans may be granted only where:
 - a. The loan request does not exceed 35 per cent of the entire cost of buildings including initial furnishings or 50% where the project is an extension or major renovation.

- b. The annual repayments on the loan do not exceed 40% of average annual tithe receipts for the church, calculated on receipts over the most recent two-year period.
- 5. a. Loans shall normally be repayable by equal quarterly instalments of both principal and interest over a period of not more than eight years, by automatic debit to the church account in the Church Central Banking System. . .
- 6. a. While the loan is made directly to the local church, the local and union conferences concerned shall guarantee the repayment of the principal and interest to the Division Services Loan Fund.

The delegation from Springwood church had a number of issues to raise regarding this policy. The two main concerns related to the percentage of the project that could be borrowed and also the time allocated to repay the loan.

In today's world with high property prices that seem to continue to increase all the time, it is unrealistic to expect a church to raise 50% of the cost of a new building before they can even contemplate taking on a loan. If a church wanted to build say a four million dollar structure, it would need to raise two million dollars before it could even apply for a loan with the corporate church, which, incidentally, is the only place a local Adventist church can receive a loan. Of course it would need to raise this money while still being committed to giving all the tithes and offering that continues to flow out of the local area. In today's environment, by the time a church managed to raise the amount needed to apply for a loan, decades could have past and the cost of the project could have well doubled. For churches that wanted to remain on site and extend, the SPDWP did not take into account the land value of the church. The other issue was the time allocated to repay the loan. How many mortgages are taken out for only 8 years? Local churches hoping to extend or build new facilities need to take out a lot more than your average home mortgage.

During the meeting, the question was asked, how many new church facilities have been built in Australia recently? The answer to that question appeared in *Record* a month later.

Only five new Australian capital city churches were built during the past eight years due to the rise in property prices, three of which were made possible because of bequests and grants. Lack of available resources from church members and inability to purchase property strategically at lower prices before a congregation is established has also led to the current situation. (Tan, 2006, p.4).

If the local church is meant to be seen as the “primary unit of mission,” how is it possible that only two churches were built via normal means in eight years? Has our organisation turned into an “well-oiled bureaucracy that [has] many people performing many good tasks that [are] not producing effective congregations” (Borden, 2004, p.75) nor finding places or funds for these congregations to meet and worship? Realising their responsibility, Rodney Brady, Chief Financial Officer of the South Pacific Division said, “We need to help rectify the current difficulty to grow and expand the local church in Australia and New Zealand.” (Tan, 2006, p.4).

In November of that same year, 2006, new policies were voted through and introduced. There are now two types of loans that a church can apply for; internal loans (SPDWP FIN 30.36.5), and external loans (SPDWP FIN 30.36.6). In an explanation letter of these new policies and how they will be implemented in the South Queensland Conference, CFO Scott Hopkins (2006, p.1) said “The loans are distinguished by their maximum loan repayment periods (internal 10 years, external 20 years) as well as the level of security required for each type of loan.” One will notice that the time period to repay the loan has increased by 2 years for an internal loan and for the new external loan it has extended out to 20 years. The two loans also mean that, “the loan amount may be increased beyond the 50% base limit” (Hopkins, 2006, p.1). The external loan can be secured by “arranging a registered mortgage over the local church and buildings” (Hopkins, 2006, p.3). In theory, this should unlock the capital that is available in the land to be borrowed against. In practice the value of the existing property has no bearing on the size of the loan, essentially meaning that the

capital value of the property is not unlocked. Yet arranging for a mortgage on the church's existing property becomes a "critical issue for the local church to consider as . . . the land and buildings that are mortgaged may be subject to sale if the local church defaults" (Hopkins, 2006, p.3).

It should be pointed out, however, that the critical issue may be more for the conference and the union as these two organisations are the guarantors for any loan that the local church may receive. And even though the loans are called internal and external, the external loans can only be applied for "through the local Conference and then through to Seventh-day Adventist Church Limited for approval" (Hopkins, 2006, p.3). Neither of these organisational bodies would want to see, nor it could be argued would allow, a church to be sold if it defaults on its loan repayments. Therefore they are very conservative in approving loan amounts to local churches. One of the great positive effects of this is that in order to encourage local congregations to pay their loans off as quickly as possible, the conference will reimburse all interest that has been paid on the loan after the first two and a half years!

Even with this, one local pastor has called these new arrangements a "mirage." These policies are much better than before, at least now there seems to be a shimmer of light on the horizon, that is the possibility of constructing a building seems closer – yet it is still always off in the distance. And when one finally does reach the place where the mirage was first believed to have been, it is quickly discovered that it has moved further on. For this particular pastor these new policies make building a new facility almost reachable, yet always just out of reach.

In order to make new church buildings a more achievable reality, on top of the new loan arrangements as outlined above, local churches can now receive grants from their local conference *and* the South Pacific Division to help in their church construction. As the *Record* (2008, April 12, p.4) reported, “Grants totalling \$A2.37 million dollars (sic) have been announced by Rodney Brady, CFO of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific, in order to help purchase new church properties in Australia and New Zealand.” The article entitled “*Grants help churches around the SPD*” continued by quoting Brady as saying, “We are focusing more on the needs of local churches. . . This major initiative signals a new day of greater assistance to local churches.” This is a good day and good news indeed for the local church. These grants will also not only be one off grants as “in May 2009, applications for assistance will again be considered.”

On reading this article, Andre van Rensburg, the senior pastor and lead in the delegation from Springwood church wrote a reply to *Record* stating,

I applaud the report of financial assistance for local church buildings (Grants help churches around the SPD, News, April 12). The financial assistance this year of \$2.37 million by the South Pacific Division (SPD) recognises the sisterhood of churches. Outdated policies that were barriers in building churches have been overturned by the new SPD policies. The South Queensland Conference has also voted new financial policies for church buildings, providing a financial grant and assisting with two years worth of interest payments. Many local churches which were once in limbo, are now able to build. . . . Building churches has been left primarily to the local church, yet we are not based on a Congregationalist church model but on interdependence. Our mission is to connect people to Jesus, ensure they are part of a healthy local church. We need to continue to look at our church structure and policies to encourage growth in the local church. Employing resources for our main mission calls for a greater balance between our institutional and local church needs. Let’s unleash the potential of the local church in order to finish the gospel commission (van Rensburg, 2008, May 10, p.29).

On this new and great day for the local church, Sperring (2008, p.13) responded to the above letter by saying, “it saddens me to hear Adventist leaders and churches discussing finances, or the lack thereof, when considering projects and other undertakings. Money should never be an issue in decision making.” If only she knew.

Before moving on, it is interesting to note the make up of the committee who decides which churches will receive these new grants and how much each church will receive.

The grants committee consists of

the South Pacific Division Treasurer,

the Associate General Secretary of the South Pacific Division,

the Australian Union Treasurer

the New Zealand Pacific Union Treasurer

A Conference Treasurer

A Conference President

A local church pastor – who also holds a departmental position at the South Pacific Division as the head of the *Centre of church planting institute*.

One can quickly see that it is mainly the administrators, most removed by several steps from the grass roots level that are making vital decisions about financing the growth and vitality of the local churches that apply for the grant. Yet one is not to be too critical here as it was mainly these same administrators who made these grants available in the first place. When it comes to financing local church buildings, the corporate church has taken a step in the right direction.

Staffing-for-Growth.

Staffing-for-Growth is a term coined by Gary L. McIntosh (2000, p.19) in his book *Staff your church for growth: Building team ministry in the 21st Century*. In it he explains (on page 16 and 17) that “churches always follow, consciously or unknowingly, one of three policies in staffing. The most common policy is to staff for numerical decline. A smaller number of churches staff to remain on a plateau in size. A relatively small proportion staff to grow in numbers.” Citing Wagner (1984),

McIntosh (2000, p.17) then continues “Most churches are understaffed for growth. They are staffed for maintenance and survival, but not for growth. If your church is to sustain growth momentum, staffing must become a very high priority.”

In order to be staffed for growth, McIntosh shows how earlier church growth and staffing literature, such as Lyle Schaller’s (1980) *The multiple staff and the larger church*, suggests a ratio of one full time staff member for every 100 people attending the worship service. However, from a financial perspective, “it has not proved to be functional since it requires more money to staff a church at a ratio of 1:100 than most churches are able or willing to invest. Based on a half century evaluation of churches with multiple staff teams, it now appears that a realistic ratio of staff to worship attendance is 1:150” (McIntosh, 2000, p. 39). Yet as we are staffing-for-growth, once a church reaches 150 people it should add a new staff person well *before* reaching the next projected growth level, in this case 300 people. That is, “the congregation averaging 150 to 175 in worship attendance should be in the process of adding a second person to the program staff if the leaders expect the congregation to grow to 300 worshipers and to be able to assimilate new persons into the life of the church” (McIntosh, 2000, p.42).

