

The Plan to Reduce Our NAD Unions

In recent years, we have repeatedly pleaded with our leaders to stop treating the historic believers in the church as though they were second-class citizens. Those who adhere to the historic beliefs of our denomination ought to be valued. It is they who are the bulwarks, upholding the doctrines and standards which have made us what we are.

Yet, time and again, local pastors have ridiculed and forced out solid members and, when appeal is made to the conference office, the conference office has sided with the liberal pastors. This is going on right now.

We have warned that, by this policy, not only is leadership getting rid of the best in the church; they are also saying good-bye to a significant part of the denomination's financial support. The financial backbone of the church has been the true-hearted believers. But they are being shoved out, with no one they can appeal to for redress.

The curse causeless does not come. And it is steadily increasing. The predicted financial crisis is rapidly overtaking our denomination.

"Most conferences have laid off office workers and pastors. In many conferences some pastors have four or even five churches. One larger conference now has about half the office staff and about 40 fewer pastors than it did eight years ago, even with its large increase in membership."—*Review, April 28, 1994.*

"The financial crisis is also reaching to our colleges, because the news has spread about the conditions prevailing in them. New theology teachings, combined with worldly entertainment of various kinds, cause parents to turn away in disgust—and send their youth elsewhere for a college education.

"The squeeze on dollars affects all of our schools and colleges and universities and other entities dependent for support upon our tithe dollars.

"One small Adventist college just laid off 14 staff members, and another is considering the same. Another college is trying to find an extra \$500,000 for operating costs."—*Ibid.*

One way to solve this mammoth problem would be to wholeheartedly return to our historic beliefs and standards. Those who adamantly did not wish to do so could be shown where the exit is located. A plea should be published and sent out to the faithful, who have repeatedly been so terribly mistreated, to return to the fold. But actions and practices would have to match words, if the historic believers are going to return. There would have to be a genuine return to the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy teachings by our denomination. And how grateful we all would be if that were to happen!

All the faithful ask for is submission on the part of everyone to our Bible-Spirit of Prophecy heritage!

But, refusing to take that noble course, our leaders are instead devising ways to cut costs, programs, workers, and even entire church entities.

"Without a doubt, unless trends change there will be reductions, and many programs will be affected. From the positive side, our church will be driven to do in difficult times what it should have done in good times—prioritize, clearly identify duplicate programs, and eliminate those aspects of church operation that provide limited returns in terms of our world mission. The area most vulnerable to reductions in appropriations is our interdivision worker (missionary) program."—*Review, May 5, 1994.*

"I don't know the full answer, but it is a question being asked by a General Conference committee looking at church structure and governance. And it is a question that the Pacific Union, for one, has been asking during its multi-year study commission, brainstorming how best to administer the work in a union with almost 200,000 members.

"Amazing. This is the denomination which, only a few short years ago, was able to come up with half a million dollars trying to put a nine-member church in Hawaii out of business, by means of a trademark lawsuit.

"Yet another union I know is asking the same question, with leaders talking about realigning conference and even

union lines, and joining schools thereby eliminating certain administrative units, to save overhead costs."—*Review, April 28, 1994.*

Possible plans are being discussed to sell off church properties, here and there, if necessary.

"We also need to look at all related operations. Some operations that have served the church well for years are causing increased administrative problems. Every such program needs to be reviewed, and if it is not helping to accomplish our mission, alternatives should be reviewed. The Adventist Church around the world has enormous capital assets. Some significant assets could be sold if they are determined not to be of core value to mission."—*Review, May 5, 1994.*

Any and every possibility of cost-reduction is being considered. They are even considering cutting down on church leaders!

"Without a doubt, the church must address the issue of superstructure. We are spending too much money on administration. If we would be willing to address the matter of adequate administrative structure to support needed church programs, we could free a lot of money for the church's basic mission."—*Ibid.*

The above article noted a US \$1 million decrease in regular Sabbath School mission offerings last year and a projected 8 percent cut in appropriations to the world church in 1995.

The situation is becoming so desperate that it is being recognized that nothing in the denomination should be considered off-limits for major cuts.

"[We should be] scrutinizing every conference, union, division, and General Conference entity themselves and their activities and asking whether some of the money could be better used someplace else."—*Review, April 28, 1994.*

How much easier it would be to welcome home the faithful who have been driven out of the church over the last decade! Would not that involve far less agony?

One of the plans urgently under consideration at this time is that of eliminating several entire union offices in the

North American Division!—Just get rid of them entirely!

