

AUSTRALIAN UNION CONFERENCE

**SUMMARY OF THE “CHURCH STRUCTURE REVIEW REPORT”:
Data Gathering and Initial Recommendations**

Conducted June – November 2017

December 2017

**This document is a summary of the Church Structure Review Report,
followed by an Appendix of key findings.**

The document is being made available to all stakeholders and interested parties.



A message from the Australian Union Conference (AUC) president to the reader:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia has an exciting opportunity to create a thriving disciple making movement across Australia. The following report reveals an enthusiasm throughout the Church to be both effective and efficient as we go about fulfilling the mission God has given us as a movement leading to the return of Jesus.

At AUC we are committed to positively leading the Church forward addressing and implementing the changes needed to respond to the matters raised. We are certainly listening carefully to the many voices from our members. Already the AUC executive committee has formally taken an action to proceed with the outcomes from the “listening” phase of this mission critical project. Change will take place, which we pray will have an impact on the mission of the church in this country.

It is important that such changes are made in consultation with local conference executive committees, who are the elected representative bodies for the church in each region across the country. And further, there will be continued consultation with the wider church on key issues.

One key ingredient to the Church acting wisely and effectively as change is both considered and implemented is prayer. I want to invite you as a church member, your local church, church employees and leaders to join us in praying as you have never prayed before. I make that commitment and ask you to do the same.

Pastor Jorge Munoz

INTRODUCTION:

The Australian Union Conference (AUC) is the national administrative body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia, based in Ringwood, Victoria. It is responsible for providing support to nine local conferences across Australia and linking the Church in Australia to the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist movement. The AUC is governed by a mix of Church employees and lay members under the title of 'AUC Executive Committee' which now meets four times per year, two of those for two days each to consider and action a variety of agenda items.

During recent years the AUC has been alerted to the fact that the Adventist Church in Australia is not growing and some genuine questions have been asked by members and employees as to whether the current Church structure and operation are applicable and/or efficient in the current changing world.

In response to these facts the AUC initiated a substantial Review to seek information and data from all stakeholders across Australia with a simple question: "How can we operate Church in a more effective and efficient manner?"

The AUC Executive Committee tasked the Church Structure Review Team, comprising the AUC executive officers, all local conference presidents and a number of lay members, to undertake a multi-staged process of assessing the current church structure and to make recommendations as to how it might efficiently structure for mission in the future. Mr. Anthony Mitchell (lay member and professional management / organisational change specialist) was assigned by the AUC executive as the facilitator of the process, assisted by Mr. Lindsay Borgas (lay member and retired senior executive / businessman) and Pastor Ken Vogel (Australian Union Conference Associate Secretary). The first stages of the process were to conduct an extensive data gathering exercise and make some initial recommendations. It sought the views of many of the Church's stakeholder groups across Australia, in the church, school and aged care entities¹.

In order to achieve this, over 70 focus groups were conducted around the nation and a Facebook page was created that resulted in around 21,000 posts, comments and reactions. The AUC is very grateful for the time, effort and commitment of the many stakeholders that contributed to the process.

A full Church Structure Review Report on the consolidated views of stakeholders across Australia was evaluated by the Church Structure Review Team and recommended to the AUC Executive Committee. The AUC Executive Committee accepted and fully endorsed the report on 29th November 2017, approving the implementation of its findings in consultation with local conferences.

REPORT CONTEXT — OPERATIONS AND STRUCTURE ("MISSION EXCELLENCE")

The AUC Executive Committee was briefed about the process of data gathering and informed that in order to reach a view in relation to the 'structure' of the church, it was necessary to broadly understand the current day-to-day practices that take place across the various levels and functions of the organisation. In doing so, it was discovered that there were many 'operational factors' that needed to

¹ Laity (elders; youth and other interested church members); pastors and chaplains; school principals; local conference officers; directors of Adventist education; leaders of Adventist aged care; local conference departmental personnel; union officers; union departmental personnel; South Pacific Division officers.

be addressed in order to fulfill the mission of the church *in addition* to the structural issues already under study. As a result, the Church Structure Review Report ultimately covered *both operational and structural issues*. Consequently, the AUC executive has re-titled the project “Mission Excellence”, reflecting the dual nature and focus of the initiative, and commissioned action plans to address the operational and structural factors.