As well as program or ministry staff, support staff are also needed, which McIntosh admits is dependant on a number of factors. Starting with one full support staff member for a church with an attendance of 150 people and one pastor, he suggests an increase of 0.5 support staff for every additional 150 people who attend the church. That is, at 300 people attending the church regularly, the church needs two full-time

program staff with 1.5 support staff, at a worship attendance of 450 people, it is three full time program staff positions with 2 support staff – and so on.

When it comes to ministry staff, careful consideration must be given as to where extra staffing is needed. Noting that the fastest growing churches are new ones, or ones that have recently been planted, McIntosh looks at the priorities of the senior pastor during this time period to answer questions about where it is best to place staff for growth.

To start with, “when a church-planting pastor goes into a new area, the first responsibility on his desk is to find some new people. This finding new people is (called) evangelism” (McIntosh, 2004, p.213). As the pastor begins to reach people he now must try to keep as many people as possible through the process of assimilation. Once this is happening a third priority of the pastor becomes coordinating worship services and preparing and delivering messages, in other words celebrating God with the people. What begins as a simple task continues to extend as another priority is added that of education and discipleship of the people now attending the church. This in turn means that new ministries in the church will begin to arise and the pastor finds that he is being stretched as all these new ministries cry out for oversight. Finally with all these new people attending church, church attenders have a habit of getting sick, married, in trouble, and dying! This means that an added priority for the pastor is conducting hospital visits, counselling sessions, weddings and funerals. A continuum of these priorities given by McIntosh can be seen in Figure 3 below.

Priority in Early Years			Priority in Later Years		
Find new people	Keep new people	Celebrate with people	Educate the people	Oversee the people	Care for people

Figure 3. Priorities of a Pastor

As can be seen, this model “teaches us that, as a church grows, the responsibilities on the solo pastor’s desk become complex and numerous” (McIntosh, 2000, p.25). In other words, extra staffing becomes vital. It also demonstrates that “a growing church will place a higher emphasis on the priorities on the left than those on the right.” So what is the best way to staff a church so that it grows? McIntosh (2004, p.216) states, “The answer is to staff a church from the left to the right side of the continuum.” This is all well and good, yet how can this staffing-for-growth model be applied in Adventism?

One of the largest non-institutional churches in Australia and New Zealand is the Papatoetoe Community Church, in Auckland New Zealand. Currently the church has an average attendance of about 900 every weekend. In the early 1980s the church embarked on a large building program. Because of the financial stressors that developed in the economy at the time, repayments became difficult and various levels of church organisations assisted in assuring this project moved forward. Blessed with a large facility, the pastoral team then turned their attention to staffing.

Restricted by the lack of resources that the church retained, yet knowing that the church would not live up to its fullest redemptive potential unless it added some more staff, the local pastor at the time, Brendan Pratt¹⁷, approached some businessmen within the church to set up a staffing fund. The businessmen agreed to the idea and the staff fund was established, even though the church at the time still owed a considerable amount on its facilities. From this newly established fund, staff were contracted to the church, starting with communications, then children’s ministries,

¹⁷ Pratt was interviewed on the June 17, 2008 and again on May 23, 2009 by the current author.

administration and outreach staff. As an example of staff employed, Pratt recalls the conversation in which he approached the new potential employee for the administration position at the church. Because the local church couldn't offer much money, in taking on this position the new employee would be working for significantly less pay than in their current occupation, yet because they would be doing something that makes a real eternal difference, they took the job.

Fairly soon it became apparent that as more staff were being added a more sustainable system of employment needed to be developed. The system developed as outlined below, enables Papatoetoe to currently have eight full time paid positions, six part-time positions, and two full-time volunteers on staff. Staff members fulfil ministries such as Worship, Life Groups, Children and Family and Administration and Account work. Yet how does a local Adventist church make this possible when all of her tithe, which could be used for paying these staff, goes directly to the conference?

In essence the North New Zealand Conference, under its "healthy church plan," remits a percentage of tithes collected by that particular local church, as in the case above Papatoetoe church, back to that same local church. Using a formula which also takes into account church membership, attendance and growth rates, local churches in the North New Zealand Conference can have returned to them for staffing up to 60% of the tithe that they give! That is, 60% of the tithe collected is "locked-in" to the church that gave it to help them employ staff. This can and has made an incredible difference to the churches. It has allowed Papatoetoe to have the number of staff that they need, which permits continued growth. It has increased the resources available in

the local church, while at the same time it has also increased the amount of tithe that is flowing through to the Conference!

This has happened because in part the “faceless and fathomless” aspect of giving has been removed. People who tithe know that 60% will be returned locally in the form of staffing, they know these staff personally, they see them every week and see the difference that their ministry is making, hence the members are inclined to give more. They can give with confidence knowing that their contributions also help the wider programs of the church. This is a very simple yet well thought out way of returning resources directly to the church. It is the same set target that conferences aim to be spending on field budgets, yet it has enabled this percentage to be “lock-in” to that church and not lost into a great big pool.

It should be noted at this point that in the 2005 Minnesota Conference Constituency Meeting, a proposal was put forward requiring the conference to “return 75 percent of tithe received from congregations to the congregation.” (McLarty, 2005, p.8)

Although this motion failed, it is an increase on the 60% that is currently employed in New Zealand. Whatever the figure, this system helps the local church to be what McLaren (cited in Minatrea, 2004, p. 114) calls a “self-sustaining organization that does ministry and produces a surplus of energy and money over time. In other words, it attends to its own needs and, in so doing, miraculously generates more than it needs, so it can give to needs beyond its borders.”

However, some may question if this is the fairest way to redistribute the tithe?

Wouldn't this method only help out the larger churches? Is this method fair to the

smaller churches within the conference? Before we answer this question, one should be reminded that the current system is a greater disadvantage to the larger churches than to the smaller ones. Sahlin (2003, p.87), in commenting on the situation in North America, is upfront when he says

The reality is that the top 20% of congregations provides much of the funding necessary to maintain the current levels of pastoral staffing in the many small churches in each conference, as well as the significant subsidies that conferences and churches provide for Adventist schools – about half the real cost of Christian education.

However no matter what the size, for political reasons administrators want to be seen as treating congregations equally. As George (1988, p.56) pointed out in 1988,

Distributing resources politically is becoming your method of squelching the debate [of where resources should go]. Resource allocations increasingly fulfill a standard of equity or fairness rather than a standard of distributing resources to the place where there is the greatest potential for fruitfulness. Budget makers in their wisdom say, “We can afford only one minister here, one minister there, one minister over here.” What should be said is, “It would be better to put two ministers here, even if we have to have no minister over there, because the fruitfulness for advancing the kingdom, for advancing the Adventist movement, is greater in Condition A than Conditions B or C.”

Are Seventh-day Adventist administrators more concerned about equity and fairness or the fruitfulness of the kingdom? There is no doubt that smaller churches in the sisterhood of churches can lose some level of support if conferences adopt this staffing-for-growth model. Yet these same churches have been tying up valuable human resources that can be redeployed to more fruitful harvests. James Cress (2005, p. 123), the Adventists pastor’s pastor, asks and then answers his own question when he says,

Does the church need to reallocate resources? Definitely! But we need such “freed up” resources and personnel in major metropolitan areas, where potential converts have congregated. Let us release these funds and capable individuals to minister to millions of lost souls in the world’s great cities.

Cress (2005, p.122) gives an example by stating, “At the risk of offending my colleagues in multi-church assignments, an example from my last pastorate demonstrates reality. In that metropolitan area, where people live, I served 750 members with two associates. The same number of members “downstate” were

served by eight pastors.” While it is not always the case that the larger the church, the more money it receives from its members, this is generally so. Therefore it is clear that locking in tithe for staffing, is going to be more beneficial to larger more financial churches than to the smaller congregations.

In fact in adopting this system, some of the smaller churches in the conference may be forced to close. While this may actually be beneficial in an urban environment – to free up some of the resources that could be more fruitful just 10 minutes or so down the road, it could cause problems in the rural setting. By its very nature, many of the churches in these rural areas are smaller because there are less people to draw on. Yet it is still desirable to have an Adventist presence in these country towns. Locking in the tithe at 60% for these rural churches could threaten this. However it should be remembered that under this system there is still 40% of the tithe received from all churches in the conference that is available to support the global work of the church as well as any rural churches that maybe struggling and in this situation. This is not to say that all smaller churches will struggle or feel neglected under this system. In fact some will be able to thrive!

