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7. An Analysis of the Responses to Open-ended Questions in the Australian Survey

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This chapter reports the qualitative results of two questions from a survey administered to educational workers in Seventh-day Adventist institutions in Australia. The two questions addressed the Australian workers' perception of the mission of the church through their institution and how their educational institution is different from similar educational institutions. Five hundred and nineteen participants took part in the Australian survey, which was implemented across all Seventh-day Adventist Schools in Australia. The survey used is the one described in a previous chapter, and may be found in full in Appendix B.

The two questions to which participants wrote their own answers were open-ended questions. The responses provided qualitative data which could then be analysed using an exploratory orientation (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). This type of analysis is content-driven: the researcher looks for key words by reading and rereading the data. By doing this the participants' words establish the ideas and themes. Each theme identified was allocated a code which was then applied to raw data for further analysis and coding (Guest *et al.*, 2012), a process known as thematic analysis (Creswell, 2014). The data-analysis software used for this project was NVivo. NVivo provides a set of tools to assist the researcher to analyse the qualitative data through data management, recording, matching, linking and sorting as directed by the researcher (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). To ensure the anonymity of participants each survey was allocated a number. These numbers represent geographical areas (e.g. six thousand represents education in a particular state in Australia), enabling the researcher/s

to manage the data and report according to the place of origin and type of institution and not on the participant.

The mission of my organisation should be ... (Qu. A1)

The results presented were gathered from the 519 Australian educational workers who participated in the survey. In this chapter each of the two questions will be presented with the themes that emerged from the data. Throughout this report direct quotes from the data are indicated by italics.

The report begins with the first question:

I work at a Church-connected organization. If I were asked what the mission of my organisation should be, I would say: (A1)

Eight significant themes emerged from the data gathered in response to this question. Some provided extended responses to this question and their comments contributed to more than one theme. It is of interest to note that 94 participants (about 20%) chose not to answer this question but left the answer section of this question blank. This presents a considerable percentage of participants who did not want to answer the question, did not know the answer to the question or had some other reason for not responding to this question. The themes for A1 are presented with the response rate and participant percentage in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: Themes emerging from Australian responses to the question, “What should be the mission of my organisation?”(A1).

Theme	Number of participants	% of participants
Work, e.g. education	135	26%
Share the Good News	118	23%
Leading others to Jesus	115	22%
Christian environment	84	16%
Representing God to others	70	13%
Help in becoming good citizens	52	10%
Preparation for eternal life	34	7%
Service	34	7%
No response	94	18%

The theme given as the mission of their institution by the most participants (135) was their *work* which in these particular institutions

is the education of students. 118 participants stated that the mission of their educational institution is to *share the Good News*¹ followed closely by 115 participants who stated that the mission is to *lead others to Jesus*. The fourth most popular theme to emerge as the mission of their institution (84 participants) is to create a *Christian environment*. Seventy participants stated that *representing God to others* is the mission of their organisation and 52 said that it is to *help students in becoming good citizens*. The two least-popular themes were each represented by 34 participants, namely the mission of *preparation for eternal life* and the mission of *service*. Each of these eight themes will be presented below with evidence from data collected in the surveys.

Work, meaning education

The theme, “work, meaning education,” presents as the most significant theme for these Australian participants. One hundred and thirty-five participants identified that learning was the mission of their organisation. As these workers operate within educational institutions it is not surprising that they identified work as their mission. The most commonly stated phrase (33 participants) was: *to provide the students with an excellent education*.

Thirty-nine participants added the words *quality* and *Christian* as adjectives to their mission of work, thereby enhancing the type and expectation of the delivered product: *to provide quality Christian education*. Some participants used other adjectives to describe their organisational mission of education, for example: *good, excellent, wholistic, Christ-centred, Christ-inspired, rounded, and premiere*. The choice and use of these adjectives shows that these educational workers see their institutional mission in the product provided. It appears that the perceptions of these participants are that the delivery and focus centres on service and providing education as an outcome. This focus was sharpened by some participants who linked the aspect of providing a quality education with the teaching and preparation of students for eternity—*providing quality education with a view to eternity through Jesus Christ and to teach students to be independent thinkers, not “mere reflectors” of other people’s thoughts in order to help prepare them for this earthly life and eternal life*.

