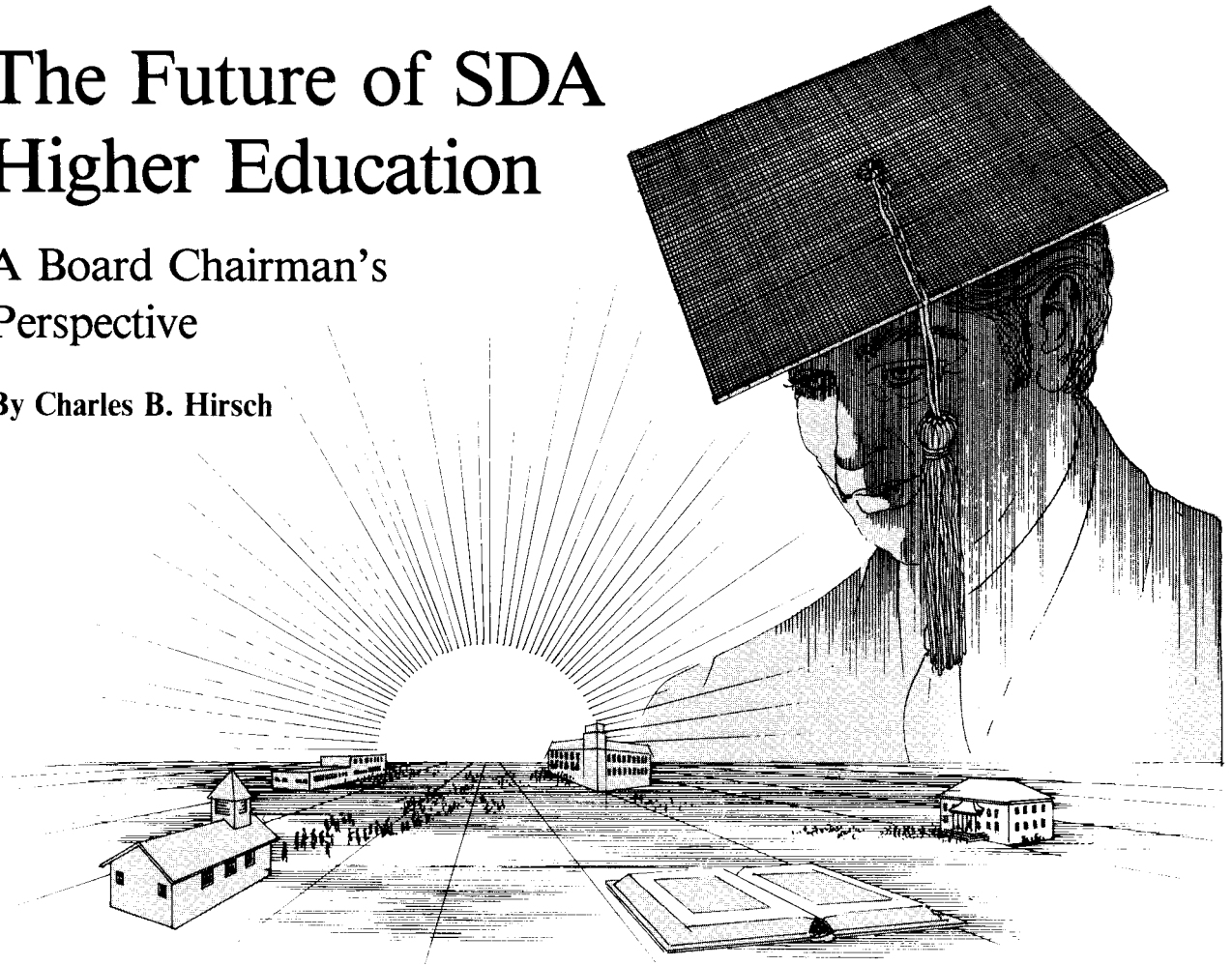

The Future of SDA Higher Education

A Board Chairman's Perspective

By Charles B. Hirsch



More than a century ago, inspired by Holy Scripture and the guidance of Ellen G. White, early Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders took on the task of providing youth with an educational program that would develop as the church grew.

The seeds of SDA education, initially planted in Battle Creek, Michigan, spread over the United States and then took root throughout the countries of the world. Today, our church has more than

650,000 students in some 5,000 institutions. These students, along with their teachers and administrators, comprise the largest Protestant parochial school system in the world.

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The chief purpose for establishing the SDA educational program was to prepare and train young people to be church leaders. Later, as enrollments increased and all the graduates could not be ab-

sorbed into church employment, it was recognized that our youth should be prepared to witness in whatever lifework they chose—medicine, technology, business, or agriculture. Statistics have shown that the longer our young people remain in our schools, the higher the percentage who adhere to and practice their faith.