One smaller church that adopted this staffing-for-growth model in New Zealand initially qualified for 0.2 of a pastor’s salary. In other words, they qualify for a pastor one day a week. Because of its size it was decided to pay the local elder a day’s wage to look after the needs of the congregation. On the other days he continued in his normal employment. However, the smaller church now realized something.

Whenever they turn up to business meetings, their “pastor” is now there. He is there for “prayer meetings” and there at church every Sabbath. Under the old system, their

conference ordained pastor may have had another three churches and the congregation only saw him once a month. Now it's every week. As a consequence, the little church starts to grow, their giving starts to increase, and pretty soon the conference treasurer is offering this small church "pastor" two days of paid ministry work a week. It can be seen that this system can be very beneficial to the local church regardless of its size.

Staffing churches for growth may help the local church, but would this also be beneficial to the conference that implements this system? In order to find out, the author conducted a telephone interview with the North New Zealand Conference President, Edward Tupai.¹⁸ The introduction of the "healthy churches plan" in North New Zealand began three years ago (2006) in order to help the conference achieve its stated mission. "to grow healthy Adventist New Zealand churches by mentoring, supporting and resourcing leaders." (www.nnzc.org.nz/Healthy-Adventist-Churches). This mission has been summarised into "seven strategic words (a) Building Leaders (b) Growing Churches (c) Serving the World" At the time of the conversation with Tupai, the conference had spent considerable time focusing on the first two objectives and were about to move onto the third. In other words the "healthy church plan" is still being implemented, however since its inception local churches have been able to be staffed for growth.

When asked if the system is working, Tupai replied that in many ways "a lot of it is anecdotal evidence, like the work that the pastors are doing." Yet when looking at the resources themselves the evidence is clear. Tupai related that since the introduction of the "healthy church plan" and its associated staffing-for-growth system, there has

¹⁸ This phone interview was conducted on July 24, 2009.

been a jump in offerings received and an increase in tithe given. On average he initially stated that in the last three years the conference tithe has increased by about \$1 million dollars each year for the last three years. He later clarified this with his treasury team and found that the actual figure is an average increase of \$625,000 a year, still a great number! Yet the author finds it interesting in itself that the very perception from the leader of the conference is that there is an overwhelming increase of resources available when it is invested back in the local setting. During the interview, Tupai stated that it seems like “every time we go to the executive committee we look at each other and ask, how do we spend all this money!” What conference wouldn’t want to have these kind of problems? The way they have spent the surplus tithe it is to continue to support local churches and increase the number of staff in the field. Tupai conveyed that in the three years since introducing this model the North New Zealand Conference have added an extra ten staffing budgets within that short time, and within the last eighteen months eight new congregations have been planted, which will increase to ten new churches by the end of the year! Clearly investing in the local church, is good for the local church, and it is also good for the conference. It seems that it really is “axiomatic that the stronger the local church becomes, the stronger the entire body will be.”¹⁹

As with any new system, staffing-for-growth does create some issues that the corporate church will need to address. Using this model, many of the employees come from within the local church. As the examples above show, this can mean that it could turn into a situation where it is predominately lay pastors with limited ministerial

¹⁹ Of course the increase in tithe cannot solely be attributed to the staffing for growth model. As spirituality increases so does peoples giving. There may be some external factors also at play. Recently the New Zealand Government introduced a system whereby a greater portion of tithe paid can be claimed as a tax deduction. However when the author asked Tupai about this he felt that they were still to see the results in this change.

training who lead the smaller country churches, while the same lack of formal training can be seen in the larger churches as the church hires employees from within. This is highlighted by the fact that at the time of writing, only one of the sixteen staff members employed at Papatoetoe church, has a theology degree or is seminary trained. This is not to say that this is necessarily a bad thing, it is only different from the current model, and challenging for administrators and church members who are after a “qualified” pastor. One of the advantages of employing people from within the church to work in their local church is that they are already committed to the ministry growth and success of the church precisely because it is *their* local church. They were a part of this church a long time before they were employed by it.

Moving more in this direction of staffing-for-growth, the issue of training becomes critical. In adopting systems like this, churches and conferences must spend large amounts of time on leadership training. Suddenly a member in your congregation may be asked to take on a paid pastoral roll. What does that mean? What are they expected to do? How are they expected to do it? On the other hand the senior pastor who has been pastoring churches on his own all his ministerial career, may now be a senior pastor with staff under him. What does that look like? How has his or her role changed? As an example, the pastor may now finally have someone to collect the church mail, answer phone calls, send letters on his behalf and photocopy the bulletin, but he now needs to manage the extra staff who are doing these and other ministry tasks in the church. The time the pastor was hoping to save may not be there. Regardless, all staff members will need to attend seminars, read books, listen to podcasts and CDs that relate to their new work area and are on topics such as church health, growth, change, and leadership. Mentoring or coaching in these situations also

becomes vitally important. Seminary institutions like Avondale College, where many of the Adventist pastors are trained for ministry in Australia and New Zealand may need to look at how they can adapt and indeed tap into this evolving situation.

Once people are trained and asked to be on the staff to lead a certain ministry, let them lead! As Borden (2003, p. 127) reminds us, “Any individual who is given a specific responsibility must be given adequate authority to accomplish the task. Separating authority from responsibility creates frustration, and if accountability is absent, it often creates ineffectiveness.” In other words, leaders must be given broad authority to take strong leadership roles over the areas for which they are responsible.

Once the leader is leading strongly and their ministry is growing, another challenge for the corporate church arises. How does the paid local church’s children’s ministries leader for example, fit into the “calling system” of the church? Can another local Adventist church call this leader to fulfill a vacancy for a children’s ministry position that the calling church may have? If so who does the calling, the conference or the local church? Would the “service requests” work as normal? If this person accepted the call, this would negate hiring from within that is occurring and has been seen as a strength of the staffing-for-growth system. If more conferences begin to adapt the staffing-for-growth model, these are some of the issues that will have to be worked through.

These issues are real. However, so is the potential kingdom impact among local Adventist churches that can be adequately staffed for health and growth. As an example of what a church that is staffed properly can achieve, Papatoetoe recently

organized a “Southside Slam” streetball competition in order to raise awareness and invite as many people as possible to programs conducted by the church. As was reported in the *Record* (Seyb, 2009, p.1&6) “It is estimated that contact was made with around 4000 young people through the streetball tournaments, as well as through the school visits conducted during the week and ‘360 Church’ on the Friday night.” Needless to say, 4000 people is a very large number of people to be in contact with during one event. *Record* continues to report that during the week more than 150 young people signed up to join “360 Life” small group ministries and 25 people responded to the guest preacher’s call to follow Christ. While obviously there are a lot of reasons for the success of this program, an event like this would be almost impossible to pull off without adequate staff. (Papatoetoe has three employed staff working in the areas of teens, youth and young adults alone).

Because of the success of the staffing-for-growth system in the North New Zealand Conference, it is currently being implemented throughout the Greater Sydney Conference. As the staffing-for-growth formula takes into account not only tithe but also church membership and growth rates, it helps to ensure that the churches which receive funding for extra staffing are the ones who are making a kingdom impact.

Again it is George (1988, p.57) who reminds us that,

we in the church of Jesus Christ must learn to put our primary resources where the greatest harvest can be had, because it is in that harvest that we will develop the additional resources to extend the kingdom even further. We need to increase our potential for winning by placing our resources where they can do the most good.

Instead of allocating resources equally or politically among the churches, staffing-for-growth goes some way in helping accomplish this. Money is plowed back where the action is.

Commission on Ministries, Services and Structure.

In October of 2005, the General Conference Executive committee established the *Commission on ministries, services and structures*. This commission was assigned “the wide-ranging task of reviewing denominational organization patterns and the delivery systems for programs and information” (Cooper, 2005a, p.1). In other words, as the *Adventist News Network* (ANN) (13th Oct 2006) described it, the Commission was to look at the “concept of whether, and to what extent, there could be flexibility in the church denominational structure compared the current single template in our organization’s building blocks.” The ANN article also reported vice chairman of the committee, Lowell Cooper, saying that “mission and growth happen in a localized setting, and the environments in which they happen vary throughout the world. We must recognize that one organizational pattern may not be the most effective way of responding to the core values of mission and unity.”

The chairman of the committee, General Conference President, Jan Paulsen (2006, p.1) explained that “the big concerns which will drive our considerations as a commission are, I believe, quite simple: (1) the global unity of the church, (2) the global mission entrusted to us, and (3) the best use of resources to make these possible.” He continued by saying that “these concerns are no different from those that led our pioneers one hundred years ago to develop the structures we currently have and which have served us well for a century.”

