North American Adventist publishing house boards asked to consider merger

Review & Herald, Pacific Press to consider proposals

On Wednesday, June 19, 2013, the General Conference and North American Division administrations forwarded to the boards of Pacific Press Publishing Association and Review and Herald Publishing Association a request for the two organizations to consider a merger in the near future.

The proposal comes in response to church administrators’ analysis of the current publishing mission setting along with related distribution systems. It builds upon the work of several commissions and groups that over the past several years have studied the challenges and opportunities arising from rapid technology changes in publishing as well as changes in how society accesses information.

The boards of both institutions met separately Wednesday evening, and each, by overwhelming majority votes, expressed agreement to consider a yet-to-be-developed merger proposal. In addition, each board authorized its chair and president to represent the institution on a taskforce whose assignment will be to develop a detailed merger proposal for future consideration by the boards and constituents.

Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, affirmed that “publishing and distributing materials to advance the proclamation of the gospel remains a vital and integral part of the church’s worldwide evangelistic and witnessing program. We believe that restructuring the two General Conference institutions could serve even more effectively the future needs of the church especially, in North America as well as for more general assistance to the world for print and digital content that correlates with information in other media platforms.”

Review and Herald Publishing Association, located in Hagerstown, Maryland, and the Pacific Press Publishing Association, located in Nampa, Idaho, have been operating as General Conference institutions. The two publishing houses serve the General Conference, the global Seventh-day Adventist Church, and, more specifically the North American Division, as they derive the large majority of their operating resources from services to church members and denominational organizations in North America.

The proposal forwarded to the respective boards, through the board chairs, requests not only consideration of a merger of the two institutions but also a transfer of identity for these entities from being General Conference-sponsored institutions to that of being North American Division-sponsored.

The combination of restructuring envisaged in the request placed before the boards therefore involve two
principal concepts with the expectation that both would be considered as a package and implemented together. The proposal envisions:

- Placing both Pacific Press Publishing Association and Review and Herald Publishing Association on the pathway to merger as one publishing house to serve the North American Division territory as well as the needs of the General Conference office.

- Restructuring the publishing house governance model from a General Conference-based constituency and board of directors to a North American Division-based constituency and board of directors.

Over the past two years, the North American Division has been developing a comprehensive approach to all forms of media ministry. “The use of literature by church members, by sponsored witnessing initiatives, and as programs in other media platforms is a component of this strategy,” said Dan of the North American Division. “A closely linked to church infrastructure involved with planning, implementation witnessing and nurture programs is a accomplishing our mission objectives.”

Neither publishing house receives appropriations from the General Conference or from the North American Division. Both publishing houses currently enjoy operating gains. Historically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has operated several publishing houses in North America. Each must make important decisions regarding its vision for the future and the investment of capital to maintain efficiencies in publishing and printing processes. Such decisions will have far-reaching impact. In light of present surplus manufacturing capacity it is believed advantageous for the two organizations to plan for the future as one unit rather than separately and to be directly connected to a North American Division mission-driven distribution system.

A case statement presented to the two boards outlines a design for a positive, mission-oriented future for the church’s publishing ministry in North America. “It is a strategy in response to 21st century realities,” said Dale Galusha, president of Pacific Press Publishing Association. Mark Thomas, president of the Review and Herald Publishing Association, added, “Commercial and private publishing houses today are finding it necessary to redesign their business plans. We need to be proactive in addressing a rapidly changing publishing environment.”

The next step will be for a taskforce with representation from the General Conference, the North American Division and each publishing house to prepare a blueprint for merger. It is expected that a report from the taskforce would be presented to the boards by late September of this year. Each board will then have the opportunity to determine its response to the merger proposal.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates 63 publishing houses worldwide, each operating under its own board of governance. Review and Herald Publishing Association is the successor to the first publishing house, The Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, incorporated in 1881. The Pacific Adventist Publishing Association, established in California, was organized in 1875. It was renamed as the Pacific Press Publishing Association in 1904. A third General Conference-sponsored publishing house, Southern Publishing Association, merged with the Review and Herald Publishing Association in 1980.

General Conference administration asks that church members pray for God’s guidance upon church leaders and publishing house boards so that what is done in this matter will result in the most effective evangelistic print and digital publishing program to proclaim the three angels’ messages, advance God’s work through His power and hasten the second coming of Jesus Christ.
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