In February 1994, 90 percent of the NAD's conference presidents convened at Pine Springs Ranch, Colorado. During the meeting, one of the conference presidents presented a plan whereby the nine present unions would be slashed to three!

Has the situation gotten so bad, that we must consider getting rid of a majority of our union offices, administrators and staffs!

The three proposed new geographic divisions would be (1) Canada, (2) Eastern U.S., east of the Mississippi, and (3) Western U.S., west of the Mississippi.

Careful analysis has revealed that, by so doing, it would save the denomination nearly \$100 million in less than the first five years alone.

By action of the assembled presidents, the plan was handed to the standing committee on structure to consider. Chaired by B.J. Christensen, president of the Southern California Conference, a preliminary feasibility report is to be given to the presidents at a fall, 1994 meeting.

Another plan to cut down or eliminate the union offices was suggested several years ago and was immediately rejected as out of hand. But the financial crisis continues to worsen each year, and *this time* the possibility is being considered. That alone is remarkable.

Under this proposed plan, each of the three union offices would have, not administrative staffs, but only coordinating staffs. This would mean each one would have far less workers.

Whereas, at the present time, 10 percent of each conference tithe goes to support union offices; under the proposed plan only one percent would be allocated for that purpose, plus 4 percent which would pass through it from the conference to the General Conference.

Moneywise, how would this stack up? Consider this:

Currently, \$400 million in tithe is collected each year by the conferences in North America. Of that, 10 percent (\$40 million) is sent on to the unions. Under the three-union system, only 1 percent (\$4 million) would be sent on for union operating expense, and 4 percent (\$16 million) would be passed through the

union offices to the General Conference for its own and overseas disbursements.

This would save \$20 million per year, which the local NAD conferences would not have to pass on to the unions. (Unfortunately, we have not told what the conferences would do with that extra money. That is not part of the plan. Just providing more money for the conferences to spend is not the solution to the spiritual, moral, and belief problems in our church.)

Under the proposed plan, here is how much would be saved annually by the territory now served by each of the present nine union offices: Atlantic Union: \$1,802,257; Canadian Union: \$1,125,520; Columbia Union: \$2,617,579; Lake Region: \$1,840,816; Mid-America Union: \$1,342,335; North Pacific Union: \$2,412,320; Pacific Union: \$4,723,742; Southern Union: \$3,937,201; Southwestern Union: \$1,540,333.

The North American Division's total annual saving would be \$21,342,104.

Yet the underlying problem is well-known to our church treasurers: Tithes and offerings are down because (1) so many of the best givers have left the church, and (2) those who remain are more worldly and give less to the church. You see, leadership has sided with pastors and members with the lowest standards and the most nominal beliefs. Yet those are the ones least likely to contribute as freely to church projects.

Our denomination has had a 43 percent increase in membership since 1978 (from 566,453 to 807,696), yet the amount being donated has not increased as fast as the membership. Yes, there has been a nominal increase, but it does not match per capita increase. Add to this the problem that the more members there are, the more expenses there are in caring for them!

"In the same 15 years [since 1978] North America has created 759 new congregations (up from 3,850 to 4,609), which has placed additional burdens on the tithe funds for pastoral care."—*Review, April 21, 1994.*

"Today its leaders [in the NAD] on all levels well know the struggle they have been undergoing in recent years to balance their continually growing expenses with their income."

"As a result, almost every conference, union, school, and institution that is dependent—wholly or partially—upon tithe has undergone painful cutbacks of personnel and programs in recent years.

"And if the giving does not increase immediately, more changes are on the horizon: cuts in personnel, programs, and subsidies, more redistricting of congregations, and smaller cost of living increases for the church's remaining employees and its host of retirees—now more than 11,500."—*Ibid.*

The problem of paying the retirees should not be a problem at all. But, as discussed at length in an earlier tract study, General Conference leaders have, for several decades, been loaning out the money in the retirement funds. As we showed in that study, the situation is getting so bad that, ere long, there will not be enough gold bricks to prop open the door to the room that holds the retirees' retirement funds. It has been loaned out to Loma Linda University, and elsewhere, for expensive projects.

Yes, there are problems with inflation, job-layoffs, and all the rest. But, in this tract, we have named the one change our pastors and leaders could make which would bring God's blessing and a return of the cream of Adventism. One writer concludes on this somber note:

"Not fully knowing all the reasons behind the hesitancy, inability, or choice of members not to return more tithe and give more World Mission Fund offerings, we can only guess at what we might do to encourage more giving."—*Review, April 21, 1994.*

Guess no more. The answer is clear.

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