In a paper presented to the Commission entitled, *Reasons for considering adjustments to Seventh-day Adventist Church ministries services and structure*, Cooper (2005b),

identified some basic assumptions about Seventh-day Adventist Church organisation.

These include. .

* The Church's core values of a worldwide mission and worldwide unity call for a global identity and structure. . . Any structural revision must preserve a sense of ownership and responsibility for mission at the local level along with a sense of identity as a worldwide family engaged in fulfilling the Gospel Commission on a global scale. (p.1)

* The range of environments (geopolitical, cultural, economic and religious) to which the Seventh-day Adventist Church must relate will require some flexibility in organizational structure." (p.2)

* Revising/adjusting structure does not automatically mean that increased resources will be available for organizational mission. (p. 2)

* The local church and the world church (i.e. General Conference Session) are indispensable elements of denominational structure. (p.2)

Commenting on this last point, Cooper (2005b, p.2) states, "other expressions of structure such as local missions/conferences, union missions/conferences, institutions, and the general conference office with its divisions must be rationalized and established or modified in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness in facilitating mission and strengthening unity." In other words, this basic assumption opens the way for flexibility in organizational structures to occur in connecting the local church to the global General Conference.

Knight (2007, p. 172) also believes that flexibility is required to ensure the linking of the vibrancy and diversity of the local church, with the unity and harmony of the global church. He says

The healthiest model of church organization will utilize congregational initiative, responsibility, and diversity to the fullest, while at the same time capturing the advantages of a structure that can amass and focus worldwide assets for the purpose of mission. Unity that is able to utilize diversity seems to be the model being aimed at the struggles of the New Testament church as it sought to find its way through the maze of its Jewishness, Gentileness, and its various national and socioeconomic corridors.

This was again emphasised when the Commission reported back to the global church (during its Annual Council) in 2007. In its recommendations entitled, *Principles and*

practices in organizational flexibility for Seventh-day Adventist denominational structure, it was stated that

Organizational structure must maintain a balance between centralization and decentralization, between control and empowerment. On the one hand, too much responsibility and authority must not be placed on one person or upon a small group of persons. There is need for more localized decision-making in the far-flung mission fields. On the other hand, unity and concerted action are preserved through a structure that provides for consultation and resource sharing. The purpose of centralization was more for coordination than for control. The purpose of decentralization was more for responsiveness to local situations than for independence. (page 2 & 3, bold in the original)

This is a good representation of the balanced position argued for in this paper.

The report then presented a number of options on how the structure between the local and the global church could be organised. The keen observer will note that all alternative options listed below attempt to reduce the current structure through either less staff or entities, showing the current imbalance towards over centralisation. The different patterns of structural design presented are illustrated below in Figure 4.

Illustration of Structural Design Alternatives

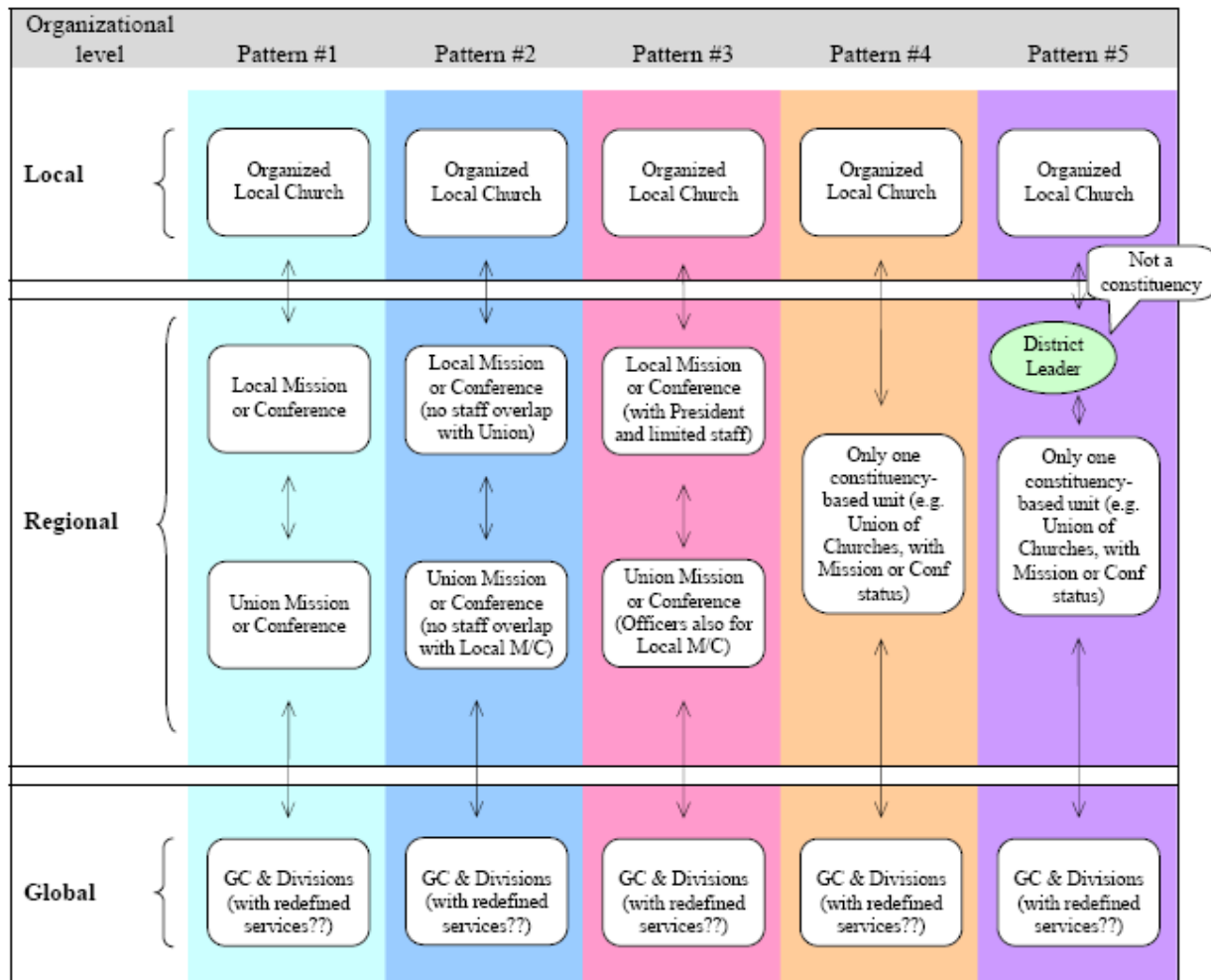


Figure 4. Taken from *Report on principles, possibilities, and limits of flexibility in the design of Seventh-day Adventist organizational structure.*
A report to the Commission on ministries, services, and structures. (p.16).

In the figure above,

Pattern #1 represents the dominant and standard model that is currently in use.

Pattern #2 has been called the “complementary staffing model” and it differs from the standard model in that there is no departmental staff overlap between the union and the conference. That is a “departmental director at the local mission/conference may not have a full-time counterpart at the union” (p.9) and vice versa

Pattern #3 reduces the local conference to basically a president only, with all other

services provided by the union.

Pattern # 4 reduces the conferences and unions into one constituency, (currently known as “Union of Churches”)

Pattern #5 is the same as pattern # 4 except a “district director” functions not as an administrator, but rather in an advisory or consultative role to a group or district of local churches.

There is also a Pattern # 6 that did not make the graphic illustration above as “the general conference executive committee (April 2006) adopted guidelines for establishing alternative structure to initiate Seventh-day Adventist mission in areas where traditional church structures are not present and/or permitted.” (p.10)

Having outlined the above options, the commission recommended that;

models #2 through #6 be acceptable alternatives to the standard model. In other words, the Seventh-day Adventist Church will have multiple models of organizational structure rather than only one. These multiple models may co-exist in the sense that denominational structure in one area may illustrate one of the models while an adjacent area may reflect another of the available models. (p. 10).

The recommendations from this committee will be voted on by the wider church during the 2010 General Conference Session in Atlanta.

The Commission also looked closely at the numerous departments that exist within the different levels of administration. Parmenter (2006) examined this issue in his paper for the commission entitled, *The flow of ministries*. The question asked was “Are the departments still relevant for this new age and if not, is there a better way of meeting the churches needs?” (p.4). Parmenter (2006, p.7) continued by saying “it would be well for us as an Adventist Church to... assess the overall health and effectiveness of all ministries and to identify any ineffective, redundant and

overlapping programs. Perhaps these measures alone could streamline our current system to the point of total satisfaction for all concerned parties.”

