

# Resourcing the Local Church

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*Report on the First Implementation of a  
Challenge Conference*

April 12, 1999

Prepared for the Officers of the  
Columbia Union Conference  
of the Seventh-day Adventist Church  
by Monte Sahlin

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# Introduction and Background

At the Presidents Council in October, 1998, it was decided that a one-day meeting will be held in each local conference to explore how to realign denominational systems within the Columbia Union to more fully make "the local church the central focus and driving force of the denomination."

The primary focus of this meeting was to be *mission*, not product, not money, not conference boundaries. It would attempt to identify why there is a growing consensus that local congregations are denied the resources necessary to implement their mission within the changing context of 21<sup>st</sup> Century America.

The Challenge Conference process would be used (as outlined in the "Challenge Conference" document). Monte Sahlin was assigned the role of staff coordinator to implement this plan.

## Questions to be Explored

1. What are the resources needed for the mission of the local church?
  - A. Human resources
  - B. Financial resources
  - C. Knowledge resources
2. How does a congregation really grow? What are the key factors?
3. What is the dominate leadership paradigm in the local church? Do we need a new paradigm?
4. Does the local church require a full-time pastor for mission?
5. What additional motivations would a pastor-equipper need to resource/inspire the local church for mission?
6. How do the answers to these questions differ among cultural and ethnic groups?
7. In resourcing the local church, what should be the role of:
  - A. The local conference?
  - B. The union conference?
  - C. The division/GC?

## Purpose and Objectives

The Ohio Conference was the first local conference to schedule a Challenge Conference on Resourcing the Local Church and implement it. The Chesapeake Conference had scheduled one at an earlier date, but it has been re-scheduled due to some conflicts in the conference calendar.

In preparation for the January 7 event in Ohio, Monte Sahlin conferred with Ohio Conference President Raj Attiken regarding outcomes that he had in mind for the event and prepared a specific agenda which was revised with his input. "I am working on the assumption that this event will provide valuable information both to the union and to the conference," Attiken wrote on December 15, 1998. "Resourcing the local church is one of three strategic initiatives that our executive committee has voted on, as a priority for the future. I am, therefore, very interested in the outcome of this challenge conference." In reviewing the plan for the challenge conference, Attiken indicated that he wanted it to "get us useful information, while providing information regarding the current delivery system that some may not be familiar with." He pointed out that one element in the proposed agenda for the day—a Bible study on the mission of the local church—might be a duplication of effort. "In September the pastors spent three days together at Camp Mohaven working through issues of mission and vision. The retreat was designed and led by pastors. Some clear conclusions were reached: Jesus gave us the mission in Matthew 28, 'Go, make disciples.' The discussion on vision focused on the characteristics of healthy congregations: worship, discipleship, ministry, fellowship and evangelism (the list from Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church*)."

Attiken also wrote, "I was hoping that somewhere in the process that we would address the following issue: What resources does your congregation need (that it does not now have available) to be more effective in fulfilling its mission? Perhaps a step to test the validity of the answers. [And,] at some point it might also be helpful to determine what the differences are in the responses between large churches and small churches."

The plan for the day was modified along the lines he suggested. The revised version as it was intended for implementation on January 7 is displayed below. Additional modifications became necessary due to snow conditions on that day which caused the event to begin late and participants to want to start for home as early as possible.

### Agenda for the Day

- 10:00 1. Introduction by conference president
- 10:05 2. Statement of the purpose and focus of the challenge conference.
- 10:10 3. Introductions (if needed) and a Bible study in groups of 6 to 8 [30 minutes]  
Focus: What is the mission of the local church? Why resources?
- 10:40 4. A time of prayer in the groups [5 to 10 minutes]
- 10:50 5. An informational overview of the system [30 to 40 minutes]
- 11:25 6. Question and answer time: Keep to clarifying questions. [5 to 15 minutes]
- 11:35 7. Break into working partnerships of 2 individuals each. [30 minutes]  
The assignment of each partnership is to make two lists: "Pleased" and "Troubled."
- 12:05 8. LUNCH BREAK
- 12:50 9. The entire group comes back together again;
  - A. First, build a master list of "Pleased." [10 to 20 minutes]
  - B. Second, build a master list of "Troubled." [10 to 20 minutes]

- 1:20 10. Small groups make lists of outcomes they would like to see over the next 3 to 5 years relative to resources for congregations/local ministries [30 minutes]
- 1:50 11. The entire group comes back together again, and a master list is created from the lists of the small groups [20 to 30 minutes]
- 2:20 12. Small groups convene again to list changes that should be made in the resourcing system (the "delivery system"), including suggestions relative to the role of the local conference [30 minutes]
- 2:50 13. The entire group comes back together again to make a master list of suggestions for changes in the system [20 to 30 minutes]
- 3:20 14. Closure: What did we accomplish today? What happens next?

