

# ADVENTIST EDUCATION



## SCHOOL BOARDS

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Bordes Henry Saturné

## Called to Lead in Tumultuous Times

The past decades have seen a substantial amount of tumult in the world of education: admissions scandals, decreased enrollment, deferred maintenance on aging facilities, excessive student indebtedness, faculty and staff layoffs, institutional closures or mergers, mass shootings, rapid tuition rate increases, sexual misconduct, and so much more. Observing the rapidly shifting educational landscape and unsustainable models of funding, Armand Alacbay notes that “the need for engaged trusteeship is at an all-time high. Boards can play a significant role in improving institutional strategy and efficiency without compromising academic quality or raising tuition.”<sup>1</sup>

Worldwide, the Adventist education system is growing. New programs and schools are being added at a steady rate.<sup>2</sup> Boards of institutions that are doing well financially and growing have a responsibility to ensure that growth is managed and sustainable. Yet, while demands for access to education continue to grow, increasing rates of poverty continue to limit this access for the world’s poor.<sup>3</sup>

In most parts of the world, education is the solution to growing economies and eradicating poverty. In the United States, a different challenge is emerging. Growing in number are the chorus of voices contesting the value of education. Last year, Bryan Caplan, economics professor at George Mason University, published *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*.<sup>4</sup> In 2016, Tamara Hiler and colleagues asked the pointed question, “Is college

good enough?” commenting on the striking trend in higher education where “nearly half of the students aren’t graduating, many students aren’t earning sufficient incomes even years after enrollment, and far too many are unable to repay their loans.”<sup>5</sup>

Also of great concern is the increasing financial instability of educational institutions. A few months ago, Michael Horn, in a troubling article titled, “Will Half of All Colleges Really Close in the Next Decade?” made the observation that U.S. colleges and universities are finding it increasingly difficult to bring in enough money to cover expenses, primarily due to shifting demographics and changing enrollment trends. Horn predicts that “25% of existing [U.S.] institutions—be it 550 nonprofit and public four-year institutions or 1,100 degree-granting institutions” will “close, merge or declare bankruptcy in the years ahead.”<sup>6</sup>

Richard Hart, president of Loma Linda University (Loma Linda, California, U.S.A.), referring to a “sobering meeting” he attended with the officers of several other Adventist colleges and universities, states that for various reasons, in “the past five years, our collective enrollment in the U.S. Adventist higher education system has dropped about 2 percent a year, from nearly 29,000 in 2012 to 24,369 this year, a loss of over 9 percent . . . It is not panic time, but it does require some rethinking of our priorities and strategies.”<sup>7</sup>

About Adventist elementary and secondary schools, Larry Blackmer, then vice president for education for



*Continued on page 51*



## Ten Mandates for Today's

# Education Board Chair

**T**oday's board chairs are tested more than ever. The realities impacting educational institutions and challenging their boards are different from those of the past several decades and continue to change, sometimes at rapid rates. Today's boards must grapple with an illusive fiscal stability challenged by ever-growing costs of education at all levels; mounting and/or shifting government regulations related to, for example, social challenges; building- and campus-safety issues that were not apparent in past decades; society's changing values, even within the church; invasive demands of, for, and through technology and social

media; and globalization of academic and professional pursuits.

In general, board members and their chairs face greater stress today because of mounting expectations. Education boards, both public and private, undergo greater scrutiny since constituents are often more informed, less trusting, and more demanding than in the past.<sup>1</sup> They expect board members to be active, dynamic agents of change who work closely with school leaders and stakeholders to elevate the school's position in its sphere of service.<sup>2</sup> Whether chairing the board of a small local school or the board of a large multi-national university, an informed and effective board chair is crucial to board and institutional success.

Unfortunately, many board chairs

feel unprepared to provide efficient and effective board leadership. Within church-sponsored settings, many hold their positions by virtue of other administrative appointments and are inducted into their role unexpectedly and without adequate preparation. While board chairs often do a remarkably effective job, most have no formal knowledge base and lack the specialized skills required for consistently successful board leadership.

Many potential and current board chairs lack a clear philosophical perspective regarding the purpose and nature of institutional governance and the role of a board chair in an Adventist school. While the general public sector is often unclear about the specific

BY ELLA SMITH SIMMONS

placement of responsibility for educational governance,<sup>3</sup> the Seventh-day Adventist Church states clearly where it places this responsibility. The Working Policy of the General Conference, FE 05 20, Agencies of Education, Section 4. Oversight, states that the church at all levels has oversight responsibility in its respective territories for its educational pursuits.<sup>4</sup> Church policy goes on to identify education boards at each organizational level and to spell out specific roles and functions for the various levels of the boards it establishes.<sup>5</sup>

It is through this system that governance responsibility for schools and higher education institutions is placed upon the shoulders of the board chairs appointed or elected by the church to exercise leadership. Chairs of the church's education boards are called to exercise courageous spiritual leadership in, as well as governance of, functions that ensure faithfulness to the church sponsor of the school, operational accountability, and the academic quality of the institution. They have to know when to draw a line in the sand to protect and maintain institutional mission, values, and standards, and simultaneously when to advance boldly into the unknown to achieve the institution's mission.

Unfortunately, often due to multiple priorities of administrative responsibilities and sometimes because of a failure of nerve, many board chairs never reach their potential and thus fail to ensure that their boards achieve optimal leadership, which will enable their institutions to reach their full potential. Moreover, many lack self-awareness and accurate assessments of their readiness to meet the needs of the board, the institution or school, and the constituencies they serve.<sup>6</sup> Some current chairs describe their experiences in board leadership as building a bridge while walking on it or building an airplane while flying it. There is a need for well-designed, formal training for board chairs within the church setting to prepare them for the challenges of governance in educational institutions at all levels.

### Need for Board Chair Development

In their 2016 study of 635 nonprofit board chairs in the U.S.A., Beck and Associates found “a pretty glaring picture of neglect” of formal and consistent preparation for board leadership. More than half of their respondents had done “nothing special to prepare for their role as chair of a nonprofit's board.”<sup>7</sup> My informal observations in scores of education institutions within the Seventh-day Adventist Church suggest that the proportion of those who have little or no formal preparation for their board chair role in those institutions is greater than 50 percent. My direct observations and evaluations of education board chairs in Adventist schools at all levels over the past 30 years, and particularly the most recent 13 years of international observations, have revealed a need for foundational education and technical training for current and prospective board chairs.

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”<sup>8</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15 advises: “Work hard so God can say to you, ‘Well done.’ Be a good workman, one who does not need to be ashamed when God examines your work” (TLB).<sup>9</sup> While the admonition in this passage pertains to the study of Scripture and the witness it produces, the principle applies to all activities in life. Workers who enter the Lord's work without adequate training, and continue without obtaining such training, cannot expect the highest success. Persons of all vocations and professions must be educated for the occupation they hope to enter. Both before and during their service, they should strive to learn how to make themselves as efficient and effective as possible.<sup>10</sup>

As with any ministry or service, successfully performing the duties of a board chair demands intentional and ongoing education and training. Leaders, including board chairs, even those born with leadership gifts, must commit to developing their skills. Benjamin Franklin is credited with observing that “By failing to prepare, you are

preparing to fail.”<sup>11</sup> Board chairs must approach the appointment as a call to development and actively seek out technical training for their role.

Typical board chair responsibilities that may be new experiences for beginning board leaders, and thus require development, include the following:

- Partnering with educational leaders (conference/union/division/General Conference directors of education; school principals/presidents; a variety of educators—teachers/professors and other educational leaders including academic and financial officers or managers, student-services leaders, and chaplains);
- Serving as a spokesperson for the organization to constituencies and the media;
- Providing both support and constructive feedback to educational administrators;
- Attending community events as an ambassador for the institution or school;
- Joining educational administrators on cultivation visits with major donors;
- Modeling the way in fundraising;
- Making board leadership service a true priority.<sup>12</sup>

### Content for Board Chair Development Programs

When asked about the content of board development programs, chairs expressed a desire to learn more about: (1) how the institutional budget is organized, (2) the board's role in strategic planning and policy formation, (3) understanding the procedural processes of a formal board meeting, and (4) clarification of board members' governance roles and responsibilities. They also called for their own organizations and institutions to offer them more training and preparation for effective service.<sup>13</sup>

Harrison and Murray's study on perceived characteristics of effective versus ineffective chairs identified skills and practices for board chair development that included the following: (1) facilitation skills, (2) team-devel-

opment skills for building board cohesion, (3) collaboration skills, (4) conflict-resolution skills, (5) strategies for inspiring motivation, (6) skills for developing a working partnership with the academic leadership, and (7) skills for creating vision and direction.<sup>14</sup>

Philosophical theories and research findings are consistent regarding the behaviors and characteristics of effective board chairs. Various experts have identified responsibilities and requisite knowledge and skills that are similar.<sup>15</sup> They consistently describe seven to ten operational characteristics of strategically effective governance. This implies certain defined responsibilities and traits for board chairs, who must ensure the proper composition, strategic focus, and internal and external relationships of the board. These requirements thus present imperatives for education and training current and perspective board chairs.

Presented here are 10 fundamental mandates that combine findings from the professional literature with biblical ideals and prophetic insights for successful board leadership. These declarations define behavioral principles required for the board chair's role. They are inspired specifically by the literature on the characteristics and habits of highly effective boards,<sup>16</sup> elements of successful board governance,<sup>17</sup> and effective quality board chair models.<sup>18</sup>

## Ten Characteristics of Effective Board Chairpersons

### 1. The board chair ensures a culture of inclusion on the board.

Effective education boards are diverse in composition and seek to include a variety of personal and professional attributes in their membership. The chair ensures that all members of the board are well informed and actively participate in the board's assigned duties, bringing their various perspectives and expertise to bear on their work. Managing the composition

of some denominational boards can be difficult because the bylaws and charters of many church institutions designate board membership as *ex officio*—that is, based upon administrative position in the sponsoring organization, which leaves little flexibility to exercise creativity in shaping board composition. Under these circumstances, board chairs can request the involvement of persons who are not elected members of the board to periodically serve as consultants and advisors, in order to make the board more diverse and to solicit their expertise on a variety of topics.

### 2. The board chair inspires and leads the board in implementing best practices relating to basic fiduciary principles.

To achieve this goal, along with providing required information, the board chair manages board time to achieve efficiency and maximum productivity in its work of: (1) preserving institutional mission, values, and quality; (2) maintaining the institution's financial health and physical safety; (3) overseeing the institution's accreditation and ensuring its statutory compliances; and (4) constantly clarifying and promoting the institution's unique purpose. It is the responsibility of the board chair to ensure that the board takes a macro-level view of the institution/school and is visionary in its perspective for setting its strategic direction and vision.

### 3. The board chair cultivates a healthy relationship with the president, vice chancellor, or principal of the institution or school.

Under the leadership of its chair, the effective education board partners with the campus or school administration. This relationship "is arguably the most important partnership in higher education [at all levels] because, in tandem, the board chair and the president [or principal] lead the board in defining its responsibilities, in setting the institution's strategic direction, and in ensuring that the board oper-

ates on a policy level."<sup>19</sup> The chair must cultivate the relationship through regular, candid communication and mutually supportive meetings with the president or principal. These interactions provide the board chair with the insights necessary to develop a true sense of the institution/school's culture, direction, and needs beyond the episodic glimpses of institution life afforded by board meeting visits.

### 4. The chair leads the board in selecting and enabling appropriate committees to facilitate its work.

The board chair's responsibility is to ensure a committee system that is well-structured in terms of the number of committees, member composition, and task assignments suitable for addressing the board's responsibilities; such a structure is vital to the board's effectiveness and efficiency. The board's standing committees are typically the initiators of board discussions and activities and are the primary conduits for informed decision-making.

Within this committee system, the board chair ensures the creation and ongoing functionality of a strong governance committee since the work of this committee is integral to all board functions. Its responsibilities include board member appointments; board orientation, education, and development; visioning and strategic planning, board and institutional assessments; and monitoring alignment with bylaws and policies. The governance committee might be the only committee for local school boards with responsibility for these and the other committee functions.

### 5. The board chair consistently maintains an awareness of strategic risk factors.

Education institutions at all levels face numerous risks—social, political, economic, and technical—associated with their work in environments that often threaten their strategic advance. Faith-based institutions face spiri-

tual challenges as well. Within the board's responsibility for strategic planning, the chair, along with the president or principal, engages in constant strategic thinking as an "enduring habit of mind and action."<sup>20</sup> Critical to every institution or school is the board chair's ability to understand its mission, be conscious of its past, envision its future, and anticipate threats that may negatively impact its identity and strategic trajectory. To achieve success in this role, the board chair must draw upon divine discernment and wisdom, as well as appropriate training and consultation with a variety of experts.

**6. The chair leads the board in providing oversight of the institution's pursuit of its mission for academic quality and spiritual faithfulness in its curricula and in teaching and learning activities.**

Central to all board functions is the chair's responsibility to focus the board and education partners (president/principal, faculty and staff, and education leaders of the church) on institution identity and mission-true qualities in teaching and learning, service, and campus life as top priorities. For tertiary institutions, this focus must include scholarship and academic and artistic creativity, as well. Faith-based education institutions pursue academic purpose and spiritual purpose as one integrated mission, and the board chair must lead in ensuring that there is an integrated mission focus. Faithfulness to mission is essential for education institutions. However, at one time or another, all faith-based organizations face mission drift.<sup>21</sup> In fact, 95 percent of hundreds of Christian leaders surveyed at the Q Conference in Los Angeles in 2013 identified "Mission Drift as a challenging issue to faith-based nonprofit organizations."<sup>22</sup> While the group was not surprised at the finding because this problem is broadly acknowledged, they were alarmed that so little is done to protect against it (see Box 1).

**7. The chair must lead the board in providing oversight of the institution's spiritual faithfulness beyond its curricula and teaching and learning activities, in order to protect and enhance the institution's general spiritual ethos.**

Church-sponsored schools and institutions must reflect the beliefs and values of their sponsoring church. The board, under the chair's leadership, must determine, along with the sponsoring organization (for K-12, the local conference or union; for higher education institutions, the union or division and constituency), whether the school/institution will be operated primarily for the membership—who are expected to comprise the great majority of the enrollment—or operated as a mission school/institution that recruits students mainly from the general population as well as those who live in close proximity

to the school. In either case, the chair must lead the board and school/institution administration in its commitment to church beliefs and values in its hiring of faculty and staff. Further, the board, under the chair's leadership, is responsible for ensuring that the school or campus culture, atmosphere, and activities outside the classrooms, both on- and off-campus, are fully representative of the beliefs and values of the sponsoring church.

**8. The board chair has the responsibility to embrace and maintain a commitment to shared governance among board members.**

Effective board chairs recognize that their board colleagues, school administrators, faculty, and staff, are also professionals and must be respected as such.<sup>23</sup> There is no place for a "Lone Ranger" leader in education governance. While the board

**Box 1. Protecting Against Mission Drift.**

While challenges resulting from mission drift are most obvious in higher education, primary and secondary schools face the same difficulties. The chair must be intentional in leading the board to do the following:

- Believe the Gospel is their most precious asset;
- Make hard decisions to protect and promote the school's mission;
- Assume that the institution will face mission drift and build safeguards against it;
- Maintain clarity about institutional mission;
- Understand their top priorities;
- Set the cultural tone for the organization;
- Hire first and foremost for heart and character;
- Partner with donors who support the institution's full mission;
- Track indicators that measure and reflect how well the institution's mission is being fulfilled;
- Understand that the gospel demands excellence in their work;
- Preserve the institution's sustaining rituals and practices;
- Boldly proclaim the mission's core tenets to prevent drift;
- Recognize that local constituent churches (in the case of higher education, the local campus church) are anchors to a thriving mission.\*

\* Taken from Peter Greer et al., *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 2014), 33-177.

chair must be personally decisive and action-oriented, he or she must be ever mindful of the strength in the inclusive, participative team. To that end, chairs must conduct board business in an open and inclusive manner.

The successful board chair will build teamwork and collaboration through (a) ensuring that board committees function smoothly, (b) accessing a wide range of individual expertise in decision-making, (c) considering the school's multiple constituencies, and (d) engaging its various stakeholders in decision processes. Particularly in higher education, shared governance is an absolute requirement. Faculty and support staff, as well as students, must be involved in decisions regarding academic and scholarly pursuits, campus life, and planning. "When the board chair comes from the corporate [or church] world with little engagement in academe . . . it is tempting to be directive."<sup>24</sup> While leadership style can vary in different situations, the chair must guard against the board falling into authoritarian management models.

### 9. The board chair requires and practices principles of accountability and transparency.

Education boards are accountable to their constituencies and their church sponsors. The board chair has a responsibility to protect the trust relationship implied in this accountability. Ethics and integrity must characterize the chair's personal life as well as that of the board and institution or school.

This responsibility includes, for example, reviewing the institution's bylaws at least annually, producing updates when needed; structuring and managing substantive meeting agendas that avoid being overly scripted and allow for open discussions and questions; and fostering clear and frequent two-way communication with all partners and stakeholders. Board chairs must be aware that challenges to the board's effectiveness and accountability such as disengagement, dysfunction, and misconduct are ever-present

threats, with disengagement typically being the primary concern. Board members' focus can easily be drawn from the intermittent board responsibilities because their daily responsibilities demand their time and attention. Even engaged boards are in danger of slipping into dysfunctional modes of engagement (see Box 2). Board member misconduct, including unethical, illegal, or immoral behaviors, is a threat to board effectiveness and credibility and will oblige the board chair to initiate board action for reprimand or removal of the offending member.

### 10. The board chair intentionally cultivates and models best practices and integrity in board leadership.

The basic attributes of strong board chairs include a dedication to mission, the capacity to leverage the right type of influence in an appropriate manner, the right leadership skills, and a forward-looking perspective.<sup>25</sup> Legon's outline of the specific traits of the chair of a highly effective board includes the following:

- A feeling of partnership with the chief executive [president or principal];
- Experience in leading voluntary boards of complex organizations;
- A commitment to focus the board and its members on issues that matter rather than those that are nei-

ther the responsibility of the board nor important to the institution's or school's strategic goals;

- A familiarity with the interests of internal and external stakeholders, and the ability to represent the board to those groups; and
- A readiness to be the voice of the board as both an advocate and a storyteller to key external constituents, in coordination with institution or school leadership.<sup>26</sup>

In a 2015 BoardSource study, "Leading With Intent,"<sup>27</sup> board chairs scored low in frequency of engagement with the community. A very low percentage of them engaged in advocacy, spoke to the media, or met with current and potential donors on a frequent basis. Board chairs would benefit from acquiring critical leadership skills in advocacy, funder and donor cultivation, media relations, and community engagement.