Parmenter showed the need for change in this area by highlighting the number of programs from the conference, union, division and General Conference which local church officers and pastors are bombarded. He admits that

in a recent General Conference committee it was discovered that the General Conference is promoting at least 19 programs at this present time. Add to this the programs initiated by the division, the union and conferences/missions. It is impossible for our pastors and lay leaders to take on board all of the excellent programs that are urged upon them. It would seem that we need a simpler structure so that we do fewer programs but make sure that the ones we do, we do well and that we evaluate those programs. (Parmenter, 2006, p 7.)

It was also shown that the current structure does not respond well when the shoe is on the other foot and the initiative comes not from the department but instead the local church.

In order to work out the best way to structure and support the local church Parmenter (2006, p.9-10) passionately argued that “it is absolutely necessary that we conduct surveys to find out what our constituencies are saying. . . If we truly believe that our structures are set up to serve the local churches these same churches should play a major role in informing us of their needs.”

Once feedback is received from local churches, Parmenter (2006, p. 11) suggests that in order to be more effective “it may be helpful to simplify the system by assembling the tasks together in related clusters.” This would be an alternative to individual existing departments such as health, personal ministries, children’s ministries and the like. Some of the possible categories could be:

- Worship (Making worship more meaningful and joyful-leading to revival)– Sabbath School, Youth, Ministerial, Church Manual, Responsibilities of church officers, Stewardship, Children’s Ministries
- Mission (Preparation and involvement in outreach) – Personal Ministries, Women’s Ministries, Youth, Communication, Health Ministries, Children’s Ministries, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, Publishing, Discipleship
- Nurture (Keeping faith alive–strengthening the church family ties) - Women’s Ministries, Youth, Health Ministries, Stewardship, Family Ministries, Children’s Ministries, Education
- Fellowship (Providing opportunity for personal contact socially and spiritually - building unity) – Youth, Sabbath School, Divine Service, Children’s Ministries, Social activities
- Specialized services such as the Education and Youth Departments (making Christian education available) – Schools, Colleges, Universities
- Administration (Leadership training) – Elders, Deacons, Deaconesses, Departmental Leadership, Church Manual, Minister’s Manual, Elder’s Manual, Ministerial Association, Trust Services

Parmenter (2006, p. 10, 11) also gave another alternative suggested cluster of departments as,

- **Evangelism and Witness:** We are called to invite all people to faith, repentance, and the abundant life of God in Jesus Christ, to encourage congregations in joyfully sharing the gospel, and through the power of the Holy Spirit to grow in membership and discipleship.
- **Justice and Compassion:** We are called to address wrongs in every aspect of life and the whole of creation, intentionally working with and on behalf of poor, oppressed, and disadvantaged people as did Jesus Christ even at risk to our corporate and personal lives.
- **Spirituality and Discipleship:** We are called to deeper discipleship through Scripture, worship, prayer, study, stewardship and service, and to rely on the Holy Spirit to mould our lives more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.
- **Leadership and Vocation:** We are called to lead by Jesus Christ’s example, to identify spiritual gifts, and to equip and support Christians of all ages for faithful and effective servant leadership in all parts of the body of Christ.
- **Church government:** We are called to address opportunities and concerns which clarify the role and responsibilities of connectedness and communication in the life of the church.

The current author believes that forming departmental ministries into clusters has merit, and would also suggest another alternative cluster that could be based upon the quality characteristics of healthy churches as outlined by Christian Schwarz’s *Natural church development*.²⁰

²⁰ Natural church development (NCD) lists the eight quality characteristics of healthy churches as Empowering Leadership, Gift-oriented ministry, Passionate Spirituality, Functional Structures, Inspiring Worship Service, Holistic Small Groups, Need-Oriented Evangelism, Loving Relationships. While it would not be desirable to have eight departmental directors, a director’s role could be oriented around two or more of these characteristics.

These suggested and flexible changes that have been put forward by this Commission and will be voted on at the General Conference Session in 2010 are indeed a step in the right direction. However, in looking at this it would be prudent to keep in mind two things.

The first is the haunting words of a Division President who oversaw structural changes to the unions in his division. These changes saw the reduction from five unions to four and saw the creation of the New Zealand Pacific Union based upon pattern #3 as outlined above. These changes took up a lot of time, energy and effort yet, as this Division President, Laurie Evans says, “none of these initiatives have resulted in appreciable growth, nor have they resulted in a revival or rejuvenated church in the South Pacific.” (Brown 2005. p.2) Unless the changes presented by the Commission continually ask how does this proposal benefit the local church, experience shows that they will bring in no appreciable growth at all.

Secondly as Knight (2007, p.175) explains

“Complicating any significant steps toward change in this area of Adventism is the fact that the great preponderance of authority for decision making at all levels above the local conference resides in those who already have vested interests in the status quo as leading functionaries in the present corporate scheme of things. Creating change in such a system could be well nigh impossible.”²¹

Ian Sleeman, a delegate from Britain to the General Conference’s Annual Council during 2005 wasn’t so politically correct when he heard about the Commission.

Addressing the meeting he stated, “Turkeys don’t vote for Christmas and departmental directors won’t vote themselves out of office” (*Adventist News Network*, 2005). One wonders if upon realising that turkeys are predominately consumed not at

²¹ Knight continues. “Thus one of the most important and first changes that Adventism needs to explore is a broadening of the authority base for the denomination’s “higher levels”.

Christmas, but rather during American Thanksgiving celebrations, if he felt like a bit of a goose! This is said only to reinforce the point that while the above structural changes are indeed encouraging and should save the corporate church money and make it more efficient, unless it ultimately leads to less resources flowing out of the strangled local congregations, it will be for nothing.

Recommendations

The author is encouraged by the glimpses one can see of the renewed focus on the local church that some conferences, divisions and the world church are currently undertaking. The greater support for churches with their building plans, and the new emphasis on staffing-for-growth that exists in some conferences, along with the potential benefit of flexibility in the global structure can all be seen as positive changes that can have an impact upon the resources and hence effectiveness of the local church. Having examined the issues involved, this paper will now offer some recommendations in order to find the middle ground on the organisational scale.

More Local Offerings. / Less Percentages Passed On

Twenty local offerings a year is simply not enough. Much more needs to be retained in the local church. Some of the offerings collected go towards supporting ministries in the global mission fields. However, because of modern technology and the current world in which we live, the globe is shrinking rapidly. So much so that Minatrea (2004, p.94-95) states, “Today, global is local. Let’s have the courage to adopt a word to describe the new state and let it stand on its own merit: *glocal*. . . . Churches need to minister in a *glocal* community. *Glocal* is reality in the twenty-first century.” If this is so, the church needs to discover ways to invest and minister more effectively in this *glocal* community.

While some of the offerings that leave the local church go towards missions, other offerings are expending in keeping the machine running. This is not a bad thing as the machine still needs to run. However one wonders why the higher levels of the organisation need so much oil to keep their machine going. This can be also seen as

conferences pass on 10% to its union, and up to a further 14% to the division. These percentages should be revised downwards. The flexibility in structures that is recommended by the *Commission on ministries, services and structures* should make this possible.

Greater Portion Of Tithe To Be Used Locally.

With more tithe now staying in the conference, more should be able to flow back to the local church. As local churches look at increasing staff (see next recommendation), there also needs to be funding available to run the churches ministries and outreach programs. The local conference usually differentiates between these two needs and will usually help to fund only those items or programs that are clearly outreach focused. However, tithe should also be spent on creating healthy missional churches. Therefore, tithe can also be used to run some of the local ministries of the church as it currently does at other levels of the church. Because of the current system many ministries have little to run on, and too many ministry programs in the local church are paid for by donations from the ministry leader.

While each conference is different, most have an application process for using tithe money to run outreach programs. The conference wants to ensure that the church is accountable with this money. However “in most congregations and in most judicatories there is little accountability for effectiveness” (Borden, 2003, p.25). That is certainly true in this case as well. A greater portion of tithe should be allocated to be used for outreach and missional ministry programs of the church, in order that the effectiveness of the local church can be increased. In essence this is what the twenty-

four pastors were arguing for when they recommended the local church retain 10% of its tithe.

Way (2008), has a creative suggestion in this area. He states

If Conferences allowed the local churches to keep the tithe of new members for two years it would help the local church to do everything possible to win and retain new members, it would help the local church to fully disciple the new members so that they became tithers, and it would give the local church an income for further outreach. Such a system would ultimately benefit both the local church and the Conference. It would require careful oversight, but has the potential to radically improve the way we do evangelism.