Thirteen participants highlighted this outcome-focus as the mission of their educational institution in their work for their students’ future,

1 Note: Italics in the text is used to indicate a verbatim citation from a participant response.

describing it as *educating for eternity while surviving here and now*. In addition to educating their students for *now and eternity*, other participants included words such as *equipping* their students for their communities: *using effective methods of education so that the young people in our care are equipped to function in their world and more importantly to become people showing integrity and love to those around them*. Participants placed emphasis on providing *dynamic learning opportunities where students thrive in their learning and service to others and love others abundantly in Jesus*.

One participant stated that the mission is an *intentional integration of Faith and Learning...[with] comprehensive curriculum pathways to success ... [including] a balanced and rewarding extra-curricular programme*. This intentional integration of faith and learning as part of the educational program is a significant mission aspect of these educational institutions as perceived by the workers. The next most-significant theme attests to this integration of faith and learning as 118 participants stated that the mission of their institution should be to share the Good news.

Share the Good news

Participants highlighted the mission of their institution as *sharing the great news of Christ unreservedly without prejudice*. Sixty-seven participants clearly stated that the mission of their education institution is *to share Jesus with all and spread the gospel*. Some participants stated the manner in which they could share the Good news: *witness to our students on a daily basis in formal and informal ways; demonstrate to, and teach my students about the God of love and His promises for us; share our faith with them; educate children about the world and my Christian belief*.

Other participants shared that the mission is to raise curiosity in their students so that they would want to find out who God is, *to plant seeds of curiosity in the minds of teenagers who don't know God and to encourage others to find out about God*. In addition, the workers perceived the mission of their educational institution as developing and nurturing the students in their care as they are *to foster spiritual growth in young people*.

In addition, one participant stated, *the focused under-girding of spiritual support and the intentional emphasis on spiritual realities forms the framework within which all of our educational activities*

take place. This is an intentional focus on sharing the good news and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to build a relationship with God. One participant stated it succinctly: *to bring children to the knowledge and love of Jesus*. This intentional sharing of the good news is *introducing Jesus to students*, the wording used by nine participants. Introducing students to Jesus links directly with the third significant theme that emerged from the survey data as being the perceived mission of the participant's educational institution.

Leading others to Jesus

One hundred and fifteen participants stated that the mission of their organisation was to *lead their students to Jesus* and *to facilitate those I come into contact with into a meaningful relationship with Christ*. Five other participants stated that the mission is to provide occasions for students to encounter Jesus by *providing opportunities for students to grow a life-long learning and experience Christ*.

It was interesting to note that some participants used the word *help* instead of *lead*, for example, *helping students to find God*. This choice of wording again emphasises a service approach which was identified in the first theme above. The attention of being of assistance is extended beyond the educational context and the immediate student body to that of the family and wider community. This mission, according to nineteen participants, includes *bring[ing] students and their families to a closer relationship with Christ*.

The theme of leading others to Jesus included making decisions and choosing to accept Christ. According to another participant, they *encourage them to choose to follow Him*. Someone else stated that, *At [name of school] our motto is "Nothing Without God"*. *This motto reflects a genuine desire for our students to give God a special place in their lives and develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ*, thus promoting and encouraging a dedicated and personal relationship with God.

Still building on this theme of leading others to Jesus, other participants perceived the mission of their educational institution to be to assist their students in establishing and nurturing a relationship with Jesus. This was reiterated in comments such as, *to introduce children to Jesus as a loving friend and Saviour and to build a relationship with Him as a life-long friend* and *to educate students so that they establish and nurture their personal relationship with Jesus*. These statements

are encouraging because they show that these workers have purpose and direction in their role as spiritual leaders for the students in their educational contexts. One participant articulated this clearly with the statement, *education is a ministry as well as a service to the students in our care*. Discipleship appears firmly established in their perceived mission, role and purpose as a worker in their educational institution. This theme of leading others to Jesus ties in well with the fourth theme emerging from the data, that of providing a Christian environment.