### Summary and Recommendations

From the moment college and university trustees or local school board members assume their seats at the board table, they need to be knowledgeable about their institution or school, understand their role and responsibilities, be aware of the skills required for their roles, and commit to honing these skills and working as

## Box 2. Board Diseases.

Larry Walker describes a variety of board dysfunctions as board or governance diseases, such as the following:

1. *Agendasclerosis*—poorly structured and executed agendas that do not guide meetings in efficient and effective ways;
2. *Dialogue deficit disorder*—a social condition that stifles member input of ideas and questions and dilutes their contributions to governance tasks; and
3. *Knowledge dystrophy*—the malady of making decisions without the necessary data and information, which results in actions that lack strategic direction and fail to meet institutional/school needs.\*\*

\*\* Larry Walker, "Dangerous Board Diseases: Prevent and Cure Common Governance Ailments With These Practical Prescriptions," *Trustee Magazine* (September 2011): [http://htnys.org/governance/docs/2011-11-18\\_dangerous\\_board\\_diseases.pdf](http://htnys.org/governance/docs/2011-11-18_dangerous_board_diseases.pdf).

a team. However, many board chairs (and members) feel they are not prepared adequately for this role.<sup>28</sup>

The institution's constituency and sponsoring organization should take responsibility for identifying, providing, and requiring board chair education and training. As opportunities arise, these same entities should encourage and/or support board chairs in their pursuit of formal education and training from other self-selected sources.

Church organizations should establish systems of formal board chair preparation, and where possible, include broad-based succession planning to develop potential board leaders. Ideally, there should be a pipeline of board chair candidates who are identified and prepared well before their appointment to board leadership. This is difficult in a church system that has structured into its mandates policies for the church's ecclesiastical leaders to chair its education boards. However, constituencies and church leadership can include board chair training in their general leadership-development programs and can provide mentoring relationships and skill-specific training for board chairs that cover necessary topics as they assume the role and continue throughout their tenure. Informal workshops, including Web-based seminars and other Internet resources, and books and articles on relevant topics shared online could be used to a greater degree.

Research and anecdotal data indicate that often, even though these online resources are available, most chairs do not access the Internet, workshops, books, or other resources that could help prepare them for their role (see Box 3). Perhaps this is due to the low priority afforded board work in competition with the many other pressing responsibilities many chairs must carry in their fulltime assignments. We are reminded that "It is the privilege of all who bear responsibilities in the work of the gospel to be apt learners in the school of Christ."<sup>29</sup> For this reason, board chair development must become priority with board chairs themselves,

and their employing church organizations and constituencies must actively seek to provide education and training that will nurture and strengthen those that lead Adventist schools. ✍

*This article has been peer reviewed.*

### Box 3. Resources for Board Chair Development.

#### Job-embedded Training

There are ways of engaging board chairs in education and training that are minimally intrusive to their schedules and that will benefit them in broader ways as leaders. For example, they may take better advantage of online discussions and Web-based seminars as part of their responsibilities if these are built into their job descriptions by their employing church organizations and constituencies.

#### Division-sponsored Leadership Education and Training

<https://www.interamerica.org/event/seld-conference-2018/>

(a) One excellent example of a broad-based mandatory leadership-development model has been developed by the Inter-American Division (IAD), which funds leadership education and training for all of its leaders. The training is organized and run by a high-level administrator who also serves as its leadership-development coordinator and facilitated by an array of administrators and educators who are invited annually to teach specific topic segments. The IAD rotates topics from its structured curriculum each year and awards certificates to those who complete the required sessions. This model could be easily adapted for use at various levels to enhance the preparedness, confidence, and performance of education board chairs worldwide.

(b) Divisions could include their board chairs and perhaps board committee chairs in their quinquennial education conferences, which feature professional-development opportunities. In these settings, the divisions could offer a focused strand of resources specifically for the chairs, while also providing educators, chairs, and church administrators with the opportunity to better understand one another's challenges and responsibilities.

#### Online Resources

Several other online options are available, including the following:

(a) Materials and seminars in the Adventist Learning Community leadership collection: [https://www.adventistlearningcommunity.com/search\\_results/courses](https://www.adventistlearningcommunity.com/search_results/courses).

(b) Online materials at the General Conference Department of Education Website and several division sites (including the South Pacific Division, which services a sizable mailing list with leadership-development materials monthly): <https://education.adventist.org/resources/>.

(c) Free leadership-training options provided by Adventist colleges and universities: Andrews University: [https://www.andrews.edu/sed/leadership\\_dept/educational\\_leadership/webinars/previous-webinars.html](https://www.andrews.edu/sed/leadership_dept/educational_leadership/webinars/previous-webinars.html); Southern Adventist University: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLU\\_Jer\\_P2Nypv-zBS3gleYf-Dir1tWTIH](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLU_Jer_P2Nypv-zBS3gleYf-Dir1tWTIH).



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A College President and Her Board:

# Reflection on the Journey



I was sitting in one of the rooms at a union conference office. I was there because I was the vice president for academic affairs of one of the three colleges operated by that union. As member of the college board, I had been invited to attend a special meeting—the election of the college president and the three vice presidents. I was not alone in the room. Two laypersons who were board members were also there. They asked me about possible candidates—how adequately they were performing their jobs at the college, how well they related to others.

To me, it was not the right time, not the right place, not the right procedure. I tried to respond to their questions as best I could until we were interrupted. “The board chair wants to see you,” I was told. I went to his office. I had scarcely sat down when he said, “We have just voted you president of [another college within the union].” To say that I felt as if I had been hit by a bombshell is an understatement. I did not have the slightest idea that I was being considered for this position. My mind swirled with a mixture of hazy thoughts and emotions. Although I had not yet accepted the position, he told me that the board members of the college where I had just been elected president were waiting and that I needed to join them to assist in the selection of the vice presidents. I walked as if in a trance. I asked if I could be allowed a brief moment to call my husband so that we could discuss and pray about the decision. He said yes, but I should hurry.

When I entered the board room, all the men stood up and congratulated me as if I were a grand-prize winner. I was the only woman there. Their handshakes were firm and warm. “We’re so glad we could put you there.” “You will do well there.” “We trust you can make a difference.” I did not believe

what they were saying; my mind was asking why.

So, we went—my family and I. The lump in my throat was like a rock that would not budge.

## Lessons From the Journey

While my journey with the board started poorly, it did not end that way. My succeeding encounters with the board were cordial and respectful. The board’s support as a body and as individuals was better than what I anticipated. Several lessons from this experience remain with me as an administrator and can serve as best-practice tips for working with college and university boards.

**Planning board meetings.** One of the venues where a college or university president can closely interact with his or her board is the board meeting. These meetings are very crucial as they mark the time when important decisions that impact the institution’s present and future are made.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the president and the board chair (who, in the Adventism system, is generally also the union president), in consultation with the other members of the board and the college administrative committee, must ensure that the agenda,<sup>2</sup> the logistics, and other aspects of each meeting are properly planned.

After my appointment as president, the first thing my administration did was to revisit the school’s mission, vision, and objectives; articulate our agenda for the next five years; formulate an institutional master plan; and review our institutional documents such as the faculty handbook, the student handbook, and other policies. Since the previous college administration did not have a board handbook, in consultation with the board, we created one. Getting these agenda items reviewed

BY ARCELI ROSARIO

and approved was a priority during the first several board meetings, which were held once a month.

Our college board meetings, which were held during the monthly union executive committee session at the union office, were short: at most an hour or, at times, a little more when pressing and difficult matters needed to be addressed. Our college board was only one of the many boards (hospital boards and the boards of the two other colleges) that met in one day, with the union president serving as chair of all the boards and the same mission and union leaders as members. Hence, I ensured that I had discussed critical agenda items with the board chair and with the members and provided them with key points relating to specific issues prior to the meetings.

Although the regular board meetings may be held at a designated place such as the union conference office, at least once or twice a year the board should schedule a meeting on the college/university campus. Such meetings can occur at the end of the year and/or at the middle of the year. Being on the campus will give the board chair and the members the opportunity to meet faculty, staff, and students and get a feel for the institution's climate.

**Seeking the board's counsel.** One of the things that the former college president approved and left to me was the sale of a donated property, a farmland with fruit-bearing coconut and banana trees. "Very soon, the sale will be closed, and the payment will be made," he told me. Indeed, the money came. The next question was what to do with the proceeds of the sale. Upon consultation with the board chair and other members, I felt convinced that we should buy another property in honor of the donor that would generate income for the college. Unfortunately, some members of the college's administrative committee (AdCom), did not agree. A few committee members thought we should use the money for other purposes. I called the board chair and asked if he and the members of the board could come to the campus for a special meeting. Our campus was about nine hours away from the union office. Other members needed to travel about 15 hours. A few days later, the board came. They met the owner; toured the farmland, which was about 15 minutes away from the campus; and sat down with our AdCom. Based on the board's counsel, we voted to buy the property.

**Relating to the local mission conference.** As college president, I was invited to be a member of the executive committee of the mission in which our college was located. My membership on that committee proved highly beneficial. The college's

administration constantly looked for opportunities to interact with our constituency and for ways to have our faculty and students do the same. These initiatives were accomplished through creating an environment that valued collaboration, cooperation, and communication. We collaborated with our local mission in hosting youth camps and other mission-wide meetings. Through the cooperation of our faculty and students, we supported programs organized by the mission. Our district pastors and leaders served as faithful partners, helping us to communicate our mission and vision to our constituents.

One of the highlights in our high school department (also part of the college) was the annual Pathfinder Club inspection. It was a big event attended by parents, alumni, and even the local community. The mission officers and staff also came and served snacks to all 400 Pathfinder Club members. Although the mission office was about two hours away, the leadership continued this tradition year after year.

The mission president, who was a member of our board, and other officers frequently visited our campus. They did not come only for special events. They came on Sabbaths and on ordinary school days. And each time they came, they spent time with me as well as the other college officers and the faculty in informal conversations. Oftentimes they stayed for a meal. These times were always fruitful; we shared our dreams for the college and how to make those dreams come true. As a result, the local mission financed several of our projects.

**Relating to the board chair.** Now that I am teaching educational administration classes, I ask my students: "If you were a college or university president and you sensed that the chairman of the board did not trust you, what would you do?" They give me different answers such as: "I would not be af-

fectured," "I would win his or her trust," "I would avoid him or her as much as possible." My answer to this question is, "I would resign."

In any organization, trust is foundational. Between the president and the board chair, trust is key to a productive relationship. In trust-building, the president and the board chair can move from one level to another, either upward or downward. One phase of trust-building is gaining an understanding of the other person based on his or her character, competence, and communication.<sup>3</sup>

I regarded my relationship with the board chair as very important. I always reminded myself that I should trust him and also strive to make myself trustworthy. I consulted him especially regarding matters relating to governance; gave him regular

**In any organization, trust is foundational. Between the president and the board chair, trust is key to a productive relationship. In trust-building, the president and the board chair can move from one level to another, either upward or downward.**

updates about the college; discussed with him the agenda items for the next meeting; sent him and the other board members documents before board meetings so they would have time to review them, ask questions, and add items they deemed important.<sup>4</sup> What I appreciated the most was that the board chair gave me permission to call him at any time. I was careful not to abuse this privilege, but it was comforting to know that if there was an emergency, even at midnight, I could consult him.

It is important for college presidents not to wait until problems have become overwhelming before notifying the board, especially the board chair. Many problems can be prevented or minimized when timely action is taken or when counsel is promptly sought. If the board chair does not offer, ask permission to consult with him or her when urgent matters arise.

**Being a woman among men.** Sometimes I am asked, “What was it like to be a woman among men?” I say it was a privilege. During board meetings, even though I was the only woman, I did not feel intimidated or discriminated against. The chair and the board members acknowledged my voice, and they welcomed my ideas.

Partway through my tenure, the board decided to form subcommittees. In these committees, we included women.<sup>5</sup> Two of these women became members of the board. The first time one of them attended a board meeting, there was a long and serious discussion. After the meeting, she took me aside. “You made very strong statements. Weren’t you afraid?” I told her that the test of the maturity of a board is its willingness to be challenged to address sticky issues with honesty and openness. As to the question whether I was afraid, I said No. A board, or any committee, should create an atmosphere where fear cannot thrive. Everyone should feel empowered to speak and, while observing propriety and respect toward others, must exercise that right freely.

A woman president may encounter negative experiences as she relates with the board, which in most cases are composed mostly of men. One participant in the study by Joseph confided that, at times, the jokes that the men exchanged in her presence made her feel uncomfortable. Another participant in the same study shared that her difficulty occurred when the board had to travel together, and she was the only woman.<sup>6</sup>

Two studies, Rosario<sup>7</sup> and Joseph,<sup>8</sup> however, affirm that women presidents generally have positive experiences with their boards. Participants in my study attested that when they were elected, they were received with warm acceptance. One participant in Joseph’s study described her board as “very, very, very supportive all the time.”<sup>9</sup>

### Advice to Current and Future College/University Presidents

**Get to know the board.** It is important for the president to become acquainted with the members of the board in order to know how to effectively work with each of them. Perusing each member’s curriculum vitae will give the necessary background information. Spending time with them both in formal and informal settings will also help; thus, the president should ensure that the board plans events that provide such experiences. The

president should also make the same effort to know the board chair and develop a positive working relationship with him or her, as this relationship is very crucial to the success of the institution. Bowen<sup>10</sup> and Hiland described five levels of interpersonal dynamics between the president and the board chair: fact-sharing, idea-sharing, knowledge-sharing, feeling-sharing, and give-and-take.<sup>11</sup> As the board chair and president get to know each other better, both will be better able to openly disclose whatever is needful for informed decision-making.

**Work with the board to evaluate academic administrators’ performance.** Holtschneider recommends that senior administrators of colleges/universities be evaluated by the board.<sup>12</sup> Ideally, this evaluation is done yearly, and, in our context, should include the vice president for academics, the deans, and the department chairs. If the evaluation is conducted in a spirit of confidence and trust, the feedback will be very helpful both to the person evaluated and to the institution.

Even if the board does not initiate or conduct evaluations of the college/university president, that individual can take the initiative and do a self-assessment. One of the skills that a college/university president should possess is the ability to self-critique.<sup>13</sup> For some, this skill will develop over time. Self-assessment gives the administrator an opportunity to “stand off and examine [his or her] performance in perspective.”<sup>14</sup> This type of evaluation is based on an initiative taken by the president, driven by his or her desire to improve personal performance as a leader and to better understand how his or her performance affects the institution.

**Suggest an evaluation of board performance.** The president should tactfully suggest an evaluation of the board. In some parts of the world, boards do not generally evaluate their own performance. But since it should be part of the institutional vision to create a culture of quality assurance and accountability, the board should be part of this endeavor. Follett makes it clear that “the board must . . . analyze its own effectiveness.”<sup>15</sup> Scholarly studies attest that boards that undergo periodic evaluation perform better.<sup>16</sup> These external evaluations can be performed by a subcommittee or the entire board. Holtschneider suggests that the board can assign a committee (usually the trusteeship committee) to take charge of the annual evaluation of the board.<sup>17</sup>

According to Boyatt, the board can also conduct a self-evaluation. It can ask itself these questions: (1) What are the strengths of this board? and (2) What areas of improvement should be addressed? When the board answers these questions candidly, it will be able to maximize its strengths and address its weaknesses.<sup>18</sup>

**Represent the college/university to the board.** The president is the face of the school that the board sees and the voice that the board hears. What he or she says about the college/university, its faculty and students, and its programs and how he or she says it, will influence the board’s view of the institution. While unfavorable information necessary for adequate decision making should not be hidden from the board, the president should consistently endeavor to present

the institution, especially in the annual report, in a positive light and to give a hopeful picture.

The president should also create strategies that will enhance the faculty's relationship with the board. Some ways to bring the board and the faculty together are to create formal and informal platforms. Listed below are some examples of each.

- Formal approaches can include conducting panel discussions and forums, inviting some faculty to board meetings, and forming ad hoc or taskforce committees to address shared concerns.

- Informal strategies can encompass such activities as holding special events such as a board-faculty dinner or inviting the board to important campus activities.<sup>19</sup> In some institutions, this is the occasion when the board chair announces important board decisions and recognizes exemplary performance of faculty members.

**Diversify the composition of the board.** Schwartz underscores that one of the most important functions of the board is to meet the needs of the college/university constituents.<sup>20</sup> With globalization, student bodies and faculty have become more diverse. But, as Fain observed, many boards have not seriously considered diversifying their membership.<sup>21</sup> Hence, it seems imperative that every board should consider looking into the composition of its membership<sup>22</sup> to determine “how much [it] reflects those whose future it holds in trust.”<sup>23</sup>

Further, several studies reveal that having a mix of men and women on the board results in better performance.<sup>24</sup> Some countries in Europe have imposed gender quotas on corporate boards of public companies “to rectify the extreme gender imbalance.”<sup>25</sup> They require that there must be at least 40 percent women sitting on any given board. When it comes to diversification, however, gender is only one aspect. Examples of other aspects to consider include age, competencies, experience, areas of specialization, and interest.<sup>26</sup> Boards of Adventist colleges and universities may not choose to adopt a quota requirement, but they need to take a serious look into the composition of their board membership. In Adventist colleges and universities in Asia and some other parts of the world, a big majority of board members are men and pastors who have with little or no training or experience in higher education leadership.

Additionally, Holtschneider emphasizes the importance of selecting the right people. He expounds, “Only smart, engaged board members can ask the right questions and, in doing so, elevate the entire board's performance and contributions to the institution.”<sup>27</sup> One way, according to Holtschneider, to determine board composition is to start with the institution's vision. “We started by asking what we needed the board to accomplish. The answers shaped the way we thought about populating the board.”<sup>28</sup> This approach may not be readily applicable to boards of Adventist colleges and universities because most board membership slots are assigned by virtue of a person's leadership role in missions, unions, and other denominational institutions. The idea, however, may merit some attention, for the board is only as good as its members, and

the college/university is only as good as its board.

**Provide board training.** A study by Canosa reveals that many boards of trustees' members, when appointed/elected, are not prepared to serve due to lack of training and experience regarding what the role entails.<sup>29</sup> Hence, there is a need for orientation, training, and mentoring. While the initiative must come from the board chair, this matter cannot be left to chance. The college president must work with the board chair to ensure the provision of education and development programs to both new and re-elected board members. These are training sessions board members should be required to attend in person, or online if available. Higgs and Jackson offer three reasons why board training is a must: (1) to delineate governance and administrative roles and functions, (2) to orient boards to their legal responsibilities, and (3) to “provide a system of accountability.”<sup>30</sup> Orientation is given to each board member at the start of his or her term. In fact, Holtschneider suggests that during the recruitment phase, the potential board member must be informed why he or she is being recruited.<sup>31</sup> Training may be provided once a year during board retreats and through online courses such as those available through the Adventist Learning Community (ALC) (see article by Ella Simmons on page 4). For board mentoring programs, a new member may be paired with an experienced one.

