Finding Our Stride

The foundations of Seventh-day Adventist higher education in North America are essentially sound. We do have problems, of course. We may have too many campuses; we certainly have too few resources. At times we may have too much uncertainty and introspection. Our strength? Adventist colleges and universities serve a church with a fundamental commitment to education.

As a denomination this has always been true. Our founding fathers and mothers gave us Bible lessons and Sabbath school. These pioneers built clinics and schools wherever they went—making Adventism and education almost synonymous. Even today, we call our evangelistic work “study groups,” “Bible lectures,” “Bible studies,” and “seminars.” This obviously implies that becoming a Seventh-day Adventist requires education.

However, this raises some important questions: Do established, third- and fourth-generation members continue to need Seventh-day Adventist education? Will our colleges and universities keep on serving their constituents? Will these schools survive?

Conventional wisdom holds that small, private, church-owned, rural colleges and universities will face extraordinary difficulties in the future as they compete with large, well-funded, public, centrally located urban institutions. Adventist colleges could be vulnerable to this trend, except for one factor—their uniqueness. What unique features will ensure the future of these schools?

Recent findings of the Seltzer-Daley report, augmented by intuitive observations, suggest that we need to more sharply define these unique features. Our colleges must continue to strongly support a life-style in harmony with Seventh-day Adventist faith and practice, a Christian social environment, and a home away from home for our students.

However, our institutions must also provide educational quality equal to that secured by the mainstream of America’s college and university graduates, in terms of professional and academic competency.

These two expectations, shared by parents and students alike, show that church members continue to regard education as a central feature of Adventism. They see its value not only at the mission frontier of the church, but also in our third- and fourth-generation churches. Adventists believe that education is as important to retention as to evangelization. That view underlies my belief about the soundness of the foundations of Adventist higher education.

Will this commitment continue? Only if our colleges meet constitu-
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ent expectations. Doing so does not become easier with time. We now deal with students whose values and life-styles have brought some of them in conflict with their parents, and many more in conflict with their church. I have great respect for our deans and their staff who guide the campus life of our students. In the face of immense pressures from contemporary culture they nurture students toward a mature Christian life-style. They deserve our support and encouragement.

In the second arena—maintaining high academic standards—we face an equally daunting task. This responsibility falls largely upon our faculty and academic deans. They are constantly asked to miraculously prepare large academic meals with small loaves and few fishes. They really have done remarkably well. However, the push for quality must continue relentlessly. This commitment begins with a well-qualified faculty, continues with opportunities and support for faculty development, and ends with a high level of teaching competence, academic maturity, and professional confidence. In addition, the high-powered academic life described above must harmonize with Adventist life and faith, or the whole mission of our institutions will falter.

In my new position as a college president, people frequently ask what I think about my job. Already I am greatly impressed with the remarkable talent and commitment of the human resources in our educational institutions. As educational leaders we must find ways to release this talent and commitment. To the extent that we make existing and pent-up resources available to young people, we will have achieved our goal of improving Adventist education.

—Niels-Erik Andreasen.

Dr. Niels-Erik Andreasen recently became President of Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


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as well as studying the craft of boardsmanship; (2) participation—sharing wealth, wisdom, and working to the level of their capacity, with special emphasis on regular attendance at board meetings; and (3) evaluation—periodically requesting the chair to lead them in a self-study to assess their own performance.

Certainly, the challenges of tomorrow will require greater skill, devotion, and disinterested commitment on the part of board members in order to increase the quality, cost-effectiveness, and spiritual contribution of Adventist colleges and universities. Even more importantly, the Adventist Church must seek greater openness combined with deeper trust by everyone who has the challenge of operating these institutions in the 1990s.

Elder Philip Follett is President of the Atlantic Union College Board.

REFERENCES

2 Ibid., p. 22.
4 Ibid., p. 9.
6 Kerr and Gage, p. 29.
7 Kerr and Gage, pp. 5-12.
8 Kerr and Gage, pp. 47-48.
10 Wood, pp. 115-123.

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bus plunged over an embankment into a water-filled excavation pit after colliding with a delivery truck at an Alton intersection.

Based on the investigation, the NTSB held that the truck driver was responsible for the collision itself, but said that the students died because there were too few emergency exits on the bus, which filled with water within 30 to 60 seconds and came to rest on its side in 10 feet of water.

The bus's front door jammed shut, and only three to five students were able to escape through the rear emergency door, which was repeatedly forced closed by the water pressure. Most of the students who escaped the bus crawled out through 9-inch by 24-inch windows, but many students became stuck or too many students tried to escape at the same time.

The board asked the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to develop a guide for training transportation and emergency-service personnel in school-bus rescue methods and drills on the use of bus exits.

The board also asked the NHTSA to study whether larger windows would aid escape from school buses. which had made at the time.

The board reiterated a call for improved passenger exits in school buses which it had made after 27 Kentucky children died after being trapped in a school bus fire.—Reported by Education Week, vol. ix, no. 40, August 1, 1990.