Christian environment

Eighty-four participants stated that the mission of their organisation should be *to provide a nurturing Christian environment where they share Jesus in a nurturing educational environment*. Participants who used the word *nurture* reiterated this theme. Other participants used phrases such as *in a safe, caring and nurturing environment*. One participant linked “safe” with a Christian environment: *Create a safe, caring Christian environment in which children can learn and develop*. Twenty-six other participants indicated this same understanding of a Christian environment that has *connected and dynamic learning opportunities grounded in the Love of Jesus and advocating service to others and individual excellence*.

Participants explained what they perceived as a Christian environment: *Christian values are woven into the curriculum and we encourage a respect for self, others and the environment in our educational approach*. Other participants elaborated by stating that a Christian environment included the aim *to protect and nurture all aspects of students’ wellbeing, physically, academically/intellectually, socially/emotionally and spiritually*. Again it was revealed in the data how participants describe and focus on values that encompass the life of a Christian and how they model and share these in their educational institutions *to create a family like the early church, where they were known for their love and care for each other*.

Four participants stated that love and care provided a Christian environment: *To love and care for all who pass through our doors, sharing the great news of Christ unreservedly without prejudice*. One participant extended this, stating that the mission of their educational institution should be, *to provide an environment where students realise their potential and recognise the love and grace God has and does show them*. Love and care are actions that need to be demonstrated

and modelled for students to experience. Again these institutional workers are stating that these actions should be a part of the mission of their educational institution.

As in the previous two themes, for many participants embracing of the wider community is a distinctive component of the mission of their institution in creating a Christian environment, to *provide a grace filled environment for students and parents*. One participant stated that the Christian environment created the opportunity to show God's love, *to educate students in a Christian nurturing atmosphere in an effort to show God's love in every interaction*. Showing God's love in every interaction is a significant way of representing God to others by being able to show them His love.

Representing God to others

Seventy participants stated that representing God to others should be the mission of their educational institution. The staff were aware that their actions and influence were important and contributed to the mission of their educational institution. This theme was articulated by the participants in various ways through words such as: *show, do, demonstrate, model, reflect, represent* and *be*. The data included statements such as the following: *Model the example of Jesus Christ in all areas; the mission of my organization is to reflect Jesus' character and to prepare my students to have resilience for their future*.

Once again participants linked this theme not only to the students with whom they interacted but also to the wider community, *We do this through teaching our students about Jesus and showing him in our behaviour when we interact with both students, parents and other community members*.

Participants identified the theme of representing God to others through their presence and especially their own actions by responding, for example, *to represent Christ in my classroom; be Jesus' Ambassadors; to be the human face of Christ; to be the heart, hands and feet of Jesus; and, to teach others about the love of Christ through my actions and values*. As in the theme above these workers are aware of the role they contribute to the mission of their educational institution. The theme of representing God to their students and the greater community through action and contribution also links to the next theme to emerge from the data.

Help in becoming good citizens

Fifty-two participants stated that the mission of their institution should be one of helping their students become good citizens. This theme encapsulates all the aspects of equipping students for living within a community and contributing to the community. Participants stated that their mission is to prepare their students with *skills for this life*. For example, *I also need students to gain required skills to participate in life on Earth; to prepare them physically, emotionally and socially to take their place in society; and prepare students to be good and useful citizens in the community.*

Purpose and contribution are important elements that these participants have acknowledged need to be a part of the mission of their institution. Again, Christian values and conduct are presented as the means to achieve the mission *to educate children to understand we are here for a purpose, to have compassion for others and to learn skills that will help them to achieve in their future*. Three participants stated that *I work with children to instil values that help with being responsible citizens.*

Some participants included the importance each individual contributes to and plays within a community, for example, *making them better community members and to feel that they are a worthy contributor to society*. A number of participants elaborated on this point by explaining how students can become good citizens; for example, *to educate students in order to be well integrated into society and have a willingness to seek Christ in all they do; our purpose is, through excellence in education, to develop people of integrity and Christian character*. These perceptions were developed by other participants who specifically added *service* as part of being a good community member, for example, *so that they may lead happy and fulfilling lives, serving others.*

This theme related well to participation in the wider community but more in the sense of the students' learning to take an active and responsible role in their community. One participant stated the mission as *educating for eternity while surviving here and now*. Participants felt the mission of their organisation is to prepare students to become good citizens in their communities but also to prepare for eternal life, the next identified theme identified.