## Power Point Presentation

A key element in the Challenge Conference on Resourcing the Local Church is a Power Point presentation which Monte Sahlin prepared to introduce the research that has been done to identify congregational needs, the new resourcing system that has been introduced in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, the rationale for this new "delivery system," and its implications for both the local church and conference departmental staff. This was designed to take about 35 to 40 minutes, but actually took nearly 60 minutes to work through. It includes a lot of new information for the participants and time was necessary to answer questions and help the group digest the information.

A copy of the slides is included as Appendix A. The slides at the end of the presentation are designed to introduce the discussion, brainstorming and development of recommendations through the rest of the day. The report on the ideas generated from the brainstorming, as well as the specific recommendations from the Ohio group, are included in the following sections of this report.

## Results of discussion and brainstorming

In response to the Power Point presentation and related discussion, the group listed a number of items that pleased them and several items that troubled them based on the information shared. These items were typed up on the screen in concise form as they were spoken in the group, and presented here in a little more detailed, grammatically-correct fashion.

### Pleased

1. The presentation was honest and open, and the recognition that the traditional system is "broken."
2. Some good resource materials are being produced by the new Church Resources Consortium. For example, *Connections* is better than the traditional nominating committee procedures.
3. The idea of a stipend for ministry leaders in the congregation is helpful, but where do we draw the line? Could the whole idea of volunteerism be threatened?
4. The information on the new system is helpful.
5. It is good that we are challenged to be part of the solution and not just complain about the problems.
6. The idea of multi-cell congregation is important and it is good that it is being supported by the new resource system.
7. Pleased with the conference staff available for resourcing in the Ohio Conference.
8. It is good that the issues have been put out in the open. It is important to move on and not rehash the basics over and over again.

### Troubled

1. Too much money is being spent on satellite evangelism initiatives and the super-star mentality which continues to give our members reasons to not get involved in ministry and take responsibility for outreach, evangelism and nurture themselves.
2. The information presented is too theoretical.
3. The Church is continuing with a number of things that do not work very well. It is avoiding some of the changes that need to be made.
4. The new resource system is built on the assumption that congregations have a vision for ministry, and in most cases the local congregation, or its leadership, does not have such a vision. That undermines the new system.
5. The difficulty of balancing pastoral roles; the perceived role that the congregation and the denomination seem to want, and the Biblical model.
6. Nothing radically new was presented.
7. Nothing was mentioned about the need for spiritual revival as a basis for mission and ministry; the focus was entirely on resources and organization, which is not a sufficient basis for building up the church.
8. The new system is still seen as a top-down mentality of getting resources to the local church. Resources should come from the local congregation.
9. Nothing in today's challenge conference related to our educational system.
10. The lack of financial resources for the congregation and local ministries.
11. The new system does not appear to include the sharing of resources with/from churches of other denominations.
12. The new system does not appear to address the major problem of the lack of public awareness for the Adventist Church. Why can't we project a positive image in the media like the Mormons do?

13. What is the cost effectiveness of the Church Resources Consortium? How many of the products it develops are actually used by local congregations?
14. The introversion of the Adventist Church is troubling. We appear to be "talking to ourselves," and not reaching out beyond our own subculture ver effectively.
15. The disproportionate funding and staff resources for smaller and larger churches under our current structure is troubling because the largest number of our members are in those larger churches, and that is where much of our church growth occurs.