KEY FINDINGS:

Stakeholders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church across Australia have spoken and made it very clear that ‘mission’ must be the agenda that drives church structure. They have given strong direction that, the *local church* must be the hub on which all operational and governance structures must focus.

The following is a summary of six key findings of the data gathering exercise², and the expression of the stakeholders – ‘the voice of the Australian Seventh-day Adventist Church’.

1. “Let’s invite the Holy Spirit to enliven and lead us”

As a church, we need to pray as we have never prayed before; know and understand our Bibles to a far greater extent; and personally and collectively grow in our spiritual lives. This, above all, was the most important factor that was identified to improve the life and mission of the church.

2. “Let’s unite, integrate and operate *as one*”

Many identified that we operate in ‘silos’ and “reinvent the wheel” at almost every level of our organisation, right down to local church. Much of this stems from the ‘vertical’ structure that we have operated under for many decades. However, this approach is highly inefficient and takes a heavy personal toll on employees and volunteers. We must therefore structure ourselves in a much more “integrated” and horizontal manner, *working together* more effectively as ‘teams’ rather than on an individual basis. This applies to all levels and functions across the church, school and aged care entities.

For example, one area of obvious benefit is for our schools and the churches in their immediate vicinity to collectively and cohesively work together to share the gospel and the Advent message with the tremendous number of students that attend our schools, and their families — many of whom are not Seventh-day Adventists and some not even Christian.

3. “Let’s fully focus on our vision and mission at local church / ground level and genuinely connect with our communities — both internally and externally”

Local Church:

The ‘vision’ of the Australian Church is to “create a thriving, disciple making movement” across the country. Many people resonated with this vision and were excited by its potential! There was a strong desire for us to “fully focus” on it, and to spread our Advent message. However, there is work to be done in a number of our churches across the nation to achieve this. While some of our churches are truly ‘community friendly’ (possessing the ability to ‘attract’ and ‘hold’ new members), there are many

² Further details on each finding located in ‘Appendix’

that are not. Creating a culture within our churches that ‘genuinely connects’ with our communities both internally and externally is a critical imperative for us if we are to achieve our vision and mission.

Another idea expressed was that the church could consider more extensively using ‘life groups’ and ‘centres of influence’ as outreach hubs. These, in and of themselves, could become formal ‘*extensions*’ of the local church. This would provide an *extended reach*, enabling us to engage with a wider segment of the Australian community — some of whom would not (initially) want to step inside a church.

A further focus was to more fully empower our youth for leadership and mission, and, in particular, provide more structured initiatives for young adults. Participants confirmed that the church is losing both of these groups at an alarming rate. Providing tools, resources and mentoring for both groups in the areas of personal spiritual development and discipleship is vital.

Adventist Education:

There is an exciting opportunity for our schools to adopt the disciple making vision throughout Australia. Our schools can be ‘outreach hubs’ on multiple levels, connecting with local churches to achieve our vision and mission.

Adventist Aged Care:

Our aged care facilities also provide an opportunity for witness in many areas, particularly to the families of residents and the many employees who serve so faithfully in the organization who are not members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

4. “Let’s release the vision to our lay members, and bring resources to the front line”

In order to achieve our vision, we need a great many more people to be actively engaged in front line work! While the disciple making vision encourages this, it was strongly suggested that we go a step further and that *lay members be provided with the opportunity to directly engage in “ministry type” roles and “church growth / planting” activities*. This opens up a world of potential opportunities for lay members, and would enable ministers to change their role to that of ‘trainer and coach’ and spend more time developing new territories and congregations.

In terms of the use of resources within the Adventist system, stakeholders believe that they must be focused more directly on the local church rather than at the higher levels of church organisation. A greater level of finance (including tithe) should be directed at local church level for mission activities.