**Thanking the board.** The board chair and members are not paid for the work that they do for the college/university. While the president typically serves at their pleasure,<sup>32</sup> they contribute their time and expertise. Many board members sacrifice their personal time and even their work hours to fulfill board responsibilities.

Hence, a fitting response to their service is gratitude. After benchmarking appropriate ways of thanking the board for their voluntary service, our school provided travel and took care of lodging and food expenses. While we did not offer a per diem, we did give a gift to each board member during Christmas and when they came to our campus. We also gave them products from our farm.

Expressions of gratitude can come in many forms—verbal and written, providing warm hospitality and giving careful attention to the needs of board members when they come to the campus, and giving appropriate gifts on special occasions. At the end of their term, a statement of thanks set in a plaque may be appropriate.

## Conclusion

At the end of a president's term, one of those things for which he or she can usually be grateful is the guidance of a good board. If the president is honest, he or she will admit that whatever the college/university has achieved can be credited to the cooperative effort of the board, the president, and many others. The presidency is a privileged role because while the challenges are many, the president is not without support. And much of this support comes from the board. The roles of the board and the president are distinct but complementary, and one is incomplete without the other. ✍

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# Some Legal Considerations for Operating Boards in Adventist Schools (K-12)

“Thank you, but we have decided not to participate.” Such a short phrase from the local church pastor, but what a challenge it presented to me as conference superintendent of education! Because I was responsible for nearly 30 schools scattered throughout two states, I was frantically trying to meet the deadline for the new U.S. government’s mandatory asbestos inspection requirement.<sup>1</sup> The regulation applied to all schools, including private and religious institutions. Some of the superintendents in other conferences took the extensive training needed to become certified inspectors. They thought they could save a great deal of money by doing the inspections themselves. But I had a different concern—the lia-

bility I would assume if I conducted the inspections required by the law. If I made a mistake, what penalties would accrue to me personally? There was also a report to write. I had enough paperwork to do as it was without adding the asbestos documentation to it. But it was primarily the legal liability that drove my decision to outsource this task.

I found a small engineering firm that had all the certificates needed to conduct the inspection, and in addition, was bonded.<sup>2</sup> The company was willing to inspect all of our Adventist schools, even though they were spread around two states. Company officials gave us what I considered to be a reasonable offer, considering the travel that would be required to inspect each school. In addition, the contract guaranteed that they would provide us with inspection reports that would satisfy the bureaucratic re-

quirements. Now, the problem I faced was how to pay for all the work to be done. Since I had no conference budget for the asbestos inspections, I had the unhappy task of informing the local school operating committees that they would have to pay a proportional part of the contract, based on the square footage of each school building. That is what initiated the pastor’s negative response to my communication regarding the cost of the mandated asbestos inspections. Learning that the school would have to pay for this service and comply with the state regulation was not good news for either the pastor or his congregation.

Money seems always to be a scarce resource in nonpublic schools, and Adventist schools are no excep-

BY LYNDON G. FURST

tion. Thus, when the conference imposes extra costs on the local school, it frequently provokes an emotional response. Fortunately, the pastor was a reasonable person, and I was able to convince him that Adventist schools did have to comply with the law. Although this seems obvious, I have, on a number of occasions, been confronted by well-meaning members who truly believe that religious schools are exempt from most legal requirements that public schools must follow.<sup>3</sup>

This article will identify some aspects of the law that may impact the decision-making process for board members of Seventh-day Adventist schools. It will focus on raising awareness rather than providing deep legal analysis. Based on my years of experience in school administration, as well as my experience as a member of school boards in both Adventist and public schools, I will address five areas of law. They are government regulation, student discipline, employee relations, child abuse, and government aid to Adventist schools.<sup>4</sup>

### Power of the Government

It has been well settled, in a variety of countries, that private and religious schools are subject to reasonable regulation by various government entities, although there are generally some limits on what governments can do to control nonpublic schools. In addition to the United States, many other countries exercise control over private or independent schools. One example is the Republic of South Africa, where the law specifically requires that private schools must meet all learning outcomes and assessment standards prescribed in the national curriculum statements for general education and training.<sup>5</sup> The landmark ruling regarding private schools was set for the United States by its Supreme Court nearly a century ago in its decision *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*,<sup>6</sup> which struck down an Oregon law that required all children to attend public school. The

high court based its decision on the Constitution's 14th Amendment guarantee of property rights and liberty.

*Pierce* may be considered America's Magna Carta for nonpublic schools.<sup>7</sup> Writing for a unanimous court, Associate Justice James McReynolds stated it clearly: "the fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this union repose, excludes any general power of the state to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only."<sup>8</sup> However, the decision also stated that "no question is raised concerning the power of the state to reasonably regulate all schools, to inspect, supervise, and examine them, their teachers and pupils, to require that all children of proper age attend some school, that teachers shall be of good moral character and patriotic disposition, that certain studies plainly essential to good citizenship must be taught."<sup>9</sup>

### Government Regulation

One of the marks of American education is that it does not have a single, national system, although there are national regulations that schools must follow. Rather, there are 50 systems, with each state being a law unto itself. In addition, the schools in Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and other territories have their own unique educational organizations. So, it is essential for school boards to be aware of the laws impacting nonpublic schools in their state. Some states are very rigid in their requirements, while other states have very few or no regulations impacting private schools. There are, however, some nationwide laws that apply to educational institutions. The asbestos situation was a federal law enacted after several years of growing concern about health hazards posed by the ubiquitous compound.<sup>10</sup> The laws are uniformly applied throughout the U.S.

U.S. states have enacted a number

of regulations applied to schools, including private schools, in an attempt to ensure that children become well-educated, which is necessary for the continued prosperity of the state. The most powerful tool is the compulsory school attendance laws of each state. Either in the state Constitution or in a separate statute, the state defines what constitutes a school. Some states require schools, including nonpublic schools, to utilize only teachers meeting the standards set by the state for teacher certification. In those states, private schools that do not have all their classroom instructors certified are not defined as schools. Thus, parents who enroll their children in such institutions do not meet the requirements of the compulsory school attendance law.<sup>11</sup> This puts the burden on families because such laws are written to hold parents responsible to see that their children attend a school that meets the definition provided in the statute.

The Supreme Court of Nebraska upheld the state law that applied the teacher-certification requirement to nonpublic schools, including religious schools. The court adhered to the established legal principle in *State v. Faith Baptist Church*,<sup>12</sup> which attracted national attention. The school board had refused to certify teachers, provide information regarding the children attending the institution, or submit their curriculum to the state for approval. The state high court found that all these requirements were necessary for the state to carry out its responsibility of seeing that all children have access to appropriate education. Other courts have also upheld the right of the state to regulate private nonpublic schools in such matters as submitting their curriculum for approval,<sup>13</sup> and requiring that certain necessary information be made available to the state.<sup>14</sup>

### Limits to Government Control

Nonpublic schools are not without legal protection. U.S. courts have limited authority in regulating such

schools. *In Meyer v. Nebraska*,<sup>15</sup> the United States Supreme Court ruled that a state regulation prohibiting the teaching of foreign language in the elementary school was unconstitutional. State regulations cannot be arbitrary and must have a reasonable relationship to some legitimate purpose within the right of the state to impose legal requirements on its population.

The Commonwealth of Kentucky at one time required nonpublic schools to use textbooks on the state approved list. The Commonwealth's Supreme Court held that such regulations would essentially eliminate the differences between public and private schools, and thus violated the state constitution<sup>16</sup> and could not be applied to religious schools.

In a most egregious overreach, the Ohio state board of education published minimum standards applicable to private as well as public schools. The leader of one religious school objected, noting that the standards, along with their explanatory information, were based on a philosophy of secular humanism that was antagonistic to the religious beliefs espoused by the school. In striking down these regulations, the Supreme Court of Ohio relied on the Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>17</sup> Further, the court found no state interest of sufficient magnitude to override the constitutional protection afforded the school.

This protection of religious schools from the long arm of the state does not exist in a number of countries. In Jamaica, for example, the Education Act provides for on-site inspection of independent schools by an agent of the government.<sup>18</sup> South Africa requires that the standards at independent (private) schools must not be "inferior to standards at comparable public educational institutions."<sup>19</sup> A document describing private educa-

**Student discipline is an area of special interest, because of the contrast between public and private schools. In the U.S., state regulations affecting private schools may not be arbitrary. They must be related to some legitimate goal or compelling interest of state government.**

tion in the countries forming the European Union stated that both private schools that receive funds from the government (grant-aided) and those that receive no financial assistance from the government are "subject to certain forms of state control."<sup>20</sup> It further noted that the "absence of funding does not prevent the state from exercising control over private education institutions."<sup>21</sup>

It is imperative that members of Adventist school boards be aware of the regulations that apply to private schools in their country, state, or province. They also should support the conference superintendent and the principal in their attempt to keep our schools in compliance with the state/provincial legal requirements relating to education. While most of these illustrations have involved U.S. private schools, every nation has its own unique regulations impacting private and religious schools. While

there are many commonalities, members of governing boards are well advised to inform themselves regarding those regulations distinctive to their own country and state/province.

#### **Matters of Discipline**

Student discipline is an area of special interest, because of the contrast between public and private schools. In the U.S., state regulations affecting private schools may not be arbitrary. They must be related to some legitimate goal or compelling interest of state government. The students enrolled in American public schools, have constitutionally protected rights, and cannot be stripped of or denied those rights. They thus retain the right to freedom of speech, including symbolic speech.<sup>22</sup>

However, the right to free speech is not absolute. It may be restricted if it presents a clear and present danger of causing material and substantial disruption to the educational process. Public schools have the right of prior review (and thus prior restraint) of publications sponsored by the school,<sup>23</sup> but not those published by entities outside of the school<sup>24</sup> (because they are not under school sponsorship). Also, public schools do not need probable cause to search student effects, including lockers. Rather, the court has imposed a reasonable suspicion standard.<sup>25</sup> When it comes to disciplinary action such as expulsion,<sup>26</sup> or suspension for 10 days or more,<sup>27</sup> students in public schools must be afforded procedural due process.

In our Adventist schools and other private schools in the United States, students are not protected by these constitutional provisions. Rather, there is a contractual relationship that determines the processes of student discipline. However, other countries put restrictions on private schools regarding student discipline. South Africa, for example, requires "fair

procedures” in cases of student expulsion.<sup>28</sup>

In private schools in the U.S., the student handbook essentially becomes the contract between the school and the parents regarding the rules to be enforced and the procedures for discipline when a student violates those rules. In an old case,<sup>29</sup> the Supreme Court of North Carolina ruled that when students enroll in nonpublic schools, there is an implied promise that they will comply with reasonable rules and regulations, and that school officials have the authority to expel them as long as the disciplinary actions taken are not maliciously or arbitrarily done.

In an often-cited case, a U.S. federal district court ruled that students in nonpublic schools have no right to procedural due process in disciplinary matters.<sup>30</sup> The 14th Amendment makes provisions for constitutional restrictions that apply to state actors. Private schools do not function as part of the state system of public schools and thus are engaged in private action for which there is no constitutional protection. This doctrine has been further clarified in other cases. An appellate court in Louisiana found that private schools have nearly absolute authority and power to control their own disciplinary processes. If there is even the “color” of due process,<sup>31</sup> it meets the standard of the law. In another case, the federal trial court in Delaware noted that the relationship between private schools and the parents of an expelled student was contractual in nature. In view of the school’s basic procedural fairness, the court upheld the right of the school to expel the student.<sup>32</sup> The concept of fundamental fairness in student discipline is a standard that has been followed by other U.S. jurisdictions.<sup>33</sup>

### Student Handbook

Every Adventist school should have a student handbook or school bulletin that identifies the rules of behavior that are to guide student life

as well as the procedures to be followed when students step outside those rules. If the students’ off-campus behavior is of interest to the board or constituent churches that support the school, these expectations should be clearly stated. Most religious schools disallow any behavior that they believe will bring their faith community into public disrepute. The U.S. courts usually uphold the right of school officials to enforce such rules.<sup>34</sup> School regulations based on our religious worldview as well as the procedures utilized to enforce them are not subject to American courts’ judicial review.<sup>35</sup>

In the Adventist system, local schools have much discretion regarding the standards for enrollment and procedures for discipline. In some schools, the authority to expel a student resides with the principal. Other schools may require a faculty committee to make that decision, while still others place authority for expulsion of students with the board. Some schools have an appeals process that is available to parents/students subsequent to severe disciplinary action such as expulsion. There is no best way to do it. Local school operating committees are best suited to interpret the culture of their own faith community and to identify the limits of acceptable student behavior. The important legal consideration is the necessity for school administrators to follow the school’s established process, which should be published in the school handbook.<sup>36</sup>

### Policies Relating to School Employees

As with students, the relationship of our Adventist schools to teachers and other employees is contractual in nature rather than based on constitutional rights. While American public school teachers have constitutional rights, no such protections are available for Adventist school employees.

The Adventist denomination has a unique organizational structure that provides a system of dual management, consisting of the local school operating committee and the conference K-12 Board of Education.<sup>37</sup> The teacher’s employment contract is with the conference; yet in most cases, the local operating committee has major input into who is hired to work at their school. The conference superintendent is tasked with determining the professional eligibility of a candidate, and in consultation with the school principal, ascertaining his or her fit with the academic and spiritual needs of the school. The school committee generally is mostly concerned with the cultural and personality congruence with the congregation and especially with parents.

While the employment contract is with the local conference, the union conference education code spells out the terms of that contract. In some unions, employees are given “at will” contracts that can be terminated by either party. Usually this status is given to classified (nonteaching or noncertified) staff rather than professional educators. The at-will status gives the conference a great deal of flexibility but provides very little security to the employee. Some union conferences offer contracts that provide for continuing or regular employment status following three years of successful employment on provisional or intern status. The education code provides a list of causes for the termination or dismissal of employees in each category. The procedures for each of these actions are described in the education code and must be followed to the letter.

U.S. courts typically decline to exercise jurisdiction when an employee of a religious institution claims wrongful termination.<sup>38</sup> The doctrine of “ecclesiastical abstention” sometimes referred to as the “ministerial exception” is considered controlling.<sup>39</sup> However, a religious institution is not allowed to terminate an employee for

refusal to commit an illegal act or one that violates public policy.<sup>40</sup> For most of our K-12 schools, the employment policies clearly indicate that employees must be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in good standing and adhere to the lifestyle standards adopted by the church. Having such a provision clearly stated in the union conference education code provides legal cover for the church's schools in a situation where a disgruntled former employee seeks recourse in the judicial system.<sup>41</sup>

### Dealing With Child Abuse

One of the most sensitive issues that Adventist school personnel must deal with is child abuse and neglect. Every state in the U.S. has a law that requires educators to report suspicions of abuse and/or neglect.<sup>42</sup> The specific agency to which the report must be presented varies from state to state. All teachers and school administrators, including those in religious schools, are *mandatory reporters*. This fact puts many church workers in a serious quandary. When the public gets wind of a case of child abuse, the resulting negative publicity has the potential to seriously hamper the mission of the church.

There is a natural tendency to try to protect the reputation of our schools and the denomination. Yet educators function in the role of caregiver, and they have a moral and legal responsibility to protect the children who are placed under their care. Children and youth are much more vulnerable than adults. Therefore, it is our Christian duty to serve the best interest of our students by reporting suspicion of abuse or neglect as a law requires. We best honor our unique religious beliefs and our moral principles when our educators comply with the civil law.<sup>43</sup> Board members are advised to support this compliance on the part of school employees.

It has been my observation that

**I strongly recommend that Adventist churches and schools become proactive in implementing a policy that requires all persons, such as volunteers, who have more than casual contact with children and youth to be screened and subject to a criminal-history check.**

local leaders in the Adventist Church are hesitant to take any action that might put the church in a negative light. Also, there is a tendency to deal with child abuse and neglect, as well as sexual harassment and sexual abuse, from a pastoral viewpoint rather than an administrative one, which requires reporting to the civil authorities. Many times, I have had ministers and fellow educators tell me that instead of reporting to government agents, we should follow the steps for dispute resolution laid out in Matthew, Chapter 18. My response is that this is the worst action the school could take when employees suspect that children are being abused.

First, there is no dispute between the school and abusers, so the counsel in the Book of Matthew does not apply. Second, engaging in discussion with abusers alerts them that they are under scrutiny and may be in trouble. This gives them time to cover up

their behavior and escape the legal consequence of their abusive conduct. Typically, the abuse will continue or even get worse.

From my experience, the best advice is to follow the law. School personnel should not play detective by investigating just to ensure that their suspicions are correct.<sup>44</sup> Leave that to the professionals. One law-enforcement official made that very clear to me in a succinct statement: "Your job is to manage the school; my job is to do the investigation!" I had been reluctant to give him the name of a student who had told her friends that her stepfather "fooled around with me at night." She was known to have a vivid imagination and lived somewhat in a fantasy world. Under some degree of duress, I made the report he requested. After a short investigation, the detective discovered that the perpetrator was not only abusing his own stepdaughter, but in his role as assistant Pathfinder director, had also had questionable contact with several other children in the local church. I was glad I had responded positively to the detective's lecture.

I strongly recommend that Adventist churches and schools become proactive in implementing a policy that requires all persons, such as volunteers, who have more than casual contact with children and youth to be screened and subject to a criminal-history check. See Arthur F. Blinci's article in the April/May 2013 issue of the *JOURNAL*: "Preventing and Dealing With Child Abuse."<sup>45</sup>

### Government Funds for Adventist Schools

Many American Seventh-day Adventists believe there is no government funding available to their church schools. Traditionally, the Adventist Church in the United States has rejected any attempt by the government to provide funds to K-12 religious schools, believing such assistance to be unconstitutional. This is

not the case in most parts of the world, where governments routinely provide generous subsidies to “grant aided schools.”<sup>46</sup> Such schools are unheard of in the United States. However, American Adventists do avail themselves of government benefits such as maintaining the streets and roads by which they arrive at the church school, the fire department services, and police protection. A number of services provided by state government have been made available to religious schools as well as the public schools. Several attempts by state governments to provide financial assistance to private and religious schools have been tested in the courts to determine their constitutionality.

One of the earliest of these court challenges involved funding for transportation to and from school for all students, including those in parochial schools. In *Everson v. Board of Education*,<sup>47</sup> the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the plan as constitutional. Other rulings followed, such as the Supreme Court’s decision regarding the loaning of textbooks to private schools.<sup>48</sup> Noting that the books would remain the property of the public school system and be placed in nonpublic schools only as a loan to the children, the high court declined to find such a plan to be a violation of the Constitution. At issue was the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The court fashioned a two-part test upon which it based its determination. Any government program must have a secular purpose, and its primary effect must neither establish nor inhibit religion. In a later case, *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, the court added a third part to the test: Government aid must not foster excessive entanglement between church and state.<sup>49</sup>

Other cases have determined that a provision in the state tax code, allowing parents to deduct educational expenses from their taxable income, passes constitutional muster.<sup>50</sup> In regard to programs on the federal level, the U.S. Supreme Court in 1985 ruled

that services to children with special needs who were enrolled in religious schools could not be provided on the school premises.<sup>51</sup> The students had to be taken to a neutral site where they received services from public school teachers. Twelve years later, the Supreme Court dissolved the injunction holding its earlier order in place.<sup>52</sup> The confusion resulting from the original ruling convinced the court that it was no longer good law. Special services can now be provided by public school personnel on the premises of the religious schools without violating the Constitution.