## Needs Identified

1. A need for stronger leadership and better equipped pastors. Pastoral interns should be placed in successful, growing churches instead of small districts on their own.
2. A need for multiple solutions to meet the needs of different kinds of congregations instead of a "one-size-fits-all" approach in either the traditional system, the new resource system, or other recommendations.
3. A need for bold pastors and conferences willing to experiment, which includes taking the risk of failure.
4. A need to define the local church around a "Body Life" model instead of an "country club" model.
5. A need to address the sense of spiritual apathy. Perhaps the conference should replace public evangelism with revivalists.
6. A need to empower the local congregation so it can determine where more of its resources are used. This means more control by the local church over the Tithe Fund or a portion of it.
7. A need for more teaching, as well as modeling, the priesthood of all believers within the Adventist Church.
8. A need for additional funding for those congregations that show special vision and life; special arrangements outside the normal policy is needed to maximize the opportunity for outreach, evangelism and growth.
9. A need for funding for volunteer coordinators at the local level to recruit volunteers for ministry, to provide leadership and training of volunteers along the lines that most of our members expect today and see in the successful, nonprofit volunteer organizations.
10. A need for part-time staff in congregations to provide leadership necessary for significant ministries.
11. A need to free-up the time of pastors by equipping lay leaders to do more through resource materials that quickly address specific training needs.

## Proposals for Experimental Projects

1. An independent assessor to help congregations with self-study that will help them see who they are and where they are in terms of objective measures of mission.
2. Conduct a study to discover congregations who caught the vision of lay involvement in ministry and effectively used the new *Connections* resource materials.
3. Develop special arrangements which will provide additional funding for those congregations that show special vision and life.
4. Conduct a needs assessment in each local church so that resources can be supplied on the basis of "mass customization."
5. Publish an index to resource materials and resource personnel available to local churches.
6. Provide funding to augment the Ohio Conference commitment to further ministry training for clergy and lay leaders.

7. Recruit young adults through YouthNet ("student missionaries") to work as youth pastors in several churches or cluster of churches.
8. A policy that provides funds for lay and pastoral training and resource materials based on a percentage of the Tithes.
9. Provide funding for congregations in metropolitan areas to collaborate in a public awareness campaign.
10. Test the use of stipends for ministry leaders in local congregations to see if it improves the outreach and ministry of the congregation and how it impacts volunteerism in the congregation.
11. Hire an Associate Pastor for Ministry Development at Kettering Church to implement the *Connections* curriculum within that congregation and develop a resource and training center for other congregations throughout the conference or perhaps the entire union.
12. Provide in-service education for pastors in the specific strategies and skills of vision-casting.
13. Provide the same information that was discussed today to a wide range of congregation leaders in the Ohio Conference.
14. Phase in a policy that spends 50% of the Tithes on each local church.



## Recommendations

Based on this first Challenge Conference on Resourcing the Local Church, what conclusions can be drawn regarding the plan to conduct at least one of these sessions in each of the seven other local conferences in the Columbia Union?

At the end of the day, all of the participants were asked for feedback on the structure of the day. Almost all of the responses were quite general and positive in nature. The group was more interested in the topics discussed than in the process itself, and the snow conditions encouraged everyone to get on the road. (The next day the Governor of Ohio declared a state of emergency forcing employers to release their employees, and clearing the roads of non-essential vehicles.)

One individual—a lay person who is a member of the Ohio Conference and Columbia Union executive committees—did turn in a written evaluation on the day: “The disappointment for me today was the absence of my pastor ... [and] the poor showing of executive committee members. I enjoyed the challenge to think, though my perspectives were not fully congruent with the pastors.”


One suggestion was to have printed copies of the Power Point presentation available for people to take notes. Also, some asked for electronic copies of the presentation to share with other groups.

### Specific Recommendations

1. Schedule the same session at least once in each of the seven other conferences. In some cases it may be better to schedule joint sessions attended by more than one conference in order to save time and travel expense, but this will need to be handled carefully since the departmental staffing and approach is quite different in some neighboring conferences.
2. Process some of the recommendations with the union Presidents Council and pass the rest to the Ohio Conference administration.
3. Provide assistance from the union Office of Creative Ministries to assist the Ohio Conference in the implementation of at least two or three of the best pilot projects suggested from the session.


## **Appendix A**

Power Point presentation used as a key element in the Challenge Conference on Resourcing the Local Church.



## Resourcing the Local Church

*A Challenge Conference*  
in the Ohio Conference



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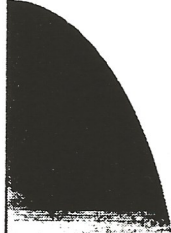
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- The local congregation is the central focus and driving force of the Adventist church; the energies of the conferences and union will be directed toward making it successful as a spiritual, educational and evangelistic center.