5. “Let’s be excellent at everything we do”

Given the important and critical nature of our mission, stakeholders suggested that we be ‘excellent’ in all aspects of our operation in order to advance our work. There were a great many responses to the question “How can we do things better across all aspects of the church system?” In general, however, the dominant ideas were to: (a) develop formal accountability processes across the system, (b) increase our leadership bench-strength at all levels and develop mentoring and coaching programs throughout the network from top to bottom, (c) significantly enhance our communication, internally and externally (d) be more transparent in our operations (including finances), (e) develop a system of ‘specialists’ rather than continue with a system of ‘generalists’, (f) be better at strategic planning and implementation processes, and (g) enhance and embrace technology for mission and internal efficiency.

In addition, it was strongly felt that specialists and professionals should be charged with a greater level of responsibility in administering the school and aged care operations, while at the same time *enhancing, bolstering and formalising the spiritual charters* of these entities with local churches and the wider Church.

Finally, given the size of the Australian Seventh-day Adventist church, school and aged care operations, functional roles such as HR, procurement, IT, etc. should be provided on a national basis across the whole system. Moreover, the national church should take a more pro-active leadership role and promote the church and its mission through Australia-wide marketing and social media platforms.

6. “Let’s efficiently structure our governance and administration for mission”

Given all of the above, a number of structural initiatives were recommended.

In line with previous professional recommendations, a single education entity to operate all of the Adventist schools throughout Australia was recommended. Similarly, a single Adventist aged care network to operate all of the aged care facilities was recommended.

In terms of church operations, a ‘district/network’ structure was recommended for local churches, thereby enabling necessary resources to come closer to the front line and a more integrated / team approach be adopted. This ‘network model’ to be developed (and initially trialed) would provide a means by which ministers and churches would work together thus enabling them to collaborate in a more targeted and intentional way for mission in a particular region.

The overall structure of how Conferences and the Union operate in Australia is yet to be determined. This will be the subject of ‘modeling’ and further consultation with the church’s stakeholders, bearing in mind that, overwhelmingly, stakeholders asserted the view that: (a) we are “over governed and over managed”, and (b) that we urgently need a significant number of ministers and relevant personnel that are currently in offices redeployed into local churches and field operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The AUC executive committee responded positively to the above report and has now made a commitment to move from the initial data gathering stage into action, as follows:

1. To explore, in consultation with the relevant local conference executive committees, developing a single Adventist Aged Care system.
2. To explore, in consultation with the local conference executive committees, developing a single Adventist School system.
3. To explore and develop an implementation plan, and conduct some trials of the district/network model in a few locations around Australia in consultation with the relevant local conference executive committees.
4. That the Church Structure Review Team, under the banner of 'Mission Excellence', develop and implement an action plan for the 'operational issues' that have arisen from the data gathering phase of the structure review.
5. To explore, in consultation with the local conference executive committees, ways to create greater efficiencies and/or reduce the management and governance of the corporate administrative structure of the Church within Australia.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

For this Church Structure Review Report to have an impact on the effectiveness and efficiencies of the church across Australia, the full report on the voice of the stakeholders will need to be shared in detail with all local conference executive committees. This will be done as early as possible in 2018.

Operational Recommendations:

An action plan will be written for the operational initiatives and a number of teams of lay people and church employees established to assist in the implementation process, in consultation with the various conferences and their executive committees.

Structural Recommendations:

Implementing the structural recommendations will be progressed by the AUC in conjunction with the local conferences and their respective executive committees. More specific consultation with stakeholders will be conducted over time. Ultimately, any structural change will need to be approved by each of the conference constituency meetings.

Local Church Initiatives:

The disciple making vision may immediately be implemented in local churches, along with initiatives that will enhance the mission of the church at local level.

CONCLUSION

Clearly this initial Church Structure Review Report outlines a landmark cultural and operational shift in church and church entity operations and structure in Australia. In order for this to progress, it will require the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia to move forward as one, to unite in mission and excellence. Everyone, without exception, has a role to play.

We pray that God will guide each person in their work for Him, and in this important process of advancing the gospel and the Advent message throughout Australia.

APPENDIX

The following are extractions providing further details on the six key findings from the Church Structure Review Report.