Additionally, there is a fear that, along with financial or other types of assistance from the government, there will be strings attached that might infringe upon our freedom to conduct our schools consistent with our unique religious perspective.<sup>53</sup> Yet a good case can be made that children in Adventist schools with special educational needs should have those needs met even if by personnel from the public schools.<sup>54</sup> Children with special needs deserve to have the services that are available even if it requires some degree of entanglement between the church and government. While there is no easy resolution to this issue, principals, board chairs, and superintendents must work together and advocate for solutions that will best meet the needs of children while also addressing the concerns of constituents.

### Some Final Thoughts

In the limited space available, I have tried to give a comprehensive overview of legal matters that might be faced by governing bodies in K-12 Adventist schools. In most cases, they will not affect the operational decisions of the board, but, board members are more effective if they understand the basis for conference and local school administration making the decisions they do. Hopefully, this analysis will encourage Adventist

school operating boards to give strong support to the actions of the administrations of their schools. ✍

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*This article has been peer reviewed.*

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 15 U.S.C.A. §26041 et. seq. (1987).
2. There are several kinds of bonds. What is referred to here is an insurance policy that guarantees the company will do its work in accordance with the legal mandates and also assume the liability for anything that goes wrong.
3. Some typical requirements for both public and private schools include teacher certification, health and safety (records of disease, immunizations, health screenings, fire safety codes, mandatory reporting of abuse, safe physical plant), and record keeping (attendance records, certificates of health, a record of each student attending the school).
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7. Charles J. Russo, *The Law of Public Education*, 9th edition (St. Paul, Minn.: Foundation Press, 2015), 33.
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20. *Private Education in the European Union*. 21.
21. *Ibid.*, 11.
22. *Tinker v. Des Moines*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969).
23. *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260 (1988).
24. *Burch v. Barker*, 861 F.2d 1149 (9th Cir. 1988).
25. *New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, 469 U.S. 325 (1985).
26. *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education*, 294 F.2d 150 (5th Cir. 1961) cert. denied, 368 U.S. 930 (1961).
27. *Goss v. Lopez*, 419 U. S. 565 (1975).
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29. *Teeter v. Horner Military School*, 81 S.E. 767 (N.C.1914). See also *Hoadley v. Allen*, 291 P. 601 (Cal. Dist. Ct. App. 1930).
30. *Bright v. Isenbarger*, 314 F.Supp.1382 (N.D. Ind. 1970). See also *Driscoll v. Board of Trustees of Milton Academy*, 873 N.E.2d 1177 (Mass. App. Ct. 2007).
31. *Flint v. St. Augustine High School*, 323 So.2d 229 (La. Ct. App. 1979).
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36. *DMP v. Fay School Ex. Rel. Bd. of Trustees*, 933 F.Supp.(remove space)2d 214 (D. Mass. 2013). See also *Khykin v. Adellphi Academy of Brooklyn*, 1 N.Y.S. 3d 356 (A.D. 2 Dept. 2015) and *Gens v. Casady School*, 177 P. 3d 565 (Okla. 2008).
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39. *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission*, 563 U.S.903 (2011), rev'g 597 F.3d 769 (6th Cir. 2010), *reh'g and reh'g en banc denied* (2010). For an in-depth analysis of the Hosanna-Tabor case and the "ministerial exception," see Charles J. Russo and Paul E. McGreal, "Religious Freedom in American Catholic Higher Education," in *Religion & Education* 39:2 (July 2012):116-132.
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# A Board's Duty of Care in Financial Oversight: How to Avoid the Question:



# “Where Was the Board?”

Generally, the public hears about an organization's board and its members only when something goes wrong. At such times, the question is raised: “Where was the board?” When WorldCom disclosed its massive accounting fraud in 2002, Adam Feuerstein, in an article entitled: “WorldCom's Watchdogs Were Asleep,” cites Charles Elson, director of the Center for Corporate Governance at the University of Delaware, who asked: “Were there red flags that they [the directors] missed?”<sup>1</sup> No board member wants to be asked such a question, combined with the accompanying accusation that *obviously*, major issues *were* missed, to the detriment of the organization and its constituencies.

However, beyond the potential public embarrassment of being perceived as an irresponsible board member, there are the spiritual responsibilities that accompany our governance service to various organizations, particularly educational institutions within the church. Ellen White reminds us that: “The accounts of every business, the details of every transaction, pass the scrutiny of unseen auditors, agents of Him who never compromises with injustice, never overlooks evil, never palliates wrong.”<sup>2</sup>

Recognizing that our ultimate responsibility is to God, it

is with humbleness that we must approach our work, particularly when acting in an oversight position where decisions can advance or hinder the mission of Seventh-day Adventist education. Again, from the pen of Ellen White:

“It is in humbly working by the side of Jesus that we find rest. Men who feel themselves sufficient to take upon themselves responsibilities that they cannot manage, do injury to themselves and to the cause of God. Yet they are so blind that they cannot discern but what they are fully competent to undertake any thing.”<sup>3</sup> This article seeks to enhance board members' understanding of their responsibilities, both to avoid a blotch on their service and to overcome the blindness that may lead to overconfidence in the individual board member's personal knowledge and skills.

Being a member of an institution's board, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, carries significant responsibilities, including three important fiduciary duties: the *duty of care*; the *duty of loyalty*; and the *duty of obedience*.<sup>4</sup> Kay Sprinkel Grace describes this unique board member role in *The Ultimate Board Member's Book* by stating:

“On the one hand, you hold the organization in trust and are legally and financially responsible for its well-being. On the other hand, while it's not your job to manage daily op-

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erations, it is your responsibility to ensure that the person in charge manages all human and financial resources of the organization effectively, appropriately, and honestly.”<sup>5</sup>

An understanding of financial information is required to monitor an institution’s progress toward its stated goals and to assist in strategic planning so that it can accomplish its mission. Thus, it is essential that *every* board member possess a basic understanding of financial information, even if he or she is not specifically trained in accounting.

### Fiduciary Duties

Let’s define the three fiduciary duties that characterize the trust responsibilities of a board member. Specifically, the *duty of care* requires that he or she actively work with other board members to advance the institution’s mission and goals. This requires attendance and participation in board meetings and service on board committees. It also requires that board members read and understand financial reports and ask questions as appropriate.

The *duty of loyalty* requires that the board member place the institution’s interests ahead of his or her own interests. **Conflicts of interest\*** (situations in which a person’s personal interests or position in one organization conflict or compete with his or her relationship with or interests in another)<sup>6</sup> must be disclosed, and service to an institution as a member of its board must never become a means for one’s own gain. The ability to maintain confidentiality is another critical aspect of a board member’s *duty of loyalty*. This is especially important when it comes to discussing financial issues outside of the board room or during an investigation of dishonest or unethical behavior.

The *duty of obedience* places the responsibility on the board for ensuring the institution’s compliance with applicable laws and regulations. It is the board’s duty to ensure that the institution’s mission is carried out in accordance with activities authorized by the school’s legal documents, and in compliance with the legal environment in which it works.

As noted above, the *duty of care* requires that the board members read and understand financial reports and be both willing and able to ask questions when appropriate. Often when the agenda indicates that the financial reports will be the next item presented, board members take a break, either physically or mentally, by leaving the room or by checking their phones or tablets. It is insufficient for a member to rely on the board’s finance or audit committees (or in small K-12 schools, the school administrator or treasurer) to meet his or her fiduciary responsibilities under *duty of care*.

### Unpacking the Board Member’s Duty of Care

To meet the *duty of care* obligation, board members must first understand the difference between the financial statements for a not-for-profit organization and a for-profit company. It is likely that the for-profit terms are more familiar to board members because they are the ones generally used

in the literature. Different names are used for not-for-profit organizations’ financial statements because these organizations do not have outside stockholders who expect a return on their investment. Instead, interested constituencies for the not-for-profit organization are concerned about the fulfillment of the organization’s mission rather than a receipt of a monetary return or personal benefit from their contributions to the organization (in this article, that would be the educational institution).

The names of the basic financial statements follow in Table 1. Note the difference in the name of the residual (what remains) after the liabilities are subtracted from the assets. For-profit organizations have owners, stakeholders, and investors, for whom “Owners’ Equity” indicates the proportion of the assets that are not held by the creditors, and thus are held by the owners. Since not-for-profit organizations do not have owners, “Net Assets” serves as an indicator of the proportion of the assets that are not held by the creditors but are under the control of either the donors (because they are restricted for a specific purpose) or are available for governance distribution.

**Table 1. Names of Basic Financial Statements.**

Not-for-Profit Organizations	For-Profit Organizations
Statement of Financial Position	Balance Sheet
Statement of Activities	Income Statement
Statement of Cash Flows	Statement of Cash Flows
Assets – Liabilities = Net Assets	Assets – Liabilities = Owners’ Equity

In addition to receiving the above financial statements, board members should also ask administration to provide them with the following:

1. Cash-flow forecasts;
2. Actual operating results compared to budget;
3. Operational ratios (e.g., **Accounts Receivable Turnover\*** or **Days Cash on Hand\***);
4. Trend analyses; and
5. Information about the external environment that is of importance to the organization(educational institution).

Capital projects or new programs that are under consideration by the board may require specialized budgets of their own rather than being included in the annual operating budget.

### Specific Financial Responsibilities

The fiscal responsibilities of the board may be categorized under three headings: financial planning, financial controls, and financial reporting.<sup>7</sup>

#### 1. Financial Planning

The operating budget is the institution’s stated plan, ex-

## Box 1. Definition of Terms.\*

### AAA

The Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (AAA) is the denominational accrediting authority for all tertiary and graduate educational programs and institutions owned by Seventh-day Adventist Church entities, and reviews and endorses accreditation of secondary schools upon the recommendation of the Commissions on Accreditation of each division.

### Conflicts of Interest

Situations in which a person's personal interests or position in one organization conflict or compete with his or her relationship with or interests in another. This includes seeking personal benefits or privileges for self, family, business partners, or others based on one's official capacity; accepting gifts or financial compensation based on inside knowledge gained from one's position; benefiting from information shared as a result of being a member of a board; and putting one's personal interests above those of the institution served.

### Current Ratio

The relationship between current assets and current liabilities; used to measure an organization's liquidity or ability to pay its creditors. Computed by dividing Current Assets by Current Liabilities. Both figures are available on the Statement of Financial Position. Ideally, the Current Ratio should be 2:1.

### Operational Ratio: Accounts Receivable Turnover

*How to Compute:* Divide net income from tuition by the average accounts receivable for the year. This measures the number of times a year the Accounts Receivable is collected. One can obtain the average collection period by dividing 365 by the Accounts Receivable Turnover. For example, if the Accounts Receivable turnover is 10, the average collection period is 36.5 days (365/10).

### Operational Ratio: Days Cash on Hand

*How to Compute:* Divide total annual operating expenses (excluding depreciation) by 365 to obtain daily operating expenses. Then divide "cash and cash equivalents" by the daily operating expenses to arrive at the days' cash on hand. This is a good measure of sufficient cash.

### Quick Ratio

The relationship of an organization's quick assets (cash, accounts receivables, or investments that can be quickly converted to cash—typically within 90 days) to its Current Liabilities. Ideally, the Quick Ratio should be 1:1.

### Restricted Assets

Cash or assets, the use of which is restricted by the donor for a specific purpose.

### Restricted Net Assets

Cash or assets designated by the donor for a specific purpose.

### Unrestricted Net Assets

Cash or assets held by a not-for-profit organization without restrictions on how they can be used.

pressed in financial terms. The board must receive and approve the operating budget of the school on an annual basis. Following approval of the document, the board should monitor the budget on a monthly basis. The purpose of approving and monitoring the budget is to ensure that allocations have been used as voted, and that the income received and the assets of the institution are used to further institutional mission.

When approving the budget, board members should look first to the bottom line to see the expected result of operations. Does the annual financial plan indicate the expectation of a gain or a loss for the period? If the board is being asked to vote a budget that shows a loss, the members should request administration to explain the anticipated loss and to clarify when the institution can be expected to return to profitability. When monitoring the budget, board members should check to see if the year-to-date budget and the actual figures are showing a net result close to the budget. If so, they can have some confidence that there have been no negative changes in the operations of the institution and that the original plan is in effect. If there is a variance, the board should ask why and what is being done to correct the situation.

If the board does not meet on a monthly basis, the members should ask the institutions' financial administrator what processes are in place for both reviewing the internal financial statement in the off-months and for reporting on deviations from expected results. In addition, board members will wish to monitor the cash flow to be certain that the institution does not become insolvent.

## 2. Financial Controls

The board is responsible for ensuring that a strong internal control system exists (and if not, seeing that one is created). This will ensure that the assets, particularly the cash, can be accounted for and are not misused. Board members should ask questions about how the school's internal control system is designed and maintained.

External audits should be conducted annually (see *Working Policy S 29 05*).<sup>8</sup> If the external auditors indicate that the institution has weaknesses in its internal control system, the board should require the administration to address those weaknesses and submit a report regarding the adjustments made in response to the auditors' recommendations. If the board has an audit committee, it may choose to delegate some of this responsibility to this group, with the understanding that they will report back to the entire board regarding the efficiency of the institution's internal control system.

One important control that the board should monitor is the monthly comparison between actual operations and the budget. The administrators (the president or principal of the institution or the financial administrator) should be required to show the Statement of Activities in a comparative format so the board members can readily compare actual operations

with budget-to-date figures. Variances should be identified for the board and explained by the school's administrators.

### 3. Financial Reporting

At every official meeting, board members should receive and review the financial information for the institution in order to evaluate its financial health. Therefore, every new board member should be trained by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) or similar staff person (or in the case of small schools, the treasurer of the conference or school) on how to read and use financial reports and how to identify the institution's critical financial factors. Veteran board members should periodically be required to attend a refresher training course.

In addition to understanding the school's financial statements, secondary and tertiary boards are responsible for ensuring that the administration prepares and files all required **Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (AAA)\*** documents. All boards must ensure that government reports are submitted on time. In some cases, the board may delegate the actual review of such governance reports to its finance committee, which then ascertains and reports whether the filings were completed on time.

Erin Welch's article, "Speed-reading Non-Profit Financial Statements,"<sup>9</sup> will be helpful in assisting board members who feel uncomfortable trying to interpret columns of numbers on financial statements and are unsure which numbers are in fact the most important. She recommends the following tips for understanding the Statement of Financial Position and the Statement of Activities<sup>10</sup>:

*For Reviewing the Statement of Financial Position:*

1. Review the liquidity ratios, specifically the **Current Ratio\*** and the **Quick Ratio\***. Board members may ask the administration to provide these ratios to them on a regular basis.

2. Examine the year-to-year financial trends. Ask: Is the current ratio increasing or decreasing? Is there growth in **Restricted Assets\***?

3. Note the direction of the institution's debt. Rapid growth in debt may foretell an impending crisis.

4. Ask how the proportion of the institution's **Unrestricted Net Assets\*** compares to its **Restricted Net Assets\***. Does the institution have sufficient liquidity (i.e., unrestricted net assets) to remain solvent? Board members should also ensure that restricted funds are properly accounted for and that restricted cash is separated from cash available for operations. The school may appear to have a lot of cash, but if the majority of the funds are restricted for specific projects, it can have a cashflow problem. If indeed a cashflow issue exists, board members should ask whether the organization has access to credit.

*For Reviewing the Statement of Activities:*

1. The board should review the amount budgeted versus

actual amount spent, looking for significant variances. Board members should understand the cause and effect of any significant variances and inquire about the administration's plans for addressing them. In particular, they should inquire which of the major expenses are rising more rapidly than income.

2. School administrators should alert the board members to concentrations of revenue and identify whether the organization relies heavily on one income source (e.g., tuition income or subsidies). If so, board members should ask the

## Box 2. Additional Resources.

***A Guide to Financial Statements for Not-for-Profit Organizations: Questions for Directors to Ask.*** CPA Chartered Professional Accountants, Canada. Originally published by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2012: <https://www.cpastore.ca/product/a-guide-to-financial-statements-of-not-for-profit-organizations-questions-for-directors-to-ask/1425>.

Buck, Peter A. "**Tips for Communicating Financial Information to the Board**": <https://www.ksmcpa.com/tips-for-communicating-financial-information-to-the-board>.

***CIMA Performance Reporting to Boards: A Guide to Good Practice.*** [https://www.cimaglobal.com/Documents/ImportedDocuments/perf\\_reporting.pdf](https://www.cimaglobal.com/Documents/ImportedDocuments/perf_reporting.pdf).

"**Directors' Responsibilities for Financial Reporting: What You Need to Know,**" **ACCA Chartered Accountants. Australia and New Zealand (2017):** [https://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/ACCA\\_Global/professional-insights/Directors-responsibilities-for-financial-reporting/pi-Directors-Guide-to-Financial-Reporting.pdf](https://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/ACCA_Global/professional-insights/Directors-responsibilities-for-financial-reporting/pi-Directors-Guide-to-Financial-Reporting.pdf).

Dave C. Lawrence, "**Communicating Financial Matters: Expectations of the School Business Officer,**" *The Journal of Adventist Education* 70:5 (Summer 2008): 37-42: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200870053706.pdf>.

\_\_\_\_\_, "**A Board Member's Guide to Financial Statements,**" *The Journal of Adventist Education* 66:5 (Summer 2004): 24-28: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200466052405.pdf>.

Milton, Leslie. "**Why Board Members Need to Understand Financial Statements**" (November 3, 2017): <https://www.ggfl.ca/financial-statements-board-members>.

president or principal to share his or her contingency plans in case there is an unexpected drop in income (e.g., due to a sudden decrease in enrollment or subsidy reductions). Since the board is responsible for the long-term viability of the institution, members may wish to consider how to diversify income in order to build the school's financial strength.