The North American Division now has two universities, eight senior colleges, and two junior colleges, which serve more than 18,500 students and employ a faculty of more than 2,400. Several of these colleges have for years had the largest enrollment of any of our schools. Today, however, tertiary schools outside the North American Division have grown

steadily until one of them, Korean Union College, will soon rank as the largest in our church.

As one who has lived with SDA education for more than 30 years and has been involved in the total program from elementary through university; who has served as teacher, administrator, educator, and now as general vice-president of the church, I have seen some issues over the years that should be addressed if SDA education is to survive along its chartered lines.

Communicating the Importance of Christian Education

Student enrollments on the whole have not only failed to keep pace with the growth of church membership, they have actually been decreasing. The evangelism that brings members into the church is not bringing them into its schools. When church doctrines are preached, proper education receives short shrift. Even though SDA education may not be a doc-

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trine *de jure*, it is one *de facto*, if the counsel of Ellen G. White is carefully studied.

Our churches have been virtually barren of sermons on SDA education. Perhaps once a year, on the annual Education Sabbath, the pastor may make a brief reference to it, but too often that is the *alpha* and *omega* for the year. Studies have shown that church growth

depends proportionately on the quality and support given to the education of its youth.

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Artificial Barriers Prevent Sharing of Information

Higher education leadership has also been guilty of restricting the flow of information about the varied education programs in the North American Division. Artificial barriers, known as union conferences, have been erected in an attempt to keep other colleges from sharing details about programs with all prospective students. In essence, the secondary students in our conferences know only what the college in their territory has to offer and are kept basically ignorant of other programs throughout the division. Academies are practically prohibited from inviting recruiters, speakers, and programs from colleges outside their union. If such a restriction were to be imposed on higher education institutions, a loud cry would be heard invoking rights, academic freedom, and concern from accrediting bodies! Yet, imposition of such strictures on our secondary schools does not appear to bother anyone's conscience!

Why cannot academy students be made aware that SDA colleges in other areas have something special to offer? They should know that in the Northwest resides the only SDA baccalaureate-degree engineering program; that located in the Great Lakes area is the only SDA College of Technology, which was specially built to meet the vocational needs of the youth of the North American Division.

Many of our youth are not challenged by the curriculum of their local institution, and as a result turn to public schools. A new setting might be just the motivation needed to entice them to attend an SDA school. Of course, the thousands of our youth in public schools and community colleges must not be overlooked in such an outreach.

With the student-teacher ratio dropping, decisions must be made regarding enrollment, tuition income, and operating costs.

Enhancing the Relationship

SDA colleges and universities are highly dependent upon church secondary schools for their freshman classes. Therefore, a much closer relationship must be established between these two educational levels if the maximum benefits of support are to be obtained. Such a relationship should be based on mutual respect and equality. Excellence in higher education presupposes excellence on the preparatory level; one is essential to the other.

The first step in this direction would be to merge the NAD Board of Higher Education and the Board of Education, K-12. Both areas would then be better able to understand each other's needs and problems. As a result, recruitment would become more successful and problems associated with retention could be better addressed.

Addressing Financial Dilemmas

In recent years, the financing of education has become an administrator's nightmare, due to inflation, increased cost of utilities,

diminishing government aid, practically stationary church subsidies, decreased enrollments, the high cost of computers and other electronic technology, as well as the additional investments required to hire or train persons qualified to operate such equipment. Budget balancing has become a real skill.

School industries, which were established to not only provide student labor but also some income for the institution, have faced real difficulties in recent years. Counsel and advice on what to do or what not to do have been abundant, but what is really needed is direction and leadership from the private sector. If ever the ASI were faced with a challenge, it would be in our school industries where labor is an important ingredient of the student program. Industries such as Harris Pine, Little Debbie, and a few others are making a fine contribution, but more are needed!

While energy costs have leveled off somewhat in recent years, by the turn of the century it is estimated that they will multiply several times. The last upsurge in energy expenses caught many in-

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stitutions by surprise. Today's finance officers face the challenge of anticipating and preparing for future increases in utility costs.

A frequent casualty of budget cutting is maintenance and upkeep. Painting has been delayed, more and more potholes are appearing on campus roads, roofs

need replacing, et cetera. Postponement of these scheduled repairs will mean higher costs in the long run. In addition, schools need to consider the negative impact of neglected upkeep on student and faculty morale.

Biting the Bullet on Operating Costs

For too long, many administrators refused to reduce personnel, even though enrollments were dropping. Instead, they compensated by raising tuition and fees, with sometimes catastrophic re-

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sults. Only in the past few years have administrators bitten the bullet by cutting operating costs—perhaps too slowly, but at least moving in the right direction.