- 1. Let's invite the Holy Spirit to enliven and lead us.**
 - 1.1 Pray as we have never prayed before.
 - 1.2 Really know and understand our Bibles with a personal faith.
 - 1.3 Seek to personally and collectively grow in our spiritual lives.

- 2. Let's unite, integrate and operate as one.**
 - 2.1 Unite our work in a fully integrated organization – remove the “silo” approach from every element of the life and work of the Church.
 - 2.2 Unite and integrate our schools, aged care and local churches for mission.
 - 2.3 Acknowledge the spiritual calling for both pastors and teachers.
 - 2.4 Unite under a single, clear brand identity.

- 3. Let's fully focus on our vision and mission at local church / ground level and genuinely connect with our communities – both internally and externally.**
 - 3.1 Local Church
 - 3.1.1 Be a more outreach structured Church.
 - 3.1.2 Reach out to community through *relationships*.
 - 3.1.3 Build strong internal relationships, ensuring members feel like they 'belong' to a vibrant and caring community.
 - 3.1.4 Be much more welcoming, tolerant and open minded.
 - 3.1.5 Fully adopt the disciple making vision.
 - 3.1.6 Utilise ADRA to a far greater extent to reach the community.
 - 3.1.7 Restore unhealthy churches.
 - 3.1.8 Re-define “church” for disciple making.
 - 3.1.9 Local church buildings – warm and community friendly; expand use beyond Sabbath mornings.
 - 3.1.10 Update our church service format and times – innovate while remaining reverent.
 - 3.1.11 Use our health message to a far greater extent to reach the community.
 - 3.1.12 Use language and names that are contemporary and 'community friendly', not dated and ambiguous.
 - 3.1.13 Fully utilise the talents of *all people* at the local church.
 - 3.2 Adventist Education
 - 3.2.1 Adopt the disciple making vision across the Adventist school system.
 - 3.2.2 Use schools as outreach hubs.
 - 3.2.3 To the greatest extent possible, employ Adventist staff who are mission focused.
 - 3.3 Adventist Aged Care
 - 3.3.1 Actively connect and share our spiritual focus and values with all stakeholders and their families.

- 4. Let's release the vision to our lay members, and bring resources to the front line.**
 - 4.1 Local churches to be far less 'pastor dependent'.

- 4.2 Effect a paradigm shift – members to step up to local church ministry roles and to church planting.
- 4.3 Re-define the role of the pastor.
- 4.4 Focus more resources to the front line of the local church – people; tithe; etc.
- 4.5 Empower the 80% unengaged church members.
- 4.6 Really focus on quality training and mentoring for lay membership.
- 4.7 Motivate, empower and mentor our youth and young adults; provide opportunities and resources for growth, discipleship and leadership.

5. Let's be excellent at everything we do.

5.1 General Excellence

- 5.1.1 Do things very, very well – with a high degree of excellence.
- 5.1.2 Implement initiatives well, obtaining full depth of impact and potential. (Do less things 'very well' well rather than a wide range of initiatives with 'average' quality.)

5.2 Accountability

- 5.2.1 Significantly enhance 'accountability' across the entire Church organization.

5.3 Leadership

- 5.3.1 Grow our leadership capacity and output at all levels across all entities.

5.4 Communication

- 5.4.1 Significantly enhance communication and transparency processes.

5.5 Strategic Planning

- 5.5.1 Focus and prioritise through enhanced planning and implementation processes – regionally and nationally.

5.6 Technology

- 5.6.1 Use technology efficiently across the system. Multiple ideas to be explored.

5.7 Roles and Responsibilities

- 5.7.1 Ensure that administrators and managers have relevant expertise across the system, and hire and retain personnel based on "*fit, merit and performance*".
- 5.7.2 Enable and develop "specialist" personnel across the system – structure in such a way as to move away from a system of "generalists".
- 5.7.3 Formalise a national database of competencies, expertise and giftedness.

5.8 Change Management

- 5.8.1 Adopt change management principles when significant change is intended.

5.9 Internal Functions

- 5.9.1 Implement needed functional and professional resources across the system: human resources; communication; marketing; knowledge management; capability database; information technology; procurement; legal; OHS/WHS.