### A Privilege and a Responsibility

Being asked to serve on the board of an educational institution is a privilege and a responsibility. The pleasure of seeing a school thrive is immeasurable, and knowing one played a small part in its success brings rich rewards. However, when people agree to serve on a board, they also assume responsibility for the institution's finances as part of fulfilling their fiduciary responsibility for *duty of care*. The board has a responsibility to ensure that policies are in place to not only prevent the abuse and misuse of financial resources, but also to address such irregularities when they occur. As Leslie Milton put it so succinctly: "There is no place on a board for members who are willing to leave that 'money stuff' to others."<sup>10</sup> ✍

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# Building A Working Relationship

## Between Institutional Boards and Accrediting and Chartering Authorities

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's education system has grown and developed over the past 140 years. Initially, it started as a small system with just a few institutions that focused mainly on preparing workers for the denomination. At that time, accreditation did not exist and thus was not an issue. As the church has grown and spread in the succeeding years, so has the demand for Adventist education by the church's membership; consequently, many more institutions have been established. For example, the number of Adventist higher educational institutions increased from two in 1880<sup>1</sup> to 115 in 2017<sup>2</sup>; similar growth has occurred at K-12 levels.

Since the main source of institutional income has always been tuition, the need for optimum enrollment steadily increased until it was no longer expected that all graduates

from these institutions would find employment or pursue advanced studies in the church or its educational institutions. After all, while church institutions are established firstly to prepare workers for the church, they are also expected to provide educational opportunities to church members' children who wish to study in a Christian environment, and to prepare them to be professionals and church members even if they do not become church employees.

Additionally, many of the people enrolling in Adventist higher education institutions are adults, some of whom are not Adventists, but have a desire to study within an institution grounded in a Christian worldview. According to Ellen White in the books *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *Beginning of the End*, among the objectives for establishing the schools of the prophets, after which model Adventist schools are patterned, the following stand out prominently:

- To serve as barriers against wide-

spread corruption in society;

- To provide for students' mental and spiritual welfare; and
- To promote the prosperity of society by furnishing it with men and women qualified to act in the fear of God as leaders and counselors.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, Adventist schools have always attracted students who, either because of their parents' desires or their own, wish to explore what it means to be distinctively Christian and to study in such an atmosphere. It would, therefore, be impractical to assume that all these would be employed by the church. Many would seek to work in other sectors and, through their influence, become a source of inspiration to society. In order to obtain employment in the public sector, these students, as well as many of those employed by Adventist institutions, needed qualifications earned at a recognized institution.

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This then led to the need for Adventist educational institutions to seek accreditation from government and regional accrediting agencies, a decision that was first made after thoughtful debate, careful consideration, seeking of spiritual guidance, and prayer. Governing boards of Seventh-day Adventist institutions operate under the authority of their constituencies as well as in consonance with the regulations of their chartering authorities.<sup>4</sup>

Operating in such a dual system raises important questions, such as: To what should governing boards pay attention? How should governing boards handle their relationship with chartering authorities and accreditation agencies? Which ideals do these bodies value most? To what degree should conditions for operations established by chartering authorities and accrediting agencies be accepted? Which conditions should be negotiable, and which ones not? Is there a tipping point at which an institution's governing board decides to forfeit accreditation by government agencies and secular accrediting agencies? What external influences can hamper the board's work?

For many schools, operating in a dual system resembles the Bible's advice about rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's, rather than attempting to serve two masters. Being able to detect these challenges and relate them to the institutional mission and the Adventist philosophy of education makes relationships to chartering bodies and accrediting agencies much easier, even if some challenges remain unresolved.

Government chartering agencies and accrediting organizations differ somewhat in the manner in which they function, but all have some (though varied) authority regarding the provision of education and the manner in which educational institutions are governed within a given country, state, or region over which they have jurisdiction. Since, in most countries, it is expected that institu-

tions have governing boards, some of these organizations also have documents, articles, statements, guidelines, or provisions relating to governance, which include both expectations and functions. Some go as far as to stipulate the membership of boards or to suggest which organizations/institutions should be represented on governing boards.

With the authority delegated to them by their respective governments, chartering agencies can authorize the opening of institutions—and by the same authority, they can also “close” institutions. They stipulate conditions under which institutions may be opened and operated, and violations that may lead to various consequences—which may include demands that colleges cease operation, suspension or withdrawal of their license to operate certain programs or offer certain degrees, and withdrawal of authorization for government-guaranteed student loans. Such actions would result in graduates receiving unrecognized qualifications or students having insufficient funds to afford to enroll in the institutions. Because of this authority, institutions find themselves bound to follow the commands given by their chartering authorities—and sometimes, are tempted to compromise their fundamental creeds.

In some countries, where the conditions are very stringent and acquiescing to them would lead to serious compromise, or where the implementation of the conditions would make it difficult to adhere to the school's fundamental creed, governing boards and constituencies choose to defer or avoid seeking such authorization and either function clandestinely as seminaries or in “affiliation” with one or more other, often foreign, institutions. This action may be taken for the whole institution or, in rare cases, for certain programs that the chartering authority is unlikely to recognize.

When such institutions are owned and operated by an organized religious body, they generally use and highly esteem their denominationally based accreditation despite such organizations' rather “limited legitimacy.” One such agency is the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities—commonly referred to as the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA).<sup>5</sup> Denominational accreditation, though helpful (especially when combined with national accreditation), may provide only limited benefits. This means that qualifications—certificates, diplomas, and degrees acquired by students after a course of study in such an institution—may not be recognized within the countries where they operate or by public education systems. Additionally, graduates may not qualify for entry into professions in other countries. The qualifications are, however, generally recognized within the religious body's educational system.

Also, in some cases where the government provides tuition grants or scholarships, the students in these institutions are not eligible for these monies. Other associated challenges include students facing hardships in accessing scholastic materials, which may be subsidized by the respective governments; college/university administration experiencing difficulty securing work permits for expatriate employees; employees encountering taxation issues, etc. Yet, despite these challenges, organizations—including government organizations seeking academic excellence and integrity in performance—have employed graduates from such institutions/programs, even ones lacking accreditation recognition because of the quality of their values-laden education.

### **Relating to Chartering Authorities and Accrediting Organizations**

This article will discuss four essential principles to keep in mind when building relationships and relating to

chartering authorities and accrediting organizations. It must be acknowledged that there are varying situations in different countries and that no single solution will address all situations. However, the list below will suggest useful guidelines that administrators and board members can use when faced with difficult situations.

### **1. Commit and Adhere to a Clear Mission and Philosophy.**

Institutional boards must pay attention to how well they embrace and adhere to the school's mission and philosophy. The mission and philosophy of Adventist education should be the foremost guiding principle when addressing issues related to governance—as it should be for everything else (see George Knight's work on this topic, along with Rasi et al.'s statement on Seventh-day Adventist educational philosophy<sup>6</sup>). In general, while some systems may operate without overt reference to a specific worldview and philosophy, all systems are based on a worldview that guides the kind of decisions made and the ensuing actions. Governing boards of Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions should ensure they base their decisions on the mission and philosophy of Adventist education.

Provisionally, with only a few exceptions, most chartering authorities and accrediting organizations do respect those who state their philosophies and abide by them. They consider it as commitment to a cause that should be honored as long as that cause does not interfere with the rights of others.

Some government chartering authorities have granted authorization to church institutions hoping they will provide a balance or an alternative to public education, in which they recognize some flaws, shortfalls, or inadequacies. Such governments would probably be disappointed if church institutions ended

up compromising their principles—the basis for which they were granted legal authorization. Our schools must avoid the path taken by a number of great educational institutions that began with Christian philosophies but gradually lost their connection to their founding organizations and abandoned the tenets they originally espoused. Abandoning institutional mission and philosophy can lead to dire results such as losing direction in a very complex maze of ideas and losing constituency support.

### **2. Handle Board Membership Selection and Orientation With Care.**

School chartering authorities, which normally represent the political interests of the government, have a mandate to ensure that there is adequate representation in terms of gender, regional balance, different sectors of society, employees, etc. They also have to ensure that the schools they charter are accountable to the government and the general public; and especially if there are government grants involved, ascertaining that these monies are not used for political or sectarian leverage to advance personal or sectarian agendas (see Box 1 for Web links to a few of such agencies' statements).

While some chartering authorities and accrediting organizations may seek to prescribe who should be on the board or which categories of society ought to be represented, the nomination or election of members to serve on a school board should always be handled with much care. In some countries where the church has a large membership, there may be a large group of professionals with different backgrounds from whom suitable members of governing boards could be selected. These individuals may include Seventh-day Adventists who work in the public sector but understand and appreciate the worldview and philosophy of denominational education. Additionally, there are professional members of the church who may be acceptable as

representatives for the suggested categories. Some chartering authorities and most accrediting organizations will trust the church to select suitable members of the board without demanding to oversee the process. Such actions need to be carefully executed so that this trust is not compromised. There are, however, a few situations where this is not the case. Consequently, a careful discussion with the chartering authority may be necessary and, if extreme disagreement occurs, deferral of seeking authorization may end up being a preferred option.

In all situations, and particularly in cases where people who are not well acquainted with the Adventist education system become members of the board, adequate orientation and board education is an imperative. This will ensure that new board members become acquainted with the mission, philosophy, and functioning of the institution, all of which drive other decisions and processes.

Team-building training should also form an essential part of such orientations to enhance mutual understanding among the members of the board. Simple things such as processes (how things are done) and even jargon (e.g., terminology used within the Adventist Church) may imply different things to the different groups and could be a source of misunderstanding. It is common to use what one is used to as the standard; however, it is important to remember that the way things are done could be based on a certain philosophy or just a preferred practice. With clear communication, misunderstandings can be avoided.

### **3. Cultivate Mutual Understanding and Act With Integrity.**

In order to make the best choices in any given circumstance, school boards should seek to acquire a comprehensive and compassionate understanding of the different worldviews

## Box 1. Examples of Country Guidelines.

### **KENYA: Universities Standards and Guidelines (2014), 4: Governance and Management INST/STD/03**

<http://www.cue.or.ke/index.php/provision-of-security-services/category/16-standards-and-guidelines?download=101:universities-standards-and-guidelines-2014>

### **AUSTRALIA – Seminar on Governing bodies of higher education institutions: Roles and responsibilities University Governance by Colin Walters to OECD.**

<http://www.oecd.org/education/imhe/37378292.pdf>

### **NIGERIA – Requirements for the Establishment of a Private University, Security Screening of Proprietors and Board of Trustees (Step 11)**

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/310365-nigerian-government-presents-licences-to-four-new-private-universities.html>

and philosophies they are likely to encounter in the public sector. All decisions and systems are based on a worldview. Thus, an understanding of the different worldviews of other institutions from which members may be drawn, as well as those of chartering authorities and accrediting agencies, will be very beneficial when reviewing the chartering agency documents that spell out the conditions for operating a private church institution. Such knowledge can help board members understand why various institutions operate the way they do and how to relate to them appropriately.

This is particularly true when there might be a need to negotiate. Negotiation should be done from a firm understanding of the school's mission and philosophy and with a high level of integrity and accountability. Easy compromise and lack of accountability may lead to the chartering authorities taking advantage of the institution administrators' compromise and lack of accountability and may make the situation more difficult when the board is faced with crucial and important decisions.

Acquiring a keen and thorough understanding can also be helpful in ascertaining the intent of the documents that the state requires for approval of school programs. Negotiating with understanding helps the institution present another perspective that could be considered as a credible alternative, even though it comes from what the chartering agency may be tempted to dismiss as a "little denominational institution."

It is also important to understand that most governments do give licenses to educational institutions or have established a system to do so because they want to protect and disseminate a certain philosophy. These philosophies may not agree or align completely with the one advocated by the church institution but may still share many things in common with it. An example of this is Paul at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:23, 34, NIV), where he referred to what was common to "break the ice," and this resulted in greater success for the gospel. Negotiations should be done from an attitude of thoughtful understanding rather than one of superiority or paranoia.

## **4. Recognize and Take Into Account Political Influences.**

Institutional school boards often face significant difficulties because of political challenges, which may seriously hamper their work. Political pressures, both external and internal, are considered the most difficult ones to handle. Oftentimes political allegiances lead people (administrators, boards, constituencies, governments, etc.) to act in ways that may be considered irrational and that contravene their own convictions, beliefs, or worldviews.

It is also important to remember that political climates change. A Pharaoh who never knew Joseph (Exodus 1:8; Acts 7:18) can easily obtain power in a particular country and create a difficult situation. Taking advantage of political allegiances should therefore be handled from an ethical point of view that can withstand all circumstances, regardless of the new leader. Such interactions should be rooted in the school's mission and philosophy. Exploitation of political leverage for any reason can lead to results that may be very difficult to handle, as well as the possibility of being misunderstood by subsequent leadership and politicians.

God's people are advised to be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16, NIV).<sup>7</sup> Politics are a reality that boards cannot avoid. Finding balance in these situations will result in genuine advancement for the institution and could even reduce the number of government and accrediting agency restrictions. For example, a school may decide to relinquish the chartering agencies' authorization even though it comes with the promise of much-needed grants or financial support if such authorization will result in compromising the institution's fundamental creed. Concern may be expressed that this will have a deleterious effect on the institution's ability to thrive and the church's work to progress in that nation. The Bible says that He who started a good work

will see it to its eventual successful completion (Philippians 1:6). This does not, however, imply sitting idle and not doing anything. On the contrary! Paul also described life as a race that requires effort (Hebrews 12:1). Therefore, our school boards will need to carefully inform themselves about the situation and employ creativity to seek all possible recognitions that will benefit the school's students and alumni, while remaining faithful to institutional mission and philosophy.

### Concluding Thoughts

Governing boards must pay careful attention to their institution's guiding mission and philosophy. Chartering authorities and accrediting organizations are often willing to negotiate with institutions that consistently adhere to a clear mission and vision and stand firmly on their philosophy. Although there are often both internal and external political pressures that can make governing difficult, diligent boards will often be able to discover methods and opportunities to negotiate an acceptable solution. Detecting and resolving such challenges is possible when boards and school administrators work together and understand the essentials of working with chartering agencies and accrediting organizations.

Board members must also take time to understand their colleagues—their backgrounds, responsibilities, and environment, and to build team spirit and genuine and ethical camaraderie. Ultimately, boards must develop strong negotiating skills based on the purpose and mission of their institution, and use a Christian ethical stance when engaging with these agencies and organizations. A healthy prayer life, team spirit, and ongoing orientation and training are essential and integral to successful relationships with chartering agencies and accrediting organizations, and a vital part of effective board functioning. ✍

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4. In this article, *constituencies* refers to the church organizations that own and/or operate the institution or which the institution primarily serves. "Chartering authority" is a term used to refer to government agencies that authorize, license, accredit, register, or charter tertiary educational institutions; e.g., agencies that give them legal status in the countries where they operate. These agencies go by different names in different places, for example: Higher Education Commission (Pakistan), National Council for Higher Education (Uganda), University Grants Commission (India), Council for Higher Education (Israel), Commission of

University Education (Kenya), and the National Accreditation Boards (Malaysia).

In the United States, there is the Council for Higher Education Accreditation in Washington, D.C., comprised of higher education institutions as well as mainly regional, but also private, faith-based accrediting agencies. Regional agencies include: Middle States Commission of Higher Education, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), and the WASC Senior College and University Commission. The council serves as an advocate for self-regulation of academic quality. Although it does not give legitimacy to institutions and is not a government agency, accreditation by regional accrediting agencies is a major factor in determining Federal government student financial support in U.S. territories, often given to students studying in institutions accredited by accrediting agencies which are themselves recognized by the council.

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# Governance and Spirituality:

## The Profound Impact of Board Members' Spiritual Health on the Institutions They Govern



A single person moved by the Holy Spirit can be a channel of blessings and make a substantial difference in Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions. Conversely, a board member who is disconnected from the Spirit, even for a short time, can cause a lot of damage.<sup>1</sup> This was made clear to me some years ago when I served as a conference superintendent of education for the Greater New York Conference.

We needed an Adventist school in eastern Long Island, New York, after the closure of the previous school, which had served families in the area for more than 40 years. We established a small committee to pray, plan, negotiate, and open a school on the premises of the Babylon church where a previous small Adventist school had closed 25 years earlier, leaving behind a large debt that the church had to pay off and the pain that came with it.

There were many challenges: First, the church members would have to embrace the project in spite of the bad memories. Second, we would have to win the support of other churches in the area so that they would subsidize the new school and/or enroll their children. Third, we would need to find funding to bring the old building up to code and cover the expenses associated with opening of a new school. Fourth, the Babylon Town Council, which had a reputation for being very difficult, would have to give permission to use

the existing building for a school. We desperately needed God's blessing for this project to become a reality against all these odds.

After much prayer and deliberation, with the support of the church pastor and planning committee members, the project was presented before the church members at a special business meeting. There were many legitimate questions and objections, and it seemed that the members were ready to vote down the proposal. Then suddenly, God used the voice of a courageous and dedicated member who spoke like Caleb and Joshua did<sup>2</sup> and helped convince the church to move forward with the project. Subsequently, she responded to the call and faithfully served for many years as the board chair of the new church school.

Answering our prayers, God miraculously opened all the doors and removed all the obstacles. Today, the South Bay Junior Academy is still providing Adventist education to many families in the area.

### Adventist Education and the Great Controversy

Adventist education is fundamentally a ministry<sup>3</sup> and a spiritual endeavor. In the context of the great controversy between good and evil, board members should keep in mind that Christian educational institutions are primarily established to advance God's kingdom: "To restore in men and

BY B O R D E S H E N R Y S A T U R N É

women the image of their Maker, to bring them back to the perfection in which they were created—this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life.”<sup>4</sup> Consequently, this battle cannot be fought exclusively with brain power, financial resources, or professional skills. Divine weapons are needed to fight spiritual battles. It is ““Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6, NKJV).

Because of their influential and visible position, board members are the targets of the enemy’s attacks, as was Simon Peter.<sup>5</sup> They need to “resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9). Otherwise, they may become an impediment to the progress of God’s work. I still remember the painful story of a bitter personal quarrel between an influential board member and a principal that ended in a church school closure. The board member wanted to prove that he had the “last word” and that he had the “power to make the principal lose his job.” So he persuaded the constituency to shut down the school. That sad-but-true story illustrates the deleterious impact of a proud, vengeful, and selfish trustee.

Lou Solomon noted that “becoming powerful makes people less empathetic,” and that “the most common leadership failures don’t involve fraud, the embezzlement of funds, or even sex scandals. It’s more common to see leaders fail in the area of every day self-management—and the use [of] power in a way that is motivated by ego and self-interest.”<sup>6</sup>

The disturbing story of the ruthless Queen Jezebel reminds us that board members are *trustees* and should hold themselves to the highest ethical standards and never condone nepotism or cronyism. Jezebel carefully planned Naboth’s elimination with the intention of seizing his vineyard for her husband (1 Kings 21). Similarly, board members sometimes pressure the administration to gain position, promotion, or salary increases for their relatives or friends.