In planning for the future, institutions must realize that they cannot afford to provide a smorgasbord of offerings to please everyone. Rather, they should concentrate on those areas they can handle best, and which offer minimum competition with sister institutions.

With the student-teacher ratio dropping, decisions must be made regarding enrollment, tuition income, and operating costs. However, haphazard or excessive pruning in any department could very well affect the quality of a college's entire program. When quality is endangered, the next step may be a reduction of programs or departments.

Too Many Colleges?

This brings us to another question with financial implications. Are there too many colleges and

Are there too many colleges and universities in the North American Division?

universities in the North American Division? The constituencies and boards who groan over requests for increased subsidies are usually the same ones who brush aside the idea of merging or phasing out some of the higher educational institutions that serve the division. Are we ready to face the inevitable realities of increasing educational costs?

Certainly the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not wish to operate inferior quality institutions. To prevent this, sometime, somewhere, a decision will have to be made to either assure more positive support or decrease the number of schools to support. One denomination, with about four times our membership in the United States, concentrates its educational efforts on one university of some 25,000-30,000 students. Such a reorganization, or the possibility of using three or four regional educational centers, might offer alternatives to consider.

What Is a "Living Wage?"

One major part of institutional budgets is the cost of faculty and staff. The people who teach and administer our schools are, with few exceptions, committed to the church and its program of education. They are ready to sacrifice and work for simply a "living wage." However, they often discover that the "living wage" for

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It is no secret that SDA colleges have above-average physical plants. This is because the constituencies are generous in donating to buildings rather than other projects. Donors should be re-educated to give to faculty-enrichment programs, which cost much less and will, in the long run, be more beneficial to both faculty and students.

Develop a Unique Program

In order to survive, each college must take advantage of its own unique position. Programs and projects that are natural for one college may not suit another school at all. SDA colleges should not allow themselves to become—or remain—generic institutions.

The best approach would be for each college to consider its unique opportunities and blend together a program that enhances its position. Each institution should strive to solve its own financial and curriculum problems based on its own conditions and the needs of its constituency. □

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pastors and health and medical personnel is higher than for them, that sacrifice means more in some areas and less in others. They also find that floor nurses receive higher salaries than those who taught and prepared them; that administrators of health institutions receive salaries that often are more than double those paid in our educational institutions. Is it unnatural, then, for these educators, often better trained and educated than workers in these other areas, to wonder about what is happening to them?

At present, college teachers are on the same salary scale, regardless

of their teaching area. Of late, however, we have seen growing pressure to give larger salaries in certain disciplines, such as nursing and business, because of the greater financial rewards that such persons could obtain outside the classroom. Years ago the church took the first step in this direction when it began to pay physicians a higher wage scale because of their potential for greater remuneration outside church employ. However, this practice opened a Pandora's box for the future.

Traditionally, the ordained minister has been paid at or above the community rate. Health personnel are now at the community rate. Logically, educators should be reimbursed similarly, but whether institutional budgets, pressed as they are today, could stand such an increase is open to debate.

It must be recognized, however, that health institutions, because of the greater financial rewards they can offer, are attracting and hiring faculty and administrators away from our educational institutions, with little or no compensation for the educational investments in such persons. This is truly a brain drain!

Supplementing Salaries With Private Funds

Many state educational institutions have the source of private funds that is used to supplement the salaries of their administrators. In the case of nursing educators, why cannot the health institutions, who are the beneficiaries of their graduates, supply special funds to this group? For business teachers, businesses and corporations could be encouraged to contribute similarly. Some such plan could no doubt also be devised for liberal-arts teachers! Although these suggestions may sound somewhat revolutionary, they could provide

a starting point in addressing this area of need.

Another approach that would improve the financial picture for higher education would be for institutions to establish scholarship endowment programs. Our schools have been slow to move in this direction, but some colleges, as well as secondary schools, are now giving serious thought to this approach.

Responsibilities of Institutional Boards

Institutional boards must become more aggressive in their management and leadership. Their concerns for accountability, greater efficiency of operation, and relevance within the total structure must be more forceful and pronounced. Educational time is too expensive to waste, and boards must not be timid about expressing their feelings about the directions taken by the administration. In all aspects of their work, however, the board's primary task must be to ensure that the mission of the church and its beliefs are the chief ingredients in any existing or proposed program.

Most SDA boards are too large. Study needs to be given to delegating authority to smaller, more efficient bodies, which could devote additional time to the challenges facing their institution.

Whatever changes are proposed in the organization or governing procedures, the goals and aims of a church educational institution must always remain in focus and should constantly be brought before its board, faculty, and student body, as well as its constituency. At no time should accreditation bodies, federal grant requirements, or state regulations be permitted to interfere with the church's mission for its colleges and universities. □