*- Columbia Union Vision Statement*

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### Realities

- The Adventist Church is more introverted
- Public awareness is down
- Evangelism is not reaching major segments of the population
- Most people raised in the church drop out as young adults
- Decline in volunteer hours
- Tithe and offerings have not kept pace with cost of doing business

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### More realities

- Decreasing departmental personnel and funding
- Increasing range of ministries
- Shorter shelf-life for new concepts and programs
- Increasing importance of skills, information and knowledge
- Decline in training resources

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### The role of resources

Mission strategy and ministries	Congregational dynamics
<b>Resources</b>	Organizational structure

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### Type of resources

- Information
- Materials
- Training
- Consultants
- Personnel (volunteers, staff)
- Funding
- Alliances, positioning
- Credentials, recognition
- "Customers" (leads, names)

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### Different needs of large & small congregations

- **Small churches**
  - Have fewer human resources
  - Look to the denomination to provide skills for ministries
  - Have more staff & funding per capita
- **Larger churches**
  - Have more human resources
    - ◆ Have people who are just as skilled as denominational staff
  - Design their own ministries
  - Have less staff & funding per capita

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### Some ministries require parachurch structures

- Example: Summer camp
- Example: Good Neighbor House
- Example: Bible Information Line
- Visibility & community relations require special structures:
  - ◆ Relating to news media which cover an entire metropolitan area
  - ◆ Relating to civic leaders at a metro or regional level

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### Most needed services as seen by pastors, lay leaders

Service	Pastors (%)	Lay leaders (%)
SS curriculum	~95	~95
Retiree Seminars	~55	~55
Trainer/Leaders	~55	~55
Pastoral support	~45	~45
Job descriptions	~45	~45
Training events	~55	~55
Community services	~45	~45
SOOP help desk	~45	~45

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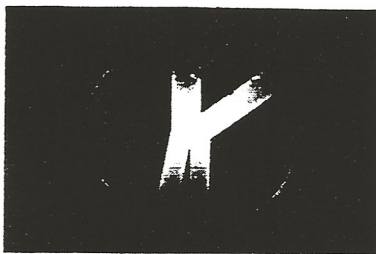
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### Options for departments preferences of pastors




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### Restructuring options

- A. Build up specialists in local conferences & decrease in unions
- B. Full staff of specialists in unions & reduce local conference staffing
- C. Strong team at national level & decrease conference & union staff
- D. Do away with departmental staff at all levels

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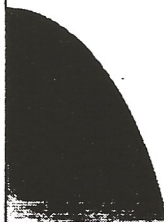
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### Restructuring options

Option	Recommend 2 <sup>nd</sup> choice			
	Pastors	Lay leaders	Pastors	Lay leaders
#A	75%	62%	14%	15%
#B	10%	13%	31%	36%
#C	12%	16%	35%	26%
#D	3%	3%	11%	3%

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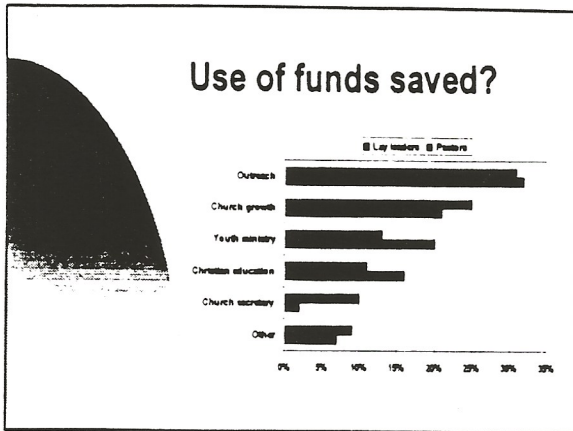
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- ### The cultural context
- Franchising
  - Mergers
  - World Wide Web
  - Global perspective
  - Euro dollar
  - NAFTA
  - Joint marketing agreements
  - Teams
  - Downsizing
  - Most new jobs are generated by small businesses
  - Government devolution to local
  - Interactive, "flat," participatory systems

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- ### Curriculum-driven ministries
- Sabbath School
  - Pathfinder Club
  - Revelation Seminars (originally)
  - To a lesser degree:
    - ◆ Vacation Bible School
    - ◆ Adventist Youth