As they carry out their important responsibilities, spiritual leaders must be aware of their shortcomings since “We have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Richard Exley candidly reminds us that the “potential for the abuse of power is present in every one of us. Frequently, it is held in check, not by true humility, but only by lack of opportunity. If we are given a little power, let the world beware!”<sup>7</sup> Dan Allender invites us to acknowledge our limitations as we “lead with a limp.” He calls us to resolutely walk away

from ineffective and harmful responses to challenges, including cowardice, rigidity, narcissism, hiding, and fatalism, and to embrace effective responses, comprising courage, depth, gratitude, openness, and hope.<sup>8</sup> “Those who control others should first learn to control themselves. Unless they learn this lesson, they cannot be Christlike in their work. They are to abide in Christ, speaking as He would speak, acting as He would act, with unfailing tenderness and compassion.”<sup>9</sup>

### Seeking to Define Spirituality

Researchers have struggled to define spirituality.<sup>10</sup> Bruce Speck acknowledged that “clearly, a consensual definition of spirituality is lacking.”<sup>11</sup> Covrig, Ledesma, and Gifford made a distinction between spirituality and religion,<sup>12</sup> but Kenneson challenged that approach.<sup>13</sup> Joanna Crossman advocated a “secular spiritual development,”<sup>14</sup> while Cadge and Konieczny noticed that religion is “hidden in plain sight” and should be openly acknowledged like gender or race.<sup>15</sup> Fry and Kiger listed values related to spiritual leadership: trust, forgiveness, integrity, honesty, courage, humility, kindness, compassion, patience, excellence, and happiness.<sup>16</sup>

In this article, *religion* is not equated with *spirituality*. There are some religious people who are also spiritual, but not all of them are. Religion has brought crusades, inquisition, persecution, bigotry, violence, and judgmental attitudes. Spirituality comes with love, acceptance, patience, courage, and forgiveness. Spiritual people demonstrate authenticity, transcendence, connectedness, self-reflection, self-control, inner peace, and a sense of purpose. Spirituality is first and foremost about the heart. Spiritual board members cultivate

the “fruit of the Spirit,” which according to Paul, “is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23).

However, even authentically spiritual persons sometimes have an incomplete or incorrect understanding of the truth. The Millerites, for example, were very spiritual, but believed incorrectly that Jesus would return to Earth in 1844, when in fact, He was about to inaugurate His ministry in the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>17</sup> Apollos’ knowledge of the gospel was limited to the teaching he received before being baptized by John the Baptist. He was, however, a very spiritual man who loved God and was dedicated to His service. Although very eloquent and highly educated, he was

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humble enough to receive a Bible study from two manual workers, the tentmakers Priscilla and Aquila.<sup>18</sup>

The Holy Spirit is guiding believers into all truth, but that revelation is progressive. Besides, believers are not always ready to learn everything that the Lord wants to teach them: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (John 16:12) Jesus told the disciples. “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things” (John 14:26). A spiritual person has an attitude of humility and a willingness to learn deeper truths in order to grow in the Lord.

### The Perils of Counterfeit Spirituality

Religion without spirituality is censured numerous times in the Bible. It is characterized by extremism, a judgmental attitude, a desire to control other people, a spirit of revenge, arrogance, pride, selfishness, discrimination, exclusion, greed, and/or corruption. Paul scorned those who have “a form of godliness but [deny] its power” (2 Timothy 3:5).

Spirituality is not about attending religious services, observing rites, participating in ceremonies, or even memorizing doctrines, although these religious practices usually help nurture it.<sup>19</sup> The Pharisees were strict observers of the law, but they “neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23 NASB).<sup>20</sup> They were very religious, but they were empty of true communion with God. The doctrines they had studied so well did not transform their selfish and proud hearts. Paul also addressed this problem: “Though I have *the gift* of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2). He added in 1 Corinthians 8:1: “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies,” also translated “knowledge makes arrogant, but love builds up” (NASB). It is not about what we know or how much money we have, nor about observing rules and obtaining compliance to policies—although these are important—it is about becoming a new creature, transformed from the inside out by the love of Jesus.

Saul of Tarsus was full of fervor for the Law and “exceedingly zealous for the traditions”<sup>21</sup> of his fathers, but it took that encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus to change his heart and set his priorities straight—a reminder that authentic spirituality grows in the presence of God.

Counterfeit spirituality is often presumptuous. Christians sometimes expect God to approve their ways and bless them even when they are negligent, disobedient, or lazy. They claim that “This is God’s work, it cannot fail.” Jeremiah warned the children of Israel: “Do not trust in these lying words, saying, ‘The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these’” (Jeremiah 7:4). Ellen White wrote: “Nehemiah did not regard his duty done when he had wept and prayed before the Lord. He united his petitions with holy endeavor, putting forth earnest, prayerful efforts for the success of the enterprise in which

he was engaged. Careful consideration and well-matured plans are as essential to the carrying forward of sacred enterprises today as in the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls.”<sup>22</sup>

Trustees of Adventist schools cannot afford to be capricious and arbitrary. They must not use their personal opinions to recommend discipline for employees or students. A couple of decades ago, a church school principal, one of the best educators in the conference, was summarily fired by the local school board because she ordered pizza for her students. The board members firmly believed that a “true Adventist” could not and would not have offered such “unhealthy food” to the students. In their righteous indignation, they voted to remove the principal from office, effective immediately. It took the firm intervention of the conference officers and a lot of wisdom to convince these board members that they needed to follow due process and that they were not allowed to dismiss an employee whose job was contracted by the conference. School boards can make recommendations for termination or dismissal, but ultimately the decision rests with the conference board of education and its representative, the education superintendent. Termination policies are stated in official denominational policies and government regulations.<sup>23</sup>

### Genuine Spirituality Bears the Fruits of the Spirit

If someone is called to serve as a board member, he or she is entrusted with great privilege that comes with responsibilities. “It is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah were successful spiritual leaders who can be an inspiration for board members. They were diligent, faithful, honest, courageous, and prudent. Their strong faith motivated them to carefully prepare themselves, to plan thoughtfully, and to judiciously execute their projects. They felt convicted that in whatever they were doing, they were responsible “to the Lord and not to men” (Colossians 3:23). They demonstrated the “wisdom that is from above,” described by James as “pure, . . . peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:13-18).

Spiritual board members have high expectations. They believe that God’s people should be the head and not the tail.<sup>24</sup> This is especially so in education, where administrators and board members demand quality, efficiency, professionalism, honesty, transparency, fairness, and compassion. They have zero tolerance for incompetence, chaos, immorality, mediocrity, or corruption. They have the conviction that God is ready and willing to accomplish extraordinary things for His children. “God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength is that they trust so much to their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power in their behalf. He will help His believing children in every emergency if they will place their en-

tire confidence in Him and faithfully obey Him.”<sup>25</sup>

Our high expectations must, however, be proportionate to the support and resources available to our students and educators. It is not reasonable to have the same expectations for everyone. “The specific place appointed us in life is determined by our capabilities. Not all reach the same development or do with equal efficiency the same work. God does not expect the hyssop to attain the proportions of the cedar, or the olive the height of the stately palm. But each should aim just as high as the union of human with divine power makes it possible for him to reach.”<sup>26</sup>

Excessive workload and premature burnout are chronic challenges in the Adventist system. We expect teachers to be available during the entire school day (often without a break), and also in the evening and on Sabbath, and often on Sundays as well. Sometimes, employees are even called to duty during their vacations. School boards must be intentional in encouraging school administrators to make efforts to protect employees’ personal time and give them some space to renew themselves and recharge their batteries.

One of the Adventist Church pioneers, the powerful preacher James White, was so dedicated to his work that he was always busy preaching, publishing, visiting, and chairing meetings. His beloved wife, Ellen, warned him that unless he slowed down in his numerous activities, his health would dramatically fail, and he might even lose his life. However, James was not ready to slow down. Consequently, at the age of 44, he suffered a stroke that left him paralyzed. When he got better a few months later, he went back to his busy life. He became very sick again at 56 years old and died at the age of 60. A fruitful ministry that could have served the church for so many more years was cut short.<sup>27</sup>

In French, people often say, “*L’excès en tout nuit*,” which could be translated, “Excess in everything is harmful.” Excess and extremism are very effective subterfuge of the devil in his efforts to beguile God’s children and drag them away from their glorious destiny. One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is ἐγκράτεια (*egkrateia*), which means temperance, self-restraint, self-control, self-governance, inner strength, or moderation.<sup>28</sup> That is the virtue exemplified by the person who, through the power of the Spirit, keeps things under control and is not carried away by passion or circumstances.

The counsel that Christ gave to His disciples 2,000 years ago is still valid today: “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31). Ellen White

corroborated this message in her comments: “It is not wise to be always under the strain of ministering to other people’s spiritual needs, for in this way, we neglect personal piety and overtax soul and body. . . . We must take time for meditation, prayer, and study of the Word.”<sup>29</sup> There is a time to work hard, but there is also a time to relax and replenish our energies. That timely lesson is relevant both for board members and school employees.

The role of the board is not to manage the institution, but to be watchful, prayerful stewards of it. Boards support a culture of prudence and ensure that institutions follow guidelines and comply with policies. Like Joseph in Egypt, board members ensure that provision is made for rainy days, economic downturns, and natural disasters. They are concerned about providing healthy and safe facilities for students, school personnel, and visitors.

As prudent stewards, board members ensure that the institution does not embark on reckless, grandiose initiatives. They make certain that no project proceeds without a feasibility study and proper planning. They approve conservative but visionary budgets, and demand that the institution complies with government regulations that do not contradict the instructions of the Bible.<sup>30</sup> They expect from school leadership a detailed, visionary, realistic strategic plan that is updated annually, and even participate in creating it. Jesus asked the question, “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—

lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish?”” (Luke 14:28-30).

One of the most important responsibilities of the board is to select competent and committed leaders for the institution. Board members cannot afford to wait for the current leadership to become unavailable to start thinking about possible replacements. That is why succession planning is so crucial. The board and the administration must be intentional in cultivating for the long term a variety of options for future leadership, both at the board level and at the institution as well. Great spiritual leaders plan for their own succession: Joshua was ready when Moses was gone. Elijah mentored Elisha. John the Baptist said about Jesus, “He must increase, but I *must* decrease” (John 3:30). Barnabas intentionally prepared Saul and John Mark. Paul trained Titus and Timothy for ministry. Boards should do the same

**Board members cannot afford to adopt a lackadaisical attitude. Sleeping at the switch or denying hard realities could have a terrible impact on the lives of many people and even threaten the viability of the school. There is no room for complacency.**

to ensure the stability and the steady growth of their institutions by systematically identifying promising talents and providing growth opportunities for potential future leaders.

### Spiritual Board Members

Spiritual board members welcome all students and employees, with their differences, as a gift from God. They see them as God's children regardless of their aptitude, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or age. Leaders must be approachable and perceived as ready and willing to listen to others, including teachers, janitors, parents, and students. Board members led by the Spirit proactively promote equity, which may translate as fair representation and treatment of all people groups at all levels.<sup>31</sup> They support the worldwide mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by taking a firm stand against discrimination and preferential treatment. They are compassionate, and they protect the vulnerable members of the school family. They should be the voices of the voiceless, particularly the orphan, the widow, the immigrant, the children, and the elderly.<sup>32</sup>

Boards sometimes have to make difficult decisions that will affect personnel, students, families, and even the church. That is a sacred responsibility that must be handled with humility and prayer. These decisions may be prompted by financial exigencies, employees' misconduct, safety concerns, or government initiatives.

The board may also simply recognize that times have changed, and that the institution needs to take a new direction. The members may need to take drastic actions and decisions, make significant changes, or do a thorough cleanup. That is when board members' integrity is tested.

Board members cannot afford to adopt a lackadaisical attitude. Sleeping at the switch or denying hard realities could have a terrible impact on the lives of many people and even threaten the viability of the school. There is no room for complacency. *Laissez-faire* trustees should resign (or be removed) to make room for responsible stewards who will embrace their sacred responsibilities: "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:8).<sup>33</sup> Even God's patience has its limits. The same lowly and gentle Jesus knew when it was time to cleanse the temple.<sup>34</sup> He sprang into action in an astonishing manner. Board members who do not wish to be charged with dereliction of duty are called to do the same. Scott Cowen, president emeritus of Tulane University, gave the following advice to those who want to be "effective trustees": "Don't be afraid to take on the sacred cows." He added, "To lead with integrity, you need to make principled decisions responsive to the particular realities you confront."<sup>35</sup>

In the solitary chamber of their souls, trustees must make the commitment to take a stand for what is right and ensure the integrity of the institution. In these crucial moments, board members will search for God's guidance, "gird up the loins" of their minds, "be sober" (1 Peter 5:8), and act in a

timely manner with sensitivity, common sense, wisdom, and determination. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing" (Matthew 24: 45, 46).

### Conclusion: "Who is sufficient for these things?"<sup>36</sup>

Because of their imperfections, Christians are exhorted to humble themselves and rededicate their hearts to God by spending time in prayer and meditation, and by hiding His Word in their hearts.<sup>37</sup> When board members follow this admonition, their vibrant spirituality will radiate into church institutions. Daniel developed the habit of praying three times a day.<sup>38</sup> Nehemiah offered a silent prayer in the presence of the king.<sup>39</sup> Joseph always felt he was in God's presence.<sup>40</sup> Job offered a sacrifice daily for his children.<sup>41</sup> Board members should follow these spiritual giants' example and intercede daily for their family members and also for the school family. We are reminded in *Prophets and Kings* that the challenges of leadership can only be met with prayer. The author offers this encouragement to those who lead:

"Never are they to fail of consulting the great Source of all wisdom. Strengthened and enlightened by the Master Worker, they will be enabled to stand firm against unholy influences and to discern right from wrong, good from evil. They will approve that which God approves and will strive earnestly against the introduction of wrong principles into His cause."<sup>42</sup>

The promise is certain: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). God is ready to do extraordinary things for our educational institutions. It all depends on our spiritual readiness. Joshua's admonition to the Israelites also applies to trustees: "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (Joshua 3:5). ✍

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### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Each individual board member has the power of influence. This should be committed to God. Ellen G. White wrote: "The higher the position a man occupies, the greater the responsibility that he has to bear, the wider will be the influence that he exerts and the greater his need of dependence on God. Ever should he remember that with the call to work comes the call to walk circumspectly before his fellow men. He is to stand before God in the attitude of a learner. Position does not give holiness of character. It is by honoring God and obeying His commands that a man is made truly great" (*Prophets and Kings* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1917], 30, 31).

2. Numbers 13:30 (NKJV): "Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.'" Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture texts in this article are quoted from the *New King James Version* of the Bible, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

3. See George R. Knight, "Education for What? Thoughts on the Purpose and Identity of Adventist Education," *The Journal of Adventist Education* (October-December 2016): 6-12; and John Wesley Taylor V, "What Is the Special Character of an Adventist College or University?" *ibid.* (January-March 2017): 24-29.

4. Ellen G. White, *True Education: An Adaptation of Education by Ellen G. White* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2000), 11.

5. Luke 22:31, 32.

6. Lou Solomon, "Becoming Powerful Makes You Less Empathetic," *Harvard Business Review* (April 21, 2015): <https://hbr.org/2015/04/becoming-powerful-makes-you-less-empathetic>.

7. Richard Exley, *Perils of Power* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), 66.

8. Dan Allender, *Leading With a Limp: Turning Your Struggles Into Strengths* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: WaterBrook Press, 2006), 8, 9.

9. Ellen G. White, "Words of Counsel," *Review and Herald* 80:17 (April 28, 1903): 7.

10. David Rousseau, "A Systems Model of Spirituality," *Journal of Religion and Science*, 49:2 (June 2014): 476-508.

11. Bruce W. Speck, "What Is Spirituality?" *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 2005:104 (Winter 2005): 8.

12. Duane Covrig, Janet Ledesma, and Gary Gifford, "Spiritual or Religious Leadership: What Do You Practice? What Should You Practice?" *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 7:1 (2013): 104-113.

13. Philip Kenneson, "What's in a Name? A Brief Introduction to the 'Spiritual but Not Religious,'" *Liturgy* 30: 3 (July 2015): 3-13.

14. Joanna Crossman, "Secular Spiritual Development in Education From International and Global Perspectives," *Oxford Review of Education* 29:4 (December 2003): 503-520.

15. Wendy Cadge and Mary E. Konieczny, "'Hidden in Plain Sight':

The Significance of Religion and Spirituality in Secular Organizations," *Sociology of Religion* 75:4 (December 2014): 551-563.

16. Louis Fry and Mark Kriger, "Towards a Theory of Being-centered Leadership: Multiple Levels of Beings as Context for Effective Leadership," *Human Relations* 62:11 (September 2009): 1681.

17. See Hebrews 9.

18. See Acts 18:18-28.

19. See Isaiah 1:11-15.

20. *New American Standard Bible* (NASB). Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.

21. See Galatians 1:14.

22. White, *Prophets and Kings*, 633, 634.

23. Education personnel (teaching faculty and administrators) are under contract with the hiring conference. This means the conference is legally responsible for employment, termination, and any changes in employment status of education personnel. Non-teaching staff (e.g., cafeteria or janitorial/maintenance) are typically contracted with the school, making the administration responsible for the terms of their employment. For this reason, local school boards must consult with the local conference education superintendent when recommending any action that will impact the employment of education personnel. Clear policies regarding termination or dismissal are included in the *Church Manual*, the *K-12 Education Code* and various denominational working policies, and government regulations. See also Charles McKinstry, "The Firing of Mary Mediocre: The Case for Due Process at the School Board," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 70:5 (Summer 2008): 16-19.

24. Deuteronomy 28:13.

25. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1890): 493.

26. \_\_\_\_\_, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903): 267.

27. \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1868), 1:103-105; Virgil Robinson, *James White* (New York: Teach Services, 2005), 171-178.

28. Galatians 5:23. See Sam Williams, *Galatians* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1997), 151; Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), II:339-342.

29. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1898): 359-362.

30. Romans 13: 1-7; Acts 5:27-29.

31. Isaiah 56; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11-16; Revelation 7:9 and 14:6.

32. See Acts 10:34, 35; Micah 6:8; Leviticus 19:20; and Deuteronomy 10:17-19.

33. Board officers may gently nudge ineffective members, encouraging them to either take their responsibilities more seriously or to quietly leave their seats to someone else who has the time, interest, and/or skills to significantly contribute to the progress of the institution. Some institutions' constitution and bylaws contain provisions addressing board members' excessive absences or their persistent failure to support the institution.

34. Mark 11:15-18.

35. Scott Cowen, "Want to Be a Really Effective Trustee?" *Higher Education Today* (July 2012): <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2018/07/11/want-really-effective-trustee/>.