5.10 Governance

- 5.10.1 Assess governance issues across the whole church eg., election processes.
- 5.10.2 Seek General Conference support for amending the *Church Manual* so that certain parts are expressed with more flexibility and room is given for culture and style.
- 5.10.3 Establish a grievance / whistle blower policy and system.
- 5.10.4 Review the number of administrative entities and associated governance practices.

5.11 Australian Union Conference

- 5.11.1 Conduct national strategic planning.
- 5.11.2 Ministries to be integrated more with other levels.
- 5.11.3 More in-depth training and induction for conference leadership.

5.11.4 Facilitate the process of providing easy access to quality resources for members across Australia through multiple channels of access.

5.11.5 Stronger national voice (including social issues and religious freedom) and media/public image.

5.12 Local Conferences

5.12.1 Give full focus to churches – release administrative management of schools and aged care to specialists, while retaining spiritual leadership and involvement.

5.12.2 Review role and function of departments in line with this report.

5.12.3 Review processes for pastoral allocations.

5.13 Local Church

5.13.1 Streamline operations to enable greater focus on mission.

5.13.2 Clarify roles and responsibilities – redefine if necessary.

5.13.3 Seriously focus on small group ministry and work in teams.

5.13.4 Consider paid roles – yet ensure disciple making responsibility of all.

5.13.5 Where appropriate and possible, rationalise smaller churches and assets in city areas.

5.13.6 Better manage expectations for pastors and membership in light of redefined roles.

5.13.7 Develop appropriate operational models for small, medium and large churches in both city and rural areas; make this known to the wider church as options for how to structure efficiently.

5.14 Pastors

5.14.1 Empower pastors and enhance their professional status.

5.14.2 Enhance leadership ability to maximise mission at local church/school/aged care.

5.14.3 Provide for specialist pastors in a district context. Eg, youth, evangelists.

5.14.4 Effective handover when changing congregations/districts.

5.14.5 Accountability. Ensuring that the ‘essentials’ are being effectively undertaken at the local church.

5.14.6 Ensure that Avondale College is producing quality ministerial graduates relevant to the needs of the Church in Australia.

6. Let's efficiently structure our governance and administration for mission.

6.1 Church Functions

6.1.1 Bring infrastructure of the Church closer to the “front line” – district network model.

6.1.2 Deploy more budgets into the field.

6.1.3 Assess, model and recommend a corporate structure that addresses duplication and removes unnecessary administration.

6.2 Adventist Education

6.2.1 Strategically integrate churches and schools more effectively for mission.

6.2.2 Further develop the specialist role of chaplain.

6.2.3 Create a single Adventist education system across Australia, while assuring reasonable autonomy and empowerment for regions and local schools:

- Sustainable practices that avoid unnecessary duplication.
- Increase collective focus and consistency of both learning, ethos and mission.
- Agility and flexibility across the system.
- Move from generalists to effective use of leadership and specialists.
- Streamlined operational processes and efficiencies.

- Centralised and consistent policies and procedures.
- Sharing of and collaboration with resources.
- More cohesive overall culture.
- Brand consistency and community messaging nationally.
- More equal distribution of necessary teacher skills.
- More global approach to innovation.
- More strategic approach to school operations and growth planning.
- Greater bargaining power with suppliers of services and products.
- Streamlined and efficient head office allowing for specialists based in regions.
- Ensure that the church and the school system are intentionally aligned in ethos and mission.

6.3 Adventist Aged Care

6.3.1 Create consistency across the aged care system – mission; operational practices; management styles; marketing and branding.

6.3.2 Create a single Adventist aged care system across Australia.

- Economies of scale.
- More streamlined operational functions.
- Knowledge management and best practices implemented.
- Consistent compliance management, freeing up the system to focus on operational quality.
- Sharing of needed functional resources.
- Operational consistencies.
- Strategies to capture national opportunities.
- More consistent strategic decision-making.
- Greater opportunity for new product development.
- Greater ease in widening community influence resulting in mission opportunities.
- Being sure that the needs and opportunities of smaller entities and all regions are intentionally addressed.
- Current debt spread across single system.
- Consistent remuneration policy.