Preparation for eternal life

Thirty-four participants suggested in their responses that preparation for eternal life is definitely part of the mission of their institution. Their statements included: *To teach students to be independent thinkers, not “mere reflectors” of other people’s thoughts in order to help prepare them for this earthly life and eternal life.* Other participants used the phrases, *for this world and the next to come* and *fit them for this world and the next.* The fact that this theme is identified demonstrates that the perceptions of these institutional workers are purpose-driven and focused on the future. Hope is evident and communicated across the themes.

Participants believed that in their mission of preparation for eternity the student’s character is important—*character for eternity.* This links to the Adventist biblical understanding and worldview. One participant summed up this theme well by stating that the mission is to *provid(e) quality education with a view to eternity through Jesus Christ.*

Service

The example of Christ is one of service. This is the last significant theme to emerge, identified by thirty-four participants. These participants stated that the mission of their organisation is to advocate service and to teach students how to serve. Most participants who identified this theme used the word *service* and stated that by this is implied *service to God.* The participants also stated that the mission is their service to their students: *education is a ministry as well as a service to the students in our care.* The participants identified their role as an active one of service to God, the institution, students, parents and community—*we are saved to serve.*

In addition, participants included teaching students how to serve others as part of their institutional mission: for example, *service to others* and *advocating service to others.* One participant linked the theme of service with being content, stating, *so that they may lead happy and fulfilling lives, serving others.*

Summary

Across the Australian responses to survey question A1, seven of the eight themes identified from the data highlight Christianity and the importance of discipleship in sharing the good

news, leading others to Jesus, representing God to others, preparation for eternal life, service and having a Christian environment. The mission of the educational institutions represented is clearly one that should promote Jesus in all aspects and prepare students for His second coming. The participants highlighted what their contribution, purpose and role in the mission of their institution should be. The points identified need to be carefully considered carefully and developed within each educational institution.

What makes it different from similar but non-SDA organizations? (A3)

In question three, participants in the survey conducted in Australian educational institutes were asked to respond to the following:

My organization is owned by or connected to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. If I were asked what makes it different from similar organizations that are NOT part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I would say (A3)...

Participants had the opportunity to write their own worded response to the question above. This question asks participants to identify what they believe makes their educational institution different from a similar educational institution. This report presents the responses from the 519 participants who took part in the survey. The table below summarises the significant themes that emerged from the data regarding question A3.

Table 6.2: Themes emerging from Australian responses to the question, “... what makes [my orginazation] different from similar organizations that are NOT part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (A3).

Theme	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Christ-centred	79	15%
Special character	74	14%
Seventh-day Adventist focus	58	11%
Nurturing environment	49	9%
Staff commitment to the organisation and mission	43	8%

Theme	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Biblically based organisation	28	5%
No difference	13	3%
No response	186	36%

As for question one, most participants who gave an answer for A3 provided extended responses which have contributed to more than one of the identified themes. The prime feature that stands out in the table above is the very significant number who gave no response to this question—186 participants compared 94 no responses to question one (A1). The difference identified by most participants (79) is that their educational institution is *Christ-centred*. Seventy-four participants stated that the difference is the *special character* of their institution, while fifty-eight said the chief difference is the *Seventh-day Adventist focus*. Forty-nine participants identified a *nurturing environment* as the main difference. Forty-three participants stated that the *staff commitment to the organisation and mission* of their educational institution is the difference and for twenty-eight participants the point of difference is that their *institution is biblically based*.

No response

The fact that such a large number of participants (186) did not answer this question was unexpected and raises questions about whether the participants did not want to answer the question or did not know the answer. Another possibility could be that these participants had another reason for not responding. This is an area of inquiry that needs more investigation.

In addition to the 186 participants in the *no response* category there were thirteen participants who stated that there was *no difference* or they were not aware of a difference between their educational institution and a similar educational institution. Although only thirteen participants made these comments they are still relevant and contribute to the data set for this question. Some of these participants voiced disappointment with their educational institution, expressed in responses such as these: *there is no difference between this school and other Christian schools in regards to educational goals and in fact many other Christian schools do a better job; very little difference to other Christian schools, except a trifle more narrow minded; and,*

I've worked in more spiritual environments in the wider Christian community. These statements are interesting and show that this is an area that would need more investigation. One of these participants felt that *it should have a point of difference.*

Six themes regarding difference emerged from the data provided by the 271 participants who responded to this question and all six themes link together around Jesus and discipleship. Each of these themes will be discussed below, together with evidence, beginning with the most-noted difference – that of being Christ-centred.

