

President's Commission Reviews Structural Change

by Bonnie Dwyer

Regular discussions at the General Conference about structural change in the church have taken place during 1984, because of the President's Review Commission and the Commission on the Role and Function of Denominational Organizations.

Calling for major changes in the auditing, communication, and trust functions within the denomination, the President's Review Commission presented its final report in February, 18 months after being called into existence by General Conference President Neal C. Wilson.

In Phase II of the commission's work, it examined ways of preventing the kinds of problems uncovered by the Davenport bankruptcy. To strengthen the church's auditing system, the commission recommended using peer review for General Conference auditors, and hiring outside auditors if internal problems develop.

To improve communication it suggested:

*Sending the *Adventist Review* to every church member's home,

*Creating an independent board with a majority of laypeople which would publish a quarterly opinion journal representing a wide variety of views on topics being discussed in the church,

*Hiring an ombudsman in every conference and union to be a resource person for the laity and church workers to contact in controversial situations without fear of reprisal.

The commission's most extensive recommendations were given for trust services and included:

- Immediately auditing (by an outside firm) the church's trust services,
- Totally eliminating the revocable trust programs,
- Centralizing all trust fund accounting and investments in one location where they can be professionally managed,
- Instituting a training program for trust officers,
- Encouraging church members to prepare their wills with independent attorneys.

The commission left other issues concerning church structure for the Commission on the Role and Function of Denominational Organizations.

Chaired by F. W. Wernick, a General Conference vice president, the Commission on the Role and Function of Denominational Organizations held its first meeting in January. This commission has approximately six months to prepare a report for the 1984 Annual Council. Much of that time will be spent researching the current organization.

During its first meeting the commission developed a 17-page questionnaire on the current structure, which has been sent to 700 people for completion. The responses from the questionnaire were discussed at the commission's April meeting, at which time the commission also divided into groups and prepared for the interviewing process. During May and June the commission members are interviewing people in 36 different denominational organization units, from local conferences to divisions. With that information the commission will meet in August to prepare its final report.