While it may be a little unworkable and create extra work at the local church level, this idea upholds the value of evangelism, and enables the local church to financially see some of the fruit of their labor. The importance of redirecting tithe locally is seen by Knight (2007, p.173) when he states

Adventism must put its tithe dollars back to work in “real ministry.” For too long the tithe has subsidized a massive “bureaucratic industry.” The church might actually be more effective in accomplishing its mission if it spent no more than 20-30 percent of present administrative expenditures on bureaucracy and bureaucratic real estate and support structures. Just think of what that would involve for ministry and mission. It could mean more than all the plans developed by people behind desks in the next 100 years.

This can be achieved through some of the initiatives below.

Staffing-for-Growth Extended To All Conferences.

The option for a local church to be able to staff for growth should be available to every local church no matter what conference they belong. In other words, under a “healthy churches plan,” like the one implemented in the North New Zealand Conference, all local churches should be able to apply for a significant percentage of their tithe to be “lock-in” or returned to their church for staffing. While the advantages and the disadvantages of this system have been highlighted above, the large majority of tithe that is given by a local church needs to remain to benefit that same local church. Staffing at the local church level should be a high priority among conferences and local churches. In fact, in using the example of the choice most

congregations have between spending resources on staffing or on facilities, McIntosh (2000, p.36) states

Research on churches completed in the last half century has found that the order of a church's priority usually signals its growth or decline. For example, declining churches order their priorities in this manner: facilities, programs, and staff. On the other hand, growing churches order their priorities in this manner: staff, programs, facilities. Adequate facilities are crucial to a growing church, but in the majority of situations, it is wiser to place the priority on staff over facilities.

The staffing-for-growth system that has been implemented in some conferences helps local churches to prioritise this vital area.

In encouraging a local conference to adopt this system for the churches under its jurisdiction, two important points should be highlighted. The first is that most conferences strive and indeed many are already spending 60% of the tithe they receive on field staffing. Therefore for these conferences, it is only a matter of redistributing in a more fruitful way the field staff already employed. This is the experience of the Greater Sydney Conference as it moves to implement this system. In other words, there is no financial disincentive in implementing this system. In fact, it is the exact opposite for the second point is that there has proven to be a financial advantage to both the local church, through extra staff, and also the conference, through extra funds being generated. This has been the experience in New Zealand. As explained above, the extra funds are generated through the increased giving of tithe, as local church members can see the difference that their giving makes and as the church grows. This win-win situation helps to highlight the underlying axiom of this paper, that the stronger the local church becomes the stronger the whole body will be.

De-departmentalisation.

Cox (2001, p.146) reminds us “it follows that if a department, for whatever reason, is no longer serving the purpose for which it was created, it should not exist.” This holds true for the both the local church setting as well as the various levels of administration above. This paper has outlined a range of issues related to the relationship between the departments and the local church, and the question needs to be asked are they still serving their purpose? Are they still resourcing local churches for health and growth? These questions must be asked, for as Oliver (undated, p.19) states

The church cannot survive unless present proportions are radically altered. The church has been making some moves in the right direction, but without constant monitoring it will be easy to lose that initiative. The best way to make an impact is to reduce a level of administration.

The current system is so complex that it is reported that many members “do not understand it. . . .When people don’t know [how their church operates], they assume and when they assume they are often wrong. We need to know what functions certain departments fulfil and if they are fulfilling the mission of the church” (Rowe, 2007, p.6).

As has been seen above, one of the recommendations from the *Commission on ministries, services and structures* was to overhaul the departments of the church and group them at the various administration levels into clusters such as Worship, Mission, Nurture and the like. This will reduce the number of departments and has the potential to make the system more efficient. However, the author believes that more can be done in this area.

Instead of clustering the departments together, at the conference level a process of “de-departmentalisation” should occur. This term is created in this paper to denote the

idea that most departments, if they are to continue, should first of all be moved to be based in the local church. As will be shown, in essence de-departmentalisation builds on the suggestion of the twenty-four pastors.

Recently Kylie Ward from the Children's Ministries department at the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference admitted that "The idea is that often the way we do Children's Ministry is to make resources and then throw them at churches like confetti. We needed a bridge to bring the resources to local churches from the Conferences." (Nash, 2009, p. 3). What better way to bridge the gap than by not having a gap at all? If the church constituency is to insist on departmental leaders for ministries such as Health, Family Ministries, Women's Ministries, Prayer Ministries and the like, then place these conference appointed departments in a local church. Let the director work at creating a vibrant ministry in his/her area of expertise, where others could come and learn and observe with hands on experience. The aim here is to create field-based specialists who are doing effective ministry within their own congregations. This allows the departmental director to continue with hands on experiences, applying his or her skill and craft, while at the same time allowing others to come and observe while they teach. De-departmentalisation would allow for a better learning experience as participants see this ministry in action.

Not only will this help to reduce overhead costs, but as it is a hands-on learning experience it will also give credibility to the teaching process. In addition, any resources that may be produced would have been created and tested in a live environment, and in the environment for which they were created, the local church. Placing conference departmental operators in the field also allows their administrative

secretaries to be placed in a local church as well, creating a win-win for the local church staff. If, as in the case of some conferences, a secretary is only assigned half time to a departmental director, the other half of that secretary's time could be assigned to the pastoral team that already exists at that local church.

De-departmentalisation also has benefits for the departmental directors themselves. By locating their ministry predominately in one local setting, they will be able to see a tangible and real difference that their ministry is making, week in and week out. Often, because departmental directors are constantly travelling and are in a different church each Sabbath, they themselves don't get the opportunity to be regularly a part of a local church family. This also means that they often miss out on being with their families on Sabbath. De-departmentalisation can reverse this trend. Although, under this arrangement they could be released from the local church for say six weekends a year in order to teach in other areas of the conference, departmental directors would themselves get to be in a local church family and not travelling all the time.

Again it was Kylie Ward who commenting about the current system said "It's so easy to do things at the administrative level, but is it relevant and meeting the needs of people in churches? If we spend time with them and work out what will help people the most, it's beneficial for both us and them." (Nash, 2009, p. 3).

De-departmentalisation would ensure that departmental directors would spend time with a local church because that is where they will be based. It will also reduce or eliminate the "us and them" syndrome.

Of course de-departmentalisation would raise many issues, perhaps the largest of which would be which local church gets to have which departmental director working

in its congregation. This will be an issue and one that needs to be solved. However, perhaps it is not that difficult in that it would make sense to put a Children's Ministries Director in a church with a lot of children, a Youth Director in a church with a lot of youth, a Family Ministries Director in a church with a lot of families and so on. It would also need to be recognised that only a small proportion of the churches in a conference would have a departmental director placed in their congregations. Yet perhaps the churches that miss out on having a departmental director in their congregations could still find extra benefits to the current system in that they have the opportunity to see the ministry in action in a local setting.

The other question that is raised by this de-departmentalisation process is, are all departments to be based in the local church? Will some by their very nature be more effective at the conference level? Or can we take de-departmentalisation a step further and question the need for departments at all? One of the recommendations that came from the North American Division's *Commission on mission and organization* that had been working for one and a half years was the "dissolving (of) all conference departments except youth and education, and further "eliminating duplication of departments at conference, union, (and) division level"(Dittes, 1995). This commission reported its findings back in 1995, and yet we are still dealing with these issues today.

The suggestion of removing these departments all together (except the ones mentioned above) has been rarely followed, perhaps because of the "turkeys not voting for Christmas" issue. That is "it requires some church leaders to vote themselves out of a job and that is not likely to happen anytime soon" (Herdman,

2008). As Beach & Beach (1985, p.70) so vigorously defend, “The departments have historically been a vital and integral part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church has advanced on with and through her departments. The department directors are verily facilitators to carry out the planned mission of the church; this needs to be clearly understood and affirmed.” Needless to say that when their book was written both men were serving in a church department!

That aside, Cress (2005, p. 123) adds his warnings about the functionality of the church with no departments. He correctly points out,

As for how a church without departments and services would appear, it would look just like the emphasis of the administrator in charge at that moment. Every individual, including every church administrator, has special areas of interest and expertise. The temptation is always to emphasize our strong suits and neglect other areas.

Because of this the administrators that need to be appointed are people whose special area of interest is in creating healthy churches, and people who have the special gifts of training, teaching and mentoring others in this area. In other words de-departmentalisation could extend to having only one main department at the conference level based in a conference office, that of “local church health.” The newly created department could also incorporate the existing ministerial department as you need healthy pastors to run healthy churches. This department, indeed the whole focus of the conference should exist to ensure that healthy congregations are being created and encouraged in their jurisdiction.