36. See 2 Corinthians 2:14-17.

37. Psalm 119:11.

38. Daniel 6:10.

39. Nehemiah 2:4.

40. Genesis 39:2-5.

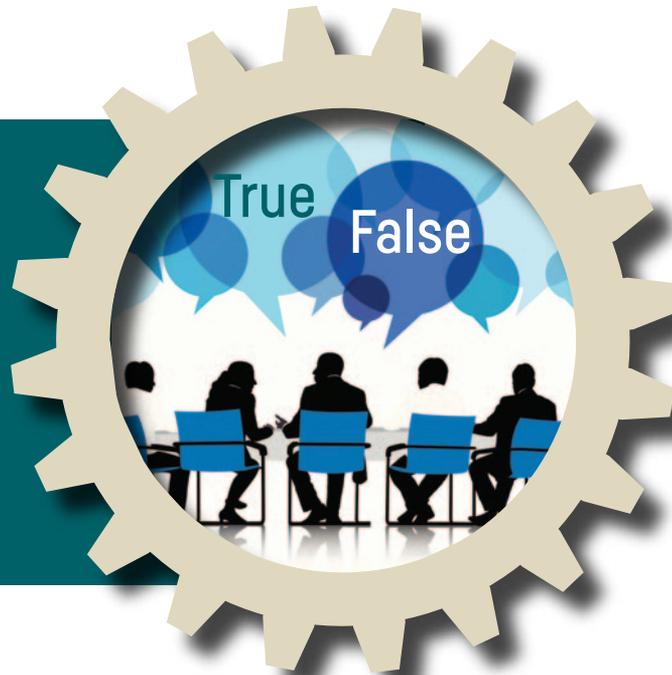
41. Job 1:5.

42. White, *Prophets and Kings*, 31.



Duane Covrig

# The Moral Work of School Boards



A board member hears rumors that a physical education teacher is using inappropriate language at school sporting events. An elementary teacher with two students from an undocumented family asks a board chair how the school can help shield these families from immigration “disruptions.” A janitor presents evidence to a board member that a teacher is drinking alcohol and wants to know what will be done about it.

These issues have obvious policy and legal implications for Seventh-day Adventist schools. They also impact relationships and employment decisions, all of which raise moral issues. School board members are called to enter the fray created by these issues to help create safe and caring schools. They can learn to execute their responsibilities—fiscal, legal, and relational—to make good decisions, create a positive school culture, and to grow their understanding about and wise

application of ethical principles. This will lead to moral growth: from simple moral compliance to major legal and regulatory cooperation with local authorities to more advanced roles of moral leadership. School boards can grow their moral influence on their schools and wider communities.

Ellen White associated moral issues with education in her classic statement:

“The plans devised and carried out for the education of our youth are none too broad. They should not have a one-sided education, but all their powers should receive equal attention. Moral philosophy, the study of the Scriptures, and physical training should be combined with the studies usually pursued in schools. Every power—physical, mental, and moral—needs to be trained, disciplined, and developed, that it may render its highest service.”<sup>1</sup>

It makes sense that, since the schools should be teaching moral philosophy and helping students achieve moral development, the leaders of these schools should also grow their

own moral learning. This article reviews useful approaches to guide boards as they do the moral work of governance.

## Ethics 101

Ethics and morality work to influence a person or group of people (e.g., organizations, communities, or institutions) to *do the right thing at the right time in the right way with the right people to help the right groups—all while cultivating right motives*. The *right* repeatedly referred to here is not merely a technical or procedural term. It is also one of alignment to values—and for Adventists, to Christian ideals and teachings.

The words *ethics* and *morality* are often used interchangeably, but *ethics* typically refers to the thinking (justification) part of moral work while *morality* is the application (behavior) part. Boards should care about both. They must be ready to present their decisions and policy changes in ethics-based explanations that help others

understand the justifications for their choices. They also need to be ready to carry out visions and ideals in a pragmatic way. In other words, they must both “talk the talk” that grows moral thinking and “walk the walk” that helps implement these ideas so that behaviors are changed, and the school’s goals are achieved.

Ethics and moral growth, in individuals and communities, are facilitated

**There are a lot of moral “voices” to which board members must learn to hear and respond, and with which they must keep in constant dialogue as they engage in decision-making. Dialogue is key to creating shared moral wisdom.**

through complex interactions related to cognitive development, cultural development, emotional intelligence, spiritual maturity, and social influence. Recognizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of morality with these other areas helps us understand why Ellen White’s quotation cited earlier in this article referred to the need for “broad” understandings. Relationships build moral expectations. Moral expectations guard relationships and

create trust and boundaries. Adjudicating between moral expectations and the friction that comes from boundary crossing is a delicate work that requires both morality and leadership.

Thankfully, Seventh-day Adventist school board members and trustees have many resources to draw from as they seek to enhance their personal moral development and shared moral leadership. They have biblical principles and commands, moral insight distilled from history and social experience, local and regional laws, and work or professional experiences. Many of them will have codes of ethics from their professional experience that can help them in shaping board discussion of moral issues. There are a lot of moral “voices” to which board members must learn to hear and respond, and with which they must keep in constant dialogue as they engage in decision-making. Dialogue is key to creating shared moral wisdom. Board chairs with a penchant for truncating discussion are at great risk of sacrificing shared moral growth in their board for the sake of quick decisions. Yes, boards need to maintain a steady pace of processing the agenda, but it is the shared dialogue—hearing the reasoning of other people—that most helps each member grow in moral wisdom and enables the group to solidify a shared moral vision.

Candid and respectful discussion of moral ideals can produce conflict. Dialogue is the bridge we take to understanding another’s thinking—but we may not like what we see when we get there. This leads some to pull out of discussion to avoid conflict or to angrily try to dominate the dialogue in an attempt to suppress other people’s thinking. However, wise individuals can use interpersonal dialogue to improve their cognitive and moral development. They can receive the ideas of other people as legitimate observations about what is happening in the world. Letting individuals explain their moral thinking is important for their development—and for ours. It strengthens their moral voice and en-

ables them to share their experiences and concerns. However, it is listening respectfully that is the most essential, and board chairs need to reiterate that. When we do this, recognizing that other people’s views and experiences, especially those that are different from our own (different cultures, races, generations, genders, etc.), we can broaden our understanding—and if we are willing to allow this, lead us to greater compassion and the opportunity to recognize the validity of different points of view. I remind my students about Proverbs 8, where the call to listening occurs repeatedly in the context of understanding wisdom and its ways. Keeping our moral conversation headed toward a consensus and a shared vision is not easy, but the ideas below can help us to achieve this goal.

### **Developing the Board’s Moral Competency**

While this article cannot cover all the rich resources available to help boards learn how to engage in moral leadership, here are seven areas worth considering that address the development of moral competency:

#### **1. Read and understand codes of ethics for school personnel and board members.**

Many professional groups and state/provincial agencies have attempted to list, explain, and illustrate the moral values and ethical ideals they require of their professionals. Reading these codes of ethics is a useful starting point. Boards should start first with what is morally and legally expected of school administrators, teachers, psychologists, and counselors. Since boards are servants seeking to help these professionals, they should know how these professionals are called to work and figure out how the board can help create a moral environment to help them fulfill their callings.

They should also read the code of ethics available for boards, both

## Sidebar 1. Example of a School Board Code of Ethics.

Excerpt adapted from the 2017 North American Division *Manual for School Board Members*:\*

1. Board meetings should be conducted in a Christian manner and in harmony with the principles outlined in Matthew 5:23 and 24 and 18:15-19.

2. A code of ethics is a standard of personal conduct. In fulfilling their responsibilities, school board members will:

- Maintain Christian ethics of honesty, trust, fairness, and integrity.
- Base decisions on the philosophy and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist education system.
- Demonstrate attitudes and personal conduct that reflect the standards of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and refrain from actions or involvements that might prove embarrassing to the church or the school.
- Work unceasingly to improve the understanding and support of Adventist education.
- Learn and practice the art of compromise without sacrificing principle.
- Support and protect the civil rights of all members of the school community.
- Recognize that the authority of the board is only expressed by its actions as a board. Individual members may act or speak on behalf of the board only when authorized to do so.
- Take no private action that will compromise the school system, the board, or the administration.
- Avoid any conflict of interest.
- Base their decisions on facts and their independent judgment and not defer to the opinions of individuals or special interest groups.
- Work with other board members in a spirit of decency, harmony, and cooperation.
- Uphold all board decisions, regardless of any personal disagreement.
- Maintain confidentiality of all matters that, if disclosed, would needlessly injure individuals or the school.
- Recognize that their responsibility is not to run the school but, together with their fellow board members, to see that it is well run.
- Refer all complaints to the school administrator for appropriate processing.

\*2018 NAD Manual for School Board Members, pp. 23, 24: [https://nad-bigtincan.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/leadership%20resources/administration/handbooks%20%26%20manuals/SchoolBoard\\_Manual.pdf](https://nad-bigtincan.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/leadership%20resources/administration/handbooks%20%26%20manuals/SchoolBoard_Manual.pdf).

within and outside the field of education (see North American Division excerpt above). Reviewing these periodically at board meetings can create a helpful reminder of the moral responsibility of board members.

### 2. View moral work as functioning in stages.

James Rest's four-stage model<sup>2</sup> has been used and modified over the past 30 years to give a simple look at the

“life cycle” of moral work. The first is sensitivity to moral issues. Becoming *sensitive to* or *aware of* a moral issue usually means a willingness to see the impact of events, statements, or actions on the well-being of individuals and groups. Boards can train themselves to recognize moral issues by mingling regularly with their communities to hear and observe their concerns and challenges. Moral sensitivities often reveal themselves through the use of phrases like “this concerns me,” “that isn’t right,” “that hurts children,” “this seems unfair,” “I hope . . . ,” “my dream of is that . . . .” Seeking to understand other people’s pains and joys often produces in us a more sensitive heart.

Boards are not only stewards of their own moral views but also those of their constituents. This requires a deep desire to understand others. Systematic visitation, anonymous surveys, and other communication tools can help transform “weak” signals into strong awareness. Boards must be careful about hypersensitivity and the possibility that excessive idealism may sabotage even incremental change. However, they must not ignore even the slightest whimper of moral sensitivity lest they become desensitized to the moral change and growth God may be trying to bring to their school and community.

The second stage is *judgment*. This is the ability to gather the moral whispers, anger, viewpoints, and dreams swirling around the school and realistically discuss them as a board in order to systematically evaluate a moral issue. Judgment is about going through a loving due process that welcomes multiple witnesses but also challenges (even interrogates) those views with alternative perspectives. Boards must be careful to avoid *judgmentalism*, which is not the same as *righteous judgment*. Judgmentalism traffics in generalities and preconceptions and rushes to a decision without due process or hearings. Cooper’s excellent book *Making Judgments Without Being Judgmental: Nurturing a Clear Mind and a Generous*

*Heart*<sup>3</sup> explains the difference and provides excellent strategies for improving this practice.

Judgmentalism shows itself when board members make rash decisions, let gossip guide their tongue or warp their data, or when they foster an unloving spirit toward those they believe to be in the wrong. Condemnatory attitudes are easily nursed, especially among Christian communities with high ideals.

Christian judgment avoids overgeneralization. It stays focused on the specifics of the situation being discussed and does not stoop to impugning the characters of those involved. In 2018, U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts explained well how the members of the Court avoid divisiveness among themselves by limiting discussion to the task at hand. By focusing on a decision point, instead of trying to push for a broader moral consensus, they can keep schism from creating judgmental attitudes. He reviewed his administrative approach to doing judgment, which may be useful for chairs to watch.<sup>4</sup> Because the Adventist community believes that God entered His final redemptive work of judgment in 1844, those who serve on institutional boards in this community would do well to learn how He does His work and how it should guide our commitment to due process in judgment.

The third stage is *a commitment to action*. This involves cultivating *motivation* and *focus* to act on a decision. While boards must avoid judgmentalism, they must make decisions. Although they are not called to play God, boards are called to evaluate and judge. Paul scolded the Corinthians for not exercising their work of judgment by taking action when dealing with a sexual practice in their congregation (1 Corinthians 5 and 6). “Do you not know that you will judge angels? How much more the things of this life” (1 Corinthians 6:3, NIV).<sup>5</sup> Boards must not avoid tough moral decisions. Avoiding judgment is *not a*

**Even in Adventist communities where wars between “liberal” and “conservative” moral values can bring deep division, calmly naming principles undergirding these values can be helpful to maintain dialogue. Liberal values of love and compassion, as well as the equality aspect of justice and the freedom part of liberty need a voice.**

loving act but a cowardly act. Boards will have to humbly engage in censoring, firing, expulsions, and other acts of discipline even as they commit themselves to embracing the deep motivation of love and truth.

The final stage is one of *maintaining a moral character and culture*. Individuals who cultivate the first three steps eventually acquire a character, bent, or predisposition toward certain moral actions. A group that does the same creates a culture, a sustainable ethos, or group tradition that fosters better moral practices. This stage is fostered by sober awareness of what happens when leadership abandons its fiduciary and oversight responsibilities (the Internet is full of illustrations of that) and conversely, inspired by times when leadership stepped into moral gaps (e.g., Martin Luther’s stand before the Diet of Worms or Martin Luther King, Jr.’s many speeches challenging the United States to moral righteousness).

There are several ways boards can improve on how they implement this stage. Chairs can place a “follow-up” or “close the loop” section in the agenda. This can be a time to discuss a specific past decision and its impact on the moral culture of the school, constituency, and wider community. Administrators or faculty may be invited to share their data that show how the policy and practice decisions were applied. This is not mainly

about administrative accountability but about helping boards see how their decisions and those of their predecessors have impacted the school and community. This feedback should invite both positive and negative feedback. Any news is better than no news for improving practice. This willingness to learn from past choices shows a steadiness in taking previous decisions seriously, an openness to learn, and a willingness to be held accountable. This practice could be encouraged in other decision-making areas of the school, as well. It can create a “what-can-we-learn culture” that is crucial to fostering moral maturity.

### **3. Learn to use the language of values in Haidt’s Six Moral Frames.**

Moral conflict will emerge during the above processes. Jonathan Haidt’s Moral Foundation<sup>6</sup> Website can help boards understand the bases of these moral conflicts. He sees six values as universally “felt” in reference to morality. Boards can use these moral values in their discussions and in support of their decisions to help create a common school language. Those six are love (care), justice (fairness), liberty, authority, loyalty, and sanctity (purity). While I do not accept Haidt’s evolutionary arguments for the origin of these values, I do believe he correctly identifies fundamental values at

work in our communities.

Haidt's work has also been helpful for explaining moral irritation and division in communities, including Adventism. He notes that parts of a community may emphasize some values over others. This leads to a perception of right and wrong, but it can also be used to polarize the larger moral community. This is especially evident in the moral division that now characterizes the politics of many nations and religious organizations. Even in Adventist communities where wars between "liberal" and "conservative" moral values can bring deep division, calmly naming principles undergirding these values can be helpful to maintain dialogue. Liberal values of love and compassion, as well as the equality aspect of justice and the freedom part of liberty need a voice. Conservatives' emphasis on the "deserving" (merit) side of justice, and the need to respect authority, foster group loyalty, and embrace a deep respect for the sanctity for life (especially related to sexual issues and abortion) also need a voice. Naming values can help different factions to understand where they "come together" on some issues.<sup>7</sup>

Space does not allow us to review Haidt's useful work on public morality, but I encourage boards to consider using his material in their training sessions to develop common language they can use to discuss and even debate moral values they identify in school situations. I think this is part of the broad moral training Ellen White recommended.<sup>8</sup> Haidt's interview with Bill Moyer<sup>9</sup> is especially useful in promoting understanding of how a rigid moral "rightness" can bring disunity, separation, judgmentalism, anger, and eventually can lead some to justify physical attacks, murder, and war on others.

#### **4. Keep track of the board's relational moral matrix.**

Another way to improve a board's moral practice is by discussing the core moral expectations various indi-

viduals or groups have on the board. I call this "creating a moral matrix." This chart can be as simple as a four-by-four table with the name relationship and what they need, what we need from them, what can violate or destroy the relationship, and ways we can improve it. Glaser recommends three simple realms of each ethical situation: individual, institutional, and societal.<sup>10</sup> I recommend a more complex matrix for professionals<sup>11</sup> (see Matrix examples on page 45).

The key benefit of this exercise is creating and discussing one's own chart. Making a list of the people the board needs to serve, finding out what these individuals need, and talking with board members about how to meet these needs is a way to see relationships as having moral claims. It can guide boards to see the moral footprint they leave on specific relationships and avoid generalizing about all groups so that they see them within one homogeneous moral framework. Disaggregating general relationships into specific ones gives a "face" to the more general moral demands each have on the board. Linking particular relationships to specific moral expectations and responsibilities keeps board members from limiting themselves to merely abstract moral calculus in their moral work. For example, boards may tend to focus on staff needs to the exclusion of parents' moral claims, or vice versa. Part of moral leadership is balancing multiple moral claims, living with that tension, and addressing it appropriately in major moral choices.

I find this especially important for religious groups, which can neglect other human beings in their moral focus on God. Yes, one's relationship with God is primary, but not the only requirement for godly living. Jesus recognized the temptation for religious people to fail to put God first but also acknowledged their temptation to claim to be putting

God first to justify their immoral treatment of other people. He condemned the Pharisees for using faithfulness to God and church as an excuse to violate family moral claims:

"For God said, "Honor your father and mother" and "Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death." But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is "devoted to God," they are not to

**One's relationship with God is primary, but not the only requirement for godly living. Jesus recognized the temptation for religious people to fail to put God first but also acknowledged their temptation to claim to be putting God first to justify their immoral treatment of other people.**

"honor their father or mother" with it. Thus, you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition'" (Matthew 15:4-6).

Another moral claim that churches sometimes marginalize is their relationship with local and national governments. While loyalty to Jesus and God and the church family should be central, we have the Bible's moral reminder that we owe something to those that govern society: "'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's'" (Matthew 22:21). Boards should foster a desire to live

at peace with local communities and respond appropriately to government authorities (Romans 13). That will often require prayerful discussion and perhaps even sacrifice, and boards must adjudicate when a capitulation to local practice or demand violates other obligations. Space is inadequate to offer detailed illustrations in this area, but sharing land use and complying with local ordinances are often key demonstrations of a board's willingness to take seriously the moral

**Creating a moral matrix will serve as a reminder of one of the unique characteristics of God's moral leadership. While God seeks exclusive worship, He encourages us to love widely, not just Him.**

claims of the community. It is clear that there may come a time when school boards have to wrestle with a request by authorities that may violate God's law, but for the most part, the moral call to "live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18) should be central to decision making.

Creating a moral matrix will serve as a reminder of one of the unique characteristics of God's moral leadership. While God seeks exclusive worship, He encourages us to love

widely, not just Him. This ability to share love widely is one of the ultimate attributes of the Trinity. Jesus' command, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31), implies two simultaneous obligations: love for self and love for one's neighbor. In short, boards that keep track of the moral matrix of their responsibilities will likely be better at making decisions that help their communities. (See Sidebar 1 for suggestions.)

