

5. CONSENSUS AND COMMITMENTS

Given that the NAD Governance Committee is not a decision-making committee, but a study committee—chartered to make recommendations and proposals to the NAD administration, who will decide what to advance—we concluded that we are not empowered to prescribe a specific path for the organization. Rather, from our extensive review of current demographic realities and possible management alternatives, we have identified several perspectives on the journey ahead.

The NAD Governance Committee recommends a series of broadly expressed commitments, to be presented to the division constituents so that they may consider the benefits associated with each. Out of this leadership process will emerge a growing consensus of where the organization should put its emphasis in creating a more contemporary governance structure, better suited to the broad North American setting. We recommend the following commitments:

- 1 **A commitment to the primacy of mission as delivered by the local congregation.** The NAD Governance Committee endorses the general consensus of both the 1995 NAD Commission and the 2007 GC Commission (along with the confirming insights of presentations to the NAD Governance Committee) that the most compelling activity in support of the Adventist mission takes place at the local level, in individual Adventist churches. As a consequence, we support both the pioneering principles of the 2007 General Conference Commission and the broader recommendations of the 1995 NAD Commission to put greater emphasis on strengthening local ministry. While we recognize that the specific call for the reduction of personnel at all levels (division, union, and local conference), along with the creation of smaller units termed “districts,” was never tested or implemented, the general idea is even more clearly to be valued today. While from our very early history Adventists rejected the appeal of congregationalism as a driving model, that doesn’t mean we fail to recognize where ministry actually happens or are unwilling to embrace local witness.
- 2 **A commitment to flexibility in approaches, along with testing plausible alternatives.** It was suggested to the Committee by a number of presenters that some of the better ideas developed over the years regarding how to enhance governance and restrain inappropriate centralization have never been significantly tested in promising local situations. That suggestion basically laid out a clear call for a realization that a “one-size-fits-all” mentality isn’t appropriate for an organization with the diversity and complexity of the North American Division. This doesn’t mean there shouldn’t be anything resembling the structure we have now, with conferences, unions, and the Division, but it does mean the organization should explore new approaches for clustering congregations according to local and regional realities. Moreover, it means alternatives for slowing centralization should be tried out, even if only in a few places. The Committee was urged to test significant possibilities, and stay with the process long enough to assess, professionally, whether or not the innovations bring wider benefits.
- 3 **A commitment to the value of streamlining.** The NAD Governance Committee, after extensive presentations and discussion, endorses the general idea that efforts to eliminate duplication and waste at all levels in the organization should be supported. The Committee sees that what is waste to one person is essential to another and that what appears to be duplication

is absolutely required in some places for mission to be advanced. Still, the gradual expansion of organizations is a natural pressure, and resisting it requires intentional efforts. To an increasing number of our members, the various layers of the organization—including conferences, unions, and the Division—seem duplicative, and it is the responsibility of the organization to be sure the emphasis is on keeping such possibilities at a minimum, and that the story about why we are organized as we are is better told. Yet, the mission of the Church should not be hindered by too much or too little support structure. The Committee was continually mindful of making sure any proposed action wouldn't produce more harm than good, reducing critical functions below optimal levels or producing unexpected challenges to the services needed.

- 4 **A commitment to “rightsizing” the governance structure.** The union-of-churches model, proposed to the NAD Governance Committee by several presenters, puts more of the focus on clusters of churches with similar geographic and demographic profiles while reducing redundancy in the structure itself. While it is true that in its extreme forms, some versions of the union of churches would eliminate some of the administrative levels currently in existence, for the purposes of the Committee, we need only identify a few places in the Division where elements of the model could be tested. While some in the discussion argued that the union of churches is simply another name for the districts that the 1995 NAD Commission recommended, we now have several places in the world field where the approach is being tested, so that we can better assess its effectiveness. The NAD Governance Committee has commissioned a more detailed assessment of that model, including a careful analysis of both missional and financial impact. The results of that study will become part of the Committee's work product. Specifically, the Committee endorses a commitment to finding an adjusting balance between efforts to restrain “organizational creep” and support mission. The educational system of the organization is a key example of this. Finding ways to assure the fiscal health of these institutions at all levels must be considered in context of the missional impact they have. No other force for evangelism equals what our schools provide. Some consolidation and introduction of tighter standards of operation may be required, but the effort to do this can't be allowed to undermine mission.
- 5 **A commitment to a small redistribution of tithe and other funds.** As several presenters argued to the NAD Governance Committee, the current governance structure of the church was developed in order to support a worldwide mission, where the thrust of local congregations was to enable the structure to empower a thrust toward ministry outside North America. This focus is changing, regardless of whether we constructively address it. While a worldwide mission continues to drive the Church, current realities—where there are almost 20 Adventists outside North America to every one inside, and the financial capabilities of those groups in some ways outstretches the capabilities of North America—suggest that the NAD must find ways to keep more of the funding local. A small redistribution of tithe and other funding, with as little as 10 percent kept at the local church, would go a long way in encouraging our members in more aggressive ministry to their local communities.
- 6 **A commitment to consolidating the recommendations from all the committees emerging from the Dulles Administrators Conference.** This includes the NAD Education Committee, the NAD Mission Committee, and the NAD Governance Committee. While it is beyond the charter of the NAD Governance Committee to overstep these other committees by offering recommendations in conflict with or ignorance of theirs, we must accept that both mission and education are part of our charter, too. All three committees are wrestling with the organizational-structure issues, and we have to coordinate our efforts if the outcome is to be effective. If an aggressive approach to any one of these sides to the challenge is ignored—or put

off for later—it will compromise the potential success of all. The NAD Governance Committee believes the “commitments” listed in this summary have implications for the work of each committee, as well, and need to be restated in their explicit areas of consideration.

While the listed commitments above do not go deeply into the details, they are supported by a number of exhibits that follow the report, where more details may be obtained and more rationales may be reviewed. It is the belief of the Committee that the listed commitments do provide a substantial next step for NAD administration, especially in light of today's contentious environment. With this report, the Committee is endorsing a pathway into the future that supports more than incremental change. Rather, it is proposing a seed change in how the Adventist Church, in North America, looks at itself, organizationally, along with expanded openness to change.

To the degree that the many papers the Committee reviewed and the presenters it heard were accurate, they were identifying a more transitional landscape for the Church than some of us in leadership might instinctively imagine. Moreover, they were describing a larger organizational crisis that some of us might anticipate, where whether or not we choose to act decisively, change is coming. Our members are increasingly demanding greater transparency from the organization, along with more explicit accountability—and they believe that this process, if approached fairly, will demand structural innovation.

In light of all this, the NAD Governance Committee recommends that the Division take the lead in shaping this change, rather than merely allowing it to sweep over us, requiring us to react in less-than-managed ways. Further, the Committee recommends that the administration act in a deliberate manner to effect greater general collaboration between administrators, pastors, and lay members in a broad pathway for advancing the Adventist mission in North America.

Now is the time for the organization to take the reigns of the matter of church structure and governance.