Having progressed this far down the track, the final process of de-departmentalisation could turn its attention back to the conference appointed departmental directors who are now located in the local church, and ask if we need these positions as conference positions or simply local church (full-time paid) positions with the training element

still attached. As staffing-for-growth continues, local churches themselves will come up with a really good children's ministries program for example, of which they could share with other children's ministries staff from other churches in their vicinity. The same could be said of other ministries that the leaders are running in the local church. If de-departmentalisation were to finally reach this stage, a position for a conference coordinator would open up to coordinate all these get togethers and /or a resource person who promotes the initiatives of the local church to the global church, and visa versa. In streamlining the departmental areas of the church, this will ensure that strong contact and communication is still maintained with the wider and global church.

De-Institutionalisation Thinking.

George Knight (1995, p.15) in his book *The fat lady and the kingdom* tells what he calls a modern parable of a "fat lady" returning home from a shopping spree. Her hands are filled with precious packages as she approached the door to her house. It is at this stage that she faces a crisis. "She is unable to open the door to enter her house to put her bundles down. If she reaches for the door handle, she will drop and ruin some of her packages, but if she continues to cling to her packages she will never pass through the doorway." There she finds herself in a predicament, "torn between the two alternating desires: (1) to enter her rest (2) to keep hold of all her packages" (Knight, 1995, p.16). Because of these two conflicting motivations she is unable to act on either and "the result is more sweat and indecision as she waits within an arm's reach of her goal."

In giving the interpretation to his own parable Knight (1995, p.16) says, "The many packages may be likened unto the church's structures and institutions, of which Adventists have a superabundant supply." Knight (1995, p.16) goes on to say,

through scrimping, saving, and sacrificing she has accumulated a large number of institutions and structures. In fact she has so many that her chief administrators spend a large and crucial bulk of their time attending board meetings and trying to solve the increasingly insurmountable problem of such institutions in a rapidly shifting complex social system. These problems, however, do not tempt the woman to lay down the packages, because as time has passed she has increasingly gained her identity through the size, number, variety, and quality of her packages. She has become addicted to packages and package-holding.

As well as a process of de-departmentalisation, a process of de-institutionalisation should also be taking place. But as the parable so accurately describes, Adventists have become so attached to her institutional “packages” that she doesn’t want to let them go. In fact for many, Adventism is the packages!

However, if we define these institutional packages as our media, medical, educational, publishing work and the like and not the organisational structure, the central argument of this paper is that this “fat lady” may not have to put those bags down. Well, not for long anyway. Sure she may have to put one or two down temporarily, as she opens the door, and lets the fresh air of increasing resources and finances flow back to the local church. But once the local church, this “goose,” is sufficiently revived, has a larger constant and secure source of food and nourishment, and begins to feel healthy again her eggs will be all the more golden. Because of the larger eggs healthier churches can produce, this in turn results in a decreased percentage taken from the local church that is needed for these institutions to operate, allowing the “goose” to retain her nourishment and health, and the lady to continue on with her packages. However, for this to happen key leaders in administration will need to spend a lot less time on institutional “packaging” and a lot more time and energy and effort on the main thing.

The *Church manual* (2000, p. 83-84) declares that the first four major items of a board meeting conducted by the local church should be about mission and outreach and increasing the kingdom of God in the community in which God has placed the

local church. Unfortunately, reality often shows that focusing on mission is not always the first priority of the local church board. Perhaps local churches have simply learned their ways from the conference and unions and division executives. How much time and how big a priority do the officers and members of the executive committees spend focusing on their core business, strategising and planning on how to increase the effectiveness on their primary units of mission, the local church? How does this compare to the time energy and effort exerted on other non-core issues? The Sydney Conference recently “passed a resolution to dedicate the first 45 minutes of each (of their) board meeting(s) to strategic planning for the purpose of being more effective and focused on the role of the local church and the spreading of the gospel and the three angels’ messages with the people of Sydney” (Worker, 2008, p.3). This should happen naturally.

It is time to free up and simplify the system, de-institutionalise the thinking minds and hearts of those who are appointed to serve at the conference level and above. Let us never forget that the very name conference and indeed union was chosen because it represented a conference or collection of local churches.

In his letter to the editor, van Rensburg (2008, May 10, p.29) highlighted how much this is forgotten when he said:

Unfortunately there is not a representative who speaks on behalf of all local churches. The church structure has leaders who speak on behalf of departments and institutions. Our schools retirement villages, bookshops, hospitals and other bodies have representation in the church organisation, whereas each local church has to represent itself, overcoming barriers and negotiating with administrators.

The issue is that many of those who work in the conference office levels and above simply have so many other concerns presented to them that they don’t have the time or the energy to focus fully on the churches. A conference president is so involved

with decision making with the schools, retirement villages, ADRA, and the like that he hardly has any time to think about local churches. Yet why is he on the education board if there is an educational director? Why does he sit or chair meetings talking about Adventist aged care or our book centres? Why is he in discussions about our campgrounds and other non-related issues? He has the power and authority to delegate these responsibilities to others; it is time to use it! This not only goes for the President. The ministry and mission of the local church could be greatly enhanced if the conference and its officers clarified its mission and kept the main thing, the main thing. If the hallowed halls of our administrative offices were filled with people thinking day and night of nothing else but how to continue to increase the health, and missional impact of its local churches, we would already be ahead. Borden (2003, p.15) in *Hit the bullseye* states

A judicatory [needs to] intentionally decide to expand the majority of its financial time, and human resources on meeting congregational needs rather than fulfilling institutional and denominational demands. This requires a conscious decision, in most cases, to literally change how the judicatory functions. . . Given the obvious scarcity of resources and competition for dollars, it also may mean that some dollars that have normally come to the denomination may need to stay with the congregation for it to have the resources to grow.

This change in function means that those who are at the conference level become trainers, equippers, mentors and coaches to the pastors and the local congregations. Conference personnel need to be competent enough to help these congregations under their care to grow or to coach them to move from dysfunction to health if growth is not occurring. As has been highlighted above, their primary role is to be a catalyst in creating healthy congregations and seeing them reproduce. “A judicatory is doing its job well when it is seeing both transformation and reproduction happen regularly and consistently in a majority of its congregations.” (Borden, 2003, p.16) Conference personnel should see and hence expend all their energy and effort into local congregations as they understand that they are the primary units of mission. A

paradigm shift can occur where, “pastors become seen as missionaries, regional staff become consultants, and the regional office becomes resource centre.”(Borden, 2003, p.85) These who work in the administration levels of the church should never forget that it is “only transformed congregations, that can transform denominations.” (Borden, 2003, p.9) The conference should simply exist to create healthy and strong local churches. As Spangler (1981, p.20) puts it,

There has been general agreement among all segments of the church that one of the primary reasons for the existence of the church organisation – local conferences, unions, divisions, and the General Conference – is to enhance the ministry of the local congregation. . We must recognize that the local church is basic and foundational in the mission of the church, and that the pastor of the local church thus occupies a crucially important role.

If all levels of organisation could de-institutionalise their thinking and state categorically that they exist to enhance the mission and ministry of the local church, and then back this statement up through their actions and the allocation of resources, the balance between congregationalism and centralisation will have been achieved.

A Suggested Tithe Re-distribution.

Based on the above recommendations, Figure 5 below is a suggested table of how the tithe received by a conference or the “storehouse” could be redistributed.

Suggested Tithe Redistribution.

Field Ministers - locked to churches Staffing-for-Growth	60%
Local Church Evangelism and Initiatives	5%
Departmental - "Church Health" coaches	5%
Departmental Operating	2.5%
Administration	7.5%
Other Conference Responsibilities	4%
Regional and Global Responsibilities	12.5%
Funding for church planting	3.5%
Total Tithe	100%

Figure 5.

The 60% staffing-for-growth has been explained extensively above. However, once the staff is in place they need funds to operate. While some of these funds will come from local church offerings, more is often needed. Currently all departmental directors have a fund in which they can operate their programs and ministries. The same should happen at the local church level. The suggested amount above is given as 5% of tithe.

Through the process of de-departmentalisation, the amount of money needed for conference departmental personnel will decrease to a suggested 5% of tithe. However they will still need finances to operate hence their operating budget of 2.5%.

Administering the functions of the conference costs money, however it should not take up too large a piece of the pie. This paper suggests that that conference administration should be able to run on 7.5% of the total tithe receipts received. If more than it is needed, it should be sourced from other areas. Of course conferences has other responsibilities and initiatives such as running big camp, and indeed many other miscellaneous items that occur that have been allocated 4%

While the church still has regional and global responsibilities one can see that it is suggested above that this be reduced to 12.5% of tithe received. This is still a significant amount of tithe that leaves the local area in support of other global needs, while at the same time not being so excessively high that it hinders the work of the local church.