#### **5. Maintain individuality, mutuality, and submission.**

Growing ethics and doing morality as a board require social skills. When we seek to share our moral thinking with one another, and listen to the ideas of others, we will accomplish this more effectively if we embrace the belief that two (or more) minds can be better than one. Both humility and mutual submission can be fostered by a board chair. It takes a praying board to get to a point where they consider others better than themselves (see Philippians 2:1-4). Submission is a difficult topic to broach in modern parlance, but it is an attitude and a culture for chairs to promote as they interact with their boards (see article by Bordes Henry Saturné on page 33).

#### **6. Understand that good moral processes create better moral thinking and outcomes.**

Practicing individuality, mutuality, and submission requires that school boards have in place a process to hear and adjudicate differing and sometimes competing moral claims. While techniques are available to facilitate this task (see Cooper's *Making Judgments Without Being Judgmental*),<sup>12</sup> implementing them requires a fundamental belief that judgment can be good. As people of "the judgment" (Revelation 3:14-22), Adventists should have a special appreciation, at least theologically, for how grace-oriented a good judgment can be in resolving conflict, promoting reconciliation, and vindicating good. God in-

vites us to be like Him, in both love and judgment. If God can engage in love and righteousness while practicing justice and judgment, we can, too, with humility and prayer.

Unfortunately, many have created an incorrect separation between grace and judgment. This is not appropriate, either biblically or in practice. Judgment can be redemptive—for example, good judges not only seek to uphold the law but also consider creative ways to bring the violator back into compliance with the law and to make restitution to his or her victims. Experiencing consequences can help a person see the negative impact of his or her actions. Strong, vindictive language can take the eyes of the offender off that reality and cause him or her to focus on individual personalities. Keeping calm allows people to stay focused on the potential for learning from judgment. I found it useful to reread Zechariah 3, John 8, and parts of Luke 15 to remind myself of how God deals with offenders in judgment. Board chairs can do much to create this atmosphere of redemptive judgment in moral deliberations.

#### **7. Practice moral courage and lead change.**

As suggested here, there is a lot involved in moral leadership for boards. However, board members should never feel as if they have arrived in this moral work. Proverbs 4:18 suggests that human beings will continue to need to change to mature morally: "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day" (NASB).<sup>13</sup> Boards can expect that progressive revelation will come to them as they wrestle through issues and stay grounded in biblical and historic learning. Such a progressive view is fundamental to Adventism (see the preamble to the *28 Fundamental Beliefs*<sup>14</sup> and for further discussion, Jon Paulien's analysis of the pre-

*Continued on page 46*

## Sidebar 2. Examples of a Moral Matrix of Social Responsibilities.

The board chair can create many types of charts to help members discuss the board's many moral responsibilities to others. Creating it and filling it in is the point of learning moral ideas. Listed below are some template charts and sample items for discussion. The key is to list different relationships in thinking about moral claims.

**For shorter discussions, a simple chart like this can work:**

The relationship with . . .	What they need . . .	What we need from them . . .	Some signs of a moral breakdown	Ways we can improve this relationship
Individuals				
Example: (Teacher's Name)	Respect Freedom to teach as he or she sees best	Uphold professional standards of practice	We micromanage his or her lesson plans.  After receiving training about best practices, he or she fails to implement these techniques.	Give him or her a trial period and mentoring as he or she attempts to implement innovative teaching strategies. Provide oversight but do not attempt to micromanage the process.
Institutions (Groups)				
Society				

**A more complex matrix each member can fill out for general application or related to a specific issue being debated:**

The relationship with . . .	What I/those in relationship with me want from this experience . . .	What I need from them during this experience . . .	What aspect of this issue is most harmful or can seriously damage this relationship?	I would better align with this relationship if I . . .
God				
Self				
My Family				
Clients				
Coworkers				
Employer				
Constituents of the school				

Continued from page 44

amble<sup>15</sup>). Boards can even play a role in applying a progressive form of moral wisdom to create energized and growing schools. This form of wisdom is evident throughout Scripture and in our heritage as a church (see Roy Gane's *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* on ways biblical and historical laws interact with moral growth and moral wisdom).<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

Boards can be competent and effective moral agents of change and play an important part in creating just and caring schools. This article discussed a few of the ways they can grow their competency and moral leadership. When this is done well, boards can help promote a strong Christian culture where people understand, appreciate, and apply moral ideals and biblical principles. They can fulfill Christ's dream to create a place where His light is reflected by His followers like a city set on a hill that is seen from afar (Matthew 5:14), and people praise God as a result. Schools can revitalize communities as they breed authenticity, transparency, and integrity.

Poorly managed boards can create one of two extremes—a dry desert where moral rigidity stifles love, creativity, human sensitivities, and growth, or a place where moral relativism grows the cancer of moral chaos, unclear expectations, and harmful practices. But as Hebrews 6:9 reminds us, “we are convinced of better things in your case”: and well-run boards can become the moral agents they need to be to help nurture and grow their schools. ✍

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*This article has been peer reviewed.*

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Craig Mattson

# Preparing to Serve on the Local K-12 School Board



**C**ongratulations! You have just accepted the invitation to serve on the local K-12 school board. Now what? Our schools are sacred—consecrated to God; each institution is an important link in a global network dedicated to educating children in Christ. A new school board appointment or election is a call to service and thus will require preparation for the work. While there is much that could be said about being a new board member, I will discuss five best-practice points that helped me as I began my tenure on K-12 boards.

## 1. Learn About the School

The first step in training oneself for board service is to subscribe to all the school's communications and newsletters and request older copies of these documents (at least three-to-five years' worth of these materials should suffice). New board members should invest the time necessary to read through current and past issues of school newsletters and publications to become familiar with the rhythms of the school and the nature of the school's operations. New board members should also review past board

minutes and financial statements, educating themselves about the issues that the school has navigated and the structures that govern its operations.

Second, new board members should obtain adequate training. Most schools and/or conference offices offer some form of school board orientation. If no orientation is offered, then there are still abundant resources available for new board members to use for training. In 2017, the North American Division Education Department published a *Manual for School Boards of Seventh-day Adventist Schools*.<sup>1</sup> This publication provides an overview of school board operations that every new school board member will find beneficial. The manual covers issues relating to school-board organization and function, effective board membership and meetings, board subcommittee work, school finance, curriculum and instruction, as well as a range of other key topics. Another resource that a new school board appointee can access is the Adventist Learning Community (ALC),<sup>2</sup> which maintains an archive of training videos and courses, including a series that focuses specifically on school-board training and orientation. In his one-hour training video on the ALC, Larry Blackmer, for-

mer North American Division vice president for education, discusses the characteristics that make for a successful school board term of service. These two resources provide a distinctly Adventist orientation that will help new board members better understand their call to service.

## 2. Understand Both Governance and Operations

On what kind of board have you been called to serve? The work of the board can be very different, depending on the size of the school and the approach the school board takes to school governance and operations. Many school boards operate as a board of trustees, concerned largely with broad governance issues such as safeguarding the school's missional philosophy and working to develop institutional vision. This governance-centered work is often found in larger schools that have strong administrative teams that manage the day-to-day operations of the institution. Governance questions are often connected to a school's philosophy, purpose, and strategic planning goals. Examples of governance questions

may include: Should the school start a new academic program? Is the board comfortable renting the facility to non-Adventist groups? Should the school consider buying or selling land? Or, should the handbook be changed to address a new concern or trend? These governance-level questions can dramatically affect the school culture, depending on how they are dealt with by the board. It is helpful for new board members to know the history and range of topics that the board has navigated. This is where a review of the past board minutes becomes a useful exercise.

While all school boards ought to deal with larger governance issues, some boards spend a great deal of time focusing on school operations. Smaller schools that do not employ a full-time administrator often rely on their school board members to assist with the administrative “heavy lifting.” School boards that spend a lot of time on operations may deal with questions such as how to fix broken playground equipment, how the Christmas program will be organized, when to schedule a school landscaping work bee, or how to manage the school’s pre-registration event. A school board that takes on these operational tasks can be of great assistance to a head teacher who also carries a full teaching load. However, a board that invests heavily on operations must not neglect larger governance issues. It is critically important for every school board to be deliberate about scheduling time for governance-level discussions. A review of school newsletters and publications can help familiarize new members with general school operations.

Time management has a direct relationship to discussions about school governance and operations. Board meetings will vary in length and frequency. For example, consider a board that meets for an average of two hours per month on a 10-month meeting schedule. This school board

**A school-board appointment is a call to serve—and service to the school should extend far beyond the boardroom. In the world of not-for-profit organizational leadership, it is an industry standard that board-level trustees are expected to contribute time, expertise, and money to the organization.**

has only 20 hours of governance time per school year. Viewing the board’s time from this perspective highlights the need to streamline discussions and keep board members focused on relevant and important issues. Highly effective school boards use time wisely and strike a balance between governance and operations that is right for the institution. As a new board member, it is appropriate for you to question the time value and weight that is given to agenda items.

### **3. Be the Giving Trustee**

A school-board appointment is a call to serve—and service to the school should extend far beyond the boardroom. In the world of not-for-profit organizational leadership, it is an industry standard that board-level trustees are expected to contribute time, expertise, and money to the organization.<sup>3</sup> This expectation is reinforced in our church by Philanthropic Services for Institutions, a North American Division entity, in their *Model for Academy Philanthropy*.<sup>4</sup> This organization offers senior academy grants based on compliance with set criteria that includes financial commitments by all trustees. A personal financial commitment to the school should accompany board appointments. This commitment should not be seen as a burden, but as an extension of service and a blessing to both the board member and the school. This invests the soul of the trustee in the work, “for where your

treasure is, there your heart will be also.”<sup>5</sup> The amount given is far less important than the systematic benevolence provided to the school by the trustee.

In addition to financial commitment, board members should also commit to being public servants and vocal supporters of the school. Volunteering, even just an hour or two a month, can make a big difference for the teachers, administrators, students, and parents that a board member serves. Not only will volunteerism be appreciated, but it will also give the new board member a much more intimate view of the school, leading to better-informed discussions and wiser decisions. New board members should be creative in thinking about volunteerism and not just look at what the school needs to operate.

Board members can be a blessing to the stakeholders of the school in many ways. New board members could consider sponsoring a staff lunch, organizing a parent-appreciation event, volunteering to operate a marketing booth for the school at a local community event or fair, offering to read with a student, helping a teacher with grading or supervision, or starting a focused prayer effort. One commitment that all new school-board members ought to make is to show up to all school-organized events.

Board members should also commit to being vocal supporters of the schools they serve. This means being an intentional advocate and a positive public voice for the school. A trustee or board member who cannot speak well of the school he or she serves should step down: "If you can't be a cheerleader for the campus and its work, you can't be a good trustee, and you should invest your time in a place or project you can cheer for."<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Practice Personal Accountability

A commitment to serve on a school board must be accompanied by a serious and prayerful commitment to ethical conduct. There are numerous ways to abuse power if the board member is not conscientious about his or her role. Most school boards will ask new members to sign statements relating to confidentiality and conflict of interest with the intent to keep board discussions private. This commitment to privacy allows for honest discourse that is critical for successful governance. Highly functional school boards will invariably have disagreement and vigorous discussion before building consensus. This is part of healthy board operations. However, ethical conduct outside of the boardroom is as critical as participation inside of the boardroom. When it comes to the responsibilities of a board member, there is no such thing as a casual conversation. While disagreement plays a part of the governance process, highly effective school boards will emerge united behind the consensus message and the decisions that have been reached. Each member's personal conversations and conduct must reflect this consensus.

The importance of appropriate conduct by the board members outside the board room cannot be overstated. The local school board has broad authority. However, this authority is a delegated authority and exists only when the board has been officially called to order. In other words, the authority exists within the body of the board and not in any one member. This observation should properly in-

form a board member's conduct both in and out of committee. Board members must avoid behaviors such as leaking sensitive information, publicly disagreeing with voted board actions, exerting managerial influence with school teachers or administrators, and using their board membership to achieve personal gain or to benefit family and/or friends. A call to serve on the local school board is also a call to personal integrity.

#### 5. Know Your Board's Endgame

Board terms of service do not last forever. Eventually, the assignment will conclude, and the board member will have the opportunity to look back on his or her work. Satisfaction will be found in a job well done. As board members reflect on their work, satisfaction should be found in the fact that they were good stewards of the financial resources entrusted to the board and also intentionally and actively advocated for the school both in the church as well as in specific venues in the wider community. A successful term of service will have supported the material needs of the school as well as the emotional, social, and spiritual needs of its teachers. Lastly, a successful board tenure will include a voice that clearly contributed to shaping an exciting institutional vision, guiding the school into a stronger future. In Adventist schools, there is eternal satisfaction in work that leads our children and young adults into loving relationships with Jesus Christ. A call to board service is nothing short of a call to engage in one of our church's oldest, hardest, and most rewarding ministries. You have been called to serve—now roll up your sleeves and get to work! ✍

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# The Adventist Professionals' Network

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the North American Division, reported in 2017 that 274 schools were closed in 15 years.<sup>8</sup> These are, indeed, challenging times for all levels of education, and many proclaim that the tuition-driven model is broken and unsustainable.<sup>9</sup> According to John Farber of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), “We can no longer rely on our traditional strategy of increasing tuition year after year and fund-raising often for our endowments and programming.”<sup>10</sup>

Hard-pressed by the financial crunch, educational leaders are looking for solutions to increase and/or diversify their sources of revenue, with mixed success, from partnering with investors to finance the cost of constructing new, non-tuition-generating facilities such as boutiques and hotels<sup>11</sup> to offering deep tuition discounts,<sup>12</sup> launching innovative and/or new online programs, or recruiting more international students to improve their institutions’ cash flow.

Several schools have sought additional revenue by turning their eyes toward the government,<sup>13</sup> in addition to pursuing large donations from the private sector. Yet, these fundraising methods come with their own challenges—primarily a shifting of priorities. David Kirp laments that “priorities in higher education are determined less by the institution itself than by multiple ‘constituencies’—students, donors, corporations, politicians—each promoting its vision of the ‘responsive’ (really the obeisant) institution.”<sup>14</sup>

However, challenges always come with opportunities. These tumultuous times should motivate our institutions to work in closer cooperation, the main conclusion of the Chicago Summit,<sup>15</sup> and also an approach advocated by Jeffrey Selingo in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: “There is a better option: true collaboration with other universities, in areas from academics to administrative management.”<sup>16</sup> To accomplish such ambitious goals, we need, both at the board level and in the executive suite, leaders who are “anticipatory thinkers, tolerant of risks and failure, and courageous decision makers.”<sup>17</sup> Financial challenges can test an institution’s commitment to mission; yet such challenges require leaders who are resolute, knowledgeable, visionary, innovative, and deeply spiritual.

### In This Issue

This special issue of THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION focuses on the role and responsibilities of board members, who provide leadership and oversight to an impressive global system of more than 8,000 Adventist educational institutions teaching students from early childhood through the graduate level.<sup>18</sup>

The educational ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is directly connected to its mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels’ Messages in preparation for His soon return.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, serving on a board is a ministry. It is essentially a spiritual matter. This is why two articles in this issue address the profound impact of board members’ spirituality on the institutions they govern (Bordes Henry Saturné) and the

moral and ethical work school board members are called to do—a sacred duty that must be exercised with the highest level of integrity and fairness (Duane Covrig).

Additional articles address 10 practical ways board chairs can be more effective in their important responsibility (Ella Smith Simmons); the personal experience of a college president working with her board in the Asian context (Arceli Rosario); counsel to help K-12 board members stay out of legal trouble (Lyndon G. Furst); valuable guidance to help board members fulfil their fiduciary duties of care, loyalty, and obedience as they attentively oversee the finances of the institutions they govern (Annetta M. Gibson); an exploration of the complexities of building a working relationship with various chartering authorities around the world (Hudson Kibuuka); and, tips for preparing to serve on a school board (Craig Mattson).

Additional articles in future issues throughout the remainder of 2019 will address effective governance of institutional boards (Karnik and Joseph Doukmetzian); professional learning for board members, who also have the responsibility to ensure that adequate and relevant professional learning opportunities are afforded to the faculty and staff (Betty Bayer); and, preventing school board members from “going rogue” (Robert Crux).

### Called to Lead

When trustees look at a landscape full of challenges, they are often tempted to ask the question: “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” The answer remains, “Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them” (2 Kings 6:15-17, NKJV).<sup>20</sup> Trustees also have precious counsel from Ellen White: “Let us be hopeful and courageous . . . . He knows our every necessity . . . . He has means for the removal of every difficulty, that those who serve Him and respect the means He employs may be sustained.”<sup>21</sup>

We must focus on our mission and preserve the uniqueness of Adventist education.<sup>22</sup> As trustees and board members, let us embrace our calling. As teachers and administrators, let us learn more about how school boards function so that we may collaborate with them in supporting and extending the mission of our schools. Let us not focus on the raging waters of the Jordan River, but on the mighty hand of our God (Numbers 13:30; Joshua 14:12; Psalm 20:6-9).

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As coordinator of this issue, Dr. Saturné assisted in all aspects of its development, from identifying topics, authors, and reviewers to providing input on manuscripts and answering questions. The Editorial Staff of the JOURNAL express heartfelt appreciation for his assistance throughout the planning and production of this issue.

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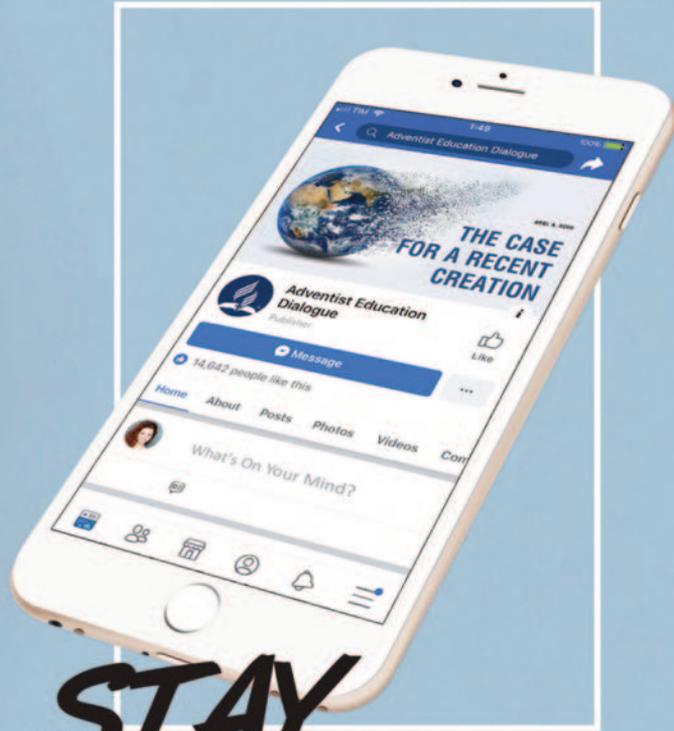
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