Christ-centred

The most common difference, identified in the data by seventy-nine participants, is that their educational institution is Christ-centred. Many participants used the phrase *Christ-centred in everything*. In addition, participants highlighted the fact that their educational institution had a motto, *'Everything with God'*, and intentionally integrated faith and learning by *putting Jesus into everything we do*. Some participants declared that *we are intentional about lifting up Jesus, praying and practising our Christian faith. Some organisations are Christian in name only.*

These statements articulate the point of difference between similar institutions as not just saying we are Christ-centred but that we make Christ the centre of everything that happens in the educational institution. One participant stated, *my school sets an expectation to work in a Godly manner*. Another participant said, *Christ is our head and God is our guide*. Statements like these portray a God-directed institution.

Special character

Seventy-four participants believed that the difference between their institution and others was due to their institution's special character. Participants' responses regarding their understanding of special character included all the aspects that made their institution different: because it was special because of higher expectations; the particular nature of Seventh-day Adventists; the world-wide connection and the fact that they intentionally integrate faith and learning. Some participants just used the words *special character*.

One participant stated that special character *influences the kinds of programs we run. It influences some of the subjects we offer. It influences the way we teach our subjects. It influences the way we*

think towards our students. It affects the atmosphere at our school. It makes our school a special, positive place. I feel that way, anyway.

Special character was viewed by some participants as being the Adventist difference. One participant stated, *the special character of Adventist Education means it is Christian but with an Adventist twist - so that everything about each child is important - mental health, emotional intelligence, spiritual growth, physical health and well-being - in addition to academic excellence. Our unique doctrines support this - Sabbath -keeping, the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, etc.* Some participants outlined what they considered to be the special character differences: *caring, service, values and grace.*

The fact that their institution focused on the whole person was a special character difference highlighted by a number of participants. Responses included the following, for example: *It is a Christian school that is not only concerned with the physical, social, mental and emotional well-being of our students, but their spiritual development as well.* Furthermore, participants felt that they had the opportunity to integrate their faith and learning because of the nature of their educational institution. A participant articulated it in this way: *We have the opportunity to share our faith through Hope in Jesus. We have the opportunity to express, share our faith with each other, community and students, based on Hope and the promise of Jesus' return.*

In order to identify and share special character it first needs to be understood what constitutes that special character. Only seventy-four participants appeared to understand how special character contributes to making their educational institution different from a similar institution. The theme of special character links directly with the third theme of having a Seventh-day Adventist focus. Although being Seventh-day Adventist can be argued as special character, these themes were separated as very specific Adventist beliefs and practices were identified by participants and these are addressed in the following.

Seventh-day Adventist focus

Fifty-eight participants specifically highlighted Adventist practices and beliefs as being the significant difference between their educational institution and a similar educational institution. This number is less than the number of participants who identified the theme of special character as being important. The differences identified in relation

to Seventh-day Adventist focus included the fact that they are an Adventist institution promoting *Adventism* and *Adventist Education* with an *Adventist name*.

Some participants gave specific differences such as *keeping the Sabbath, following a particular lifestyle, awaiting Christ's second coming and doctrines*. Two participants thought that the Seventh-day Adventist Church ... *has the unique 3 angels' messages that needs to be shared with the school community*. These participants are aware of the Christian differences that they represent as Adventist workers in the community.

Another perspective of the Seventh-day Adventist focus that was considered by participants to be different is that this focus extended beyond the educational institution into the whole community and ultimately world-wide: *It is very enmeshed in the Adventist community - inside and outside of working hours; both in my professional and personal life; In a secular work environment my personal life would have little to do with my professional but this is not the case in the SDA system; and, It is connected to a worldwide organization that is committed to Jesus and learning*. These statements provide a view that all aspects of the workers' lives are embedded in their school context. The fact of who and what they are is always visible and shows an awareness by these participants that they are who they represent.

Participants are aware that the Seventh-day Adventist focus is a difference and that this impacts on the students, parents and wider community. The participants stated their awareness of the role they play as an Adventist employee inside and outside of the educational institution.

Nurturing environment

Forty-nine participants felt that their educational institution was nurturing and provided a different environment from that of similar educational institutions. This was stated using words like *nurture, care, providing, friendly, treated, family, safe, welcoming, genuine, personal* and *spiritual*. Some participants also included the tone of the school as a factor. Other participants mentioned that this nurturing environment was to *provide a place for all those involved to learn about and become closer to God*.

Participants stated that the nurturing environment was a difference because staff contributed to this through a *positive attitude among*

workers, close collegiate bonds, overall care for the welfare of students and said, we set an example of the Adventist lifestyle and try to build a close-knit community.

Staff commitment to the organisation and mission

Forty-three participants highlighted this theme. The responses from these participants stated their support for the whole organisation and commented on the fact that they could openly *share Jesus with their students*. Participants said that *we tend to trust our leaders to make decisions in line with the Christian mandate we espouse*. Workers perceived that everyone involved was accountable to each other and especially to God.

Some participants stated that the overall care and support of the staff and community made the difference. *The connectedness of the staff and community, feeling like you are part of a wider family/community and that you are doing more than your job, you are connecting and spreading the gospel. You have a larger purpose driving everything you do*. These statements assume a sense of belonging and being a part of the bigger picture. Participants shared their commitment to the educational institution through connective statements such as this: *It's not in the buildings but in the people. We are staff who love God and hopefully demonstrate that on a daily basis and bring that philosophy into our work (as much as we can) every day. As a staff we start each day with worship to set the tone for the day*. Additional statements again show how these workers perceive their role and purpose and contribute to the distinctiveness of their institution: *The teachers are passionate and guided by the teachings of the best teacher (Jesus). They are concerned with the well-being of each family and are connected to a church organisation that aims to support and nourish all families. The teachers uphold the teachings of a Christian lifestyle and help promote this healthy emotional and spiritual life in students. We all serve God and therefore we mostly share the same ideals, beliefs, culture and language. We have a common goal and a knowledge that we belong to something bigger with purpose.*

This connection and commitment to the educational institution seems woven throughout the data. Participants are aware of the Seventh-day Adventist name linked with their educational institution and the commitment they have to the mission of their institution.

Biblically based organisation

Twenty-eight participants raised this theme in their responses. Some participants were direct in their responses clearly stating that *it is Bible believing and 'Christian' in deed as well as in in word, that is, it practises what it preaches*. Other participants mentioned a Christian worldview and perspective inferring this as a base *providing education with a Biblical worldview*. Participants identified that *our Christian faith is based on the faith message of the Bible*.

As identified earlier in the theme of Seventh-day Adventist focus, certain aspects of Adventist faith and practice derived from the Bible were reiterated as the basis of the difference between institutions. For example, *it has the unique 3 angels' message that needs to be shared with the school community* and the fact that *we tith our profits, wages and promote a Christian lifestyle*. The actions of sharing the three angels' message and tithing are derived directly from the Bible, thus indicating the Biblical basis for these actions.

Summary

Although 199 participants did not provide a difference for their educational institution in response to question A3 in the survey, 258 participants did respond. Analysis of the responses of those participants who stated there was a difference between their institution and a similar institution clearly yielded six main themes and indicates that employees believe that a Christ-centred Adventist special-character focus distinguishes their institution. These differences are all inter-linked and can easily be recognised and identified by Seventh-day Adventist Church-members.

In the Australian survey, most participants provided extended answers to both questions A(1) and A(3). The themes that emerged from question A(1)—educating; sharing the Good news; leading others to Jesus; having a Christian environment; representing God to others; helping the students to become good citizens; preparation for eternal life; service— all focus on the Christian life and teachings from the Bible. The themes that emerged from question A(3)— being Christ-centred; having a special character; having a Seventh-day Adventist focus; a nurturing environment; staff who are committed to the organisation and mission; being a biblically based organisation— again focus on the Christian life and the teachings from the Bible. A comparison of the eight themes from A(1) about what the mission

of their institution should be to the six themes from A(3) regarding the difference between their institution and others clearly reflects the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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