Finally the author believes that the tithe dollar should be spent in planting and launching new churches. Cox (2001, p.220) states

Our present system of tithing . . . has its roots in a church-planting movement, not the local church maintenance system with which we are now so familiar. We can hardly imagine a modern Adventist church without a paid pastor! Maybe it is time to return at least to some extent to the original plan, and invest a larger portion of our resources in a new, ambitious church-planting initiative. The need for new congregations is at least as great now as it ever was.

In focusing on the most primary and most effective units of mission the local church, one must not forget that the overall task is not only to make these local churches healthy, but also to create and plant more healthy churches.

Looking Ahead.

Will the corporate church take on some of these recommendations? As this paper has shown if she does, it will not be in a hurry. But in a real sense, if the corporate church does not address these issues and clings stubbornly to an overcentralised system, it may by default find itself swinging widely towards congregationalism. As Sickler (1996, p.41) notes;

It is not local churches that are going congregational, but individuals. This is far harder to combat. Individuals are redirecting their tithe funds to local church and school needs. They believe that tithing is a moral issue, but distribution of those tithe dollars is open to prayerful individual interpretation.

Unless the corporate church can be seen as supporting local needs, more and more individuals will redirect their resources to projects that they perceive are important, as the lack of funding returning to the local area indicates to them that the church administration does not believe their local church is important. It is this individualism that is threatening the structure.

History tells us that the way organisations, and the way churches handle their resources is extremely important. So much so that Mead (as found in Zech, 1997, p.124) ponders the following;

For some time I have been trying to get some historians or theologians to explore my hunch that the Reformation may have been just as much about money as it was about theology. The church historians I know focus on the critical theological issues that were fought out – the relationship of grace, faith, and works. That is their territory and they are comfortable with it. But I wonder what the practical impact was when the steady, widespread sale of indulgences was threatened. You can debate theology all you want, but what happens when salaries are at stake?

One wonders what the practical impact of the steady increase of individuals diverting their resources elsewhere other than the corporate church will be. Is it time for another Reformation? Sickler (1996, p.41) says

So is this the end of the church as we know it? I don't think so. The trend towards congregationalism will be tempered. Underneath all [the members] frustrations, they do have a world view. In the years to come, the structure will shrink enormously, and the power of the General Conference will dwindle. There will simply be little money to pass on, so fewer

employees needed to distribute it. Those who think that this will automatically destroy the church may be in for a surprise. Unity is far more a spiritual quality than an administrative policy. The Holy Spirit, surely, has ways of holding us together that are far cheaper and more effective than anything we have discovered so far.

That He does. Yet, regardless of the structural changes that may or may not occur in the many levels above the local setting, *now* more than ever is the time to work with the Holy Spirit in allowing “financial fertility” to empower our congregations and revitalise the local church. In the winter edition of 2009’s *Adventist Today*, Bryan (2009, p.9) makes this same passionate plea. He writes

A proposal: we need 500 new, well-led, well-visioned, well resourced churches in five years. This cannot simply be more of the *same*. We need an undertow, pulling pastors and teachers out of the institutions and back into local church leadership. Imagine *new* local churches birthed and shepherded by . . . a host of . . . brilliant, creative, grace-bathed, and spiritually-gifted leaders [who are currently serving in our institutions]. We need to *decentralize* with our best and brightest. I pray the Holy Spirit would storm the castle of our grandest academies and universities, hospitals and conference offices, plundering the personnel and taking prisoner those who could rock the world of American [and Australian] Babylon.

We also need, in this local church revolution, a major transfer of funds from the many layers of governance back into local settings. We need the kind of money that can help make missional soil rich and ripe. We need *financial fertility*. This is not the place or time to argue for major structural, organizational, and financial renewal. For now, let us simply say that *this is the year 2009* and we need a small, smart, high-tech, and highly efficient support structure to sustain the essential work of *saving* the Adventist Church from North American [and Western world] death, and then set it on a *prevailing* course of saving men and women for the kingdom of heaven. The hospitals and colleges and publishing houses are only important as the churches are important—and alive. The local church *is* the church.

And the church said, Amen.

Conclusion.

This paper has looked at and studied the resources that are generated by, yet then taken away from, local Seventh-day Adventist Churches. While the Adventist church is a global movement, our study has been limited to the structural issues Adventism faces largely in the Western world that can be seen predominately in Australia and New Zealand and also in North America. In looking at the structure of the corporate church, this paper has argued for a balanced approach and a plea has been made to find the middle ground which avoids both the extremes of congregationalism and an over-centralised system. Churches can accomplish more when they unite in world mission together, but this must not be at the expense of the health or the growth of the local church.

This paper has traced the tithe dollar as it leaves the giver's hand and has found that on average 40% is returned to the local congregation in the form of pastoral wages. However, that percentage is much lower for larger, wealthier churches and the system is set up so that the stronger churches support the weaker. The argument has been made that this only contributes in making the stronger churches weaker and the weak churches a little less weak. A brief discussion highlighted the effect that this can have on the local church when its tithe money is used for administrative staff at the conference level and above, yet cannot be utilised at the local church level.

This paper also traced the offerings and noted that for every offering that is collected during the main church service, the local church can only keep the offering for its own purposes 38 % of the time. On top of this Sabbath school offerings go exclusively for world missions and are not retained by the local church at all. Yet despite the amount

that is withdrawn from the local setting, Seventh-day Adventists have been described as hilarious givers. However, because of how these resources are allocated many are not laughing.

The system has been described as one which strangles the local church, taking her resources away to a critical extent, robbing the local congregation of its systemic power and, perhaps more critically, negatively affecting the church's ability to fulfil the great commission in its own neighbourhood. Because the mission of the local church is hindered, congregations can and do leave the sisterhood of churches. This paper briefly looked at the example of *Mission Catalyst* and explained the reasons for its departure.

It has been shown that these issues have existed for a long time. In 1981, twenty-four pastors presented many ideas on how to increase the resources that can be retained in the local environment. Some twenty-nine years later not one of these recommendations has been adopted. This is another example that shows that the local church and its pastors are the most powerless entity in the structure. Another consequence found is that many resources produced by the administrative structure for local church programming may not be particularly helpful for the local church.

Despite all of this it was seen that people want to give locally or to mission endeavours where they have a personal connection or interest. Chris Blake's visit to Springwood Church in the South Queensland Conference caused much excitement and people gave to make a difference in the lives of someone in their community, or someone they knew. This experience shows that giving is increased when it is not

faceless or fathomless. Hence the central argument of the paper, by investing more resources into the local church, churches will become healthy and grow and hence there will be more resources available for the corporate structure.

Encouraging steps in this direction are beginning to be taken. Previous outdated building policies saw the construction of new church facilities grind to a halt. This situation has now been rectified, making it easier for local churches to build or extend their facilities, and increase their ministries. Churches that are building also now qualify for sizeable grants to help them in this process.

Some visionary conferences are also addressing the staffing issue. In some parts, churches can choose to have tithes “locked back” at a certain percentage to their congregation. This money is then purely used for staffing; however it can be administrative staff, or specific ministry staff looking after certain ministries in the church. This is an important innovation that greatly assists the local church in its mission.

The General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has established a *Commission on Ministries, Services and Structures* that has recommended that the church allow for flexibility in its global structures. It has also suggested that existing departments at the various levels of administration could be clustered together. These recommendations will be voted on by the General Conference in Session in 2010.

However, more could still be done. More offerings need to be retained by the local church. A greater portion of the tithe dollar should be retained at the local conference

level and more of it should be available for outreach and ministry programs of the church. A process of de-departmentalisation is recommended in which conference departmental positions and secretaries are initially relocated to the local church and perform their specialist ministry in that setting. This could eventually be integrated fully into the life of the local church leaving only one main departmental office, that of “church health” with the director acting as a coach and mentor to local churches. The whole administrative system could be simplified, and the administration of the church could rediscover why they exist: namely to enhance the primary unit of mission – the local congregation.

As has been shown a real danger exists for the corporate church if it does not take a more balanced approach and redirect significant resources back to the local congregations as individuals within those congregations may go fully congregational with their giving. What all parties should not forget is that the local church *is* the church.

This paper has called for a balanced approach or a middle road to be found between congregationalism and a fully centralised system. Local churches can be stronger and be more effective in fulfilling their mission if they are organised together. Surely the purpose of our organisation is to bring strength to God’s basic and primary unit of mission in the world, the local congregation. For it is “axiomatic that the stronger the local church becomes, the stronger the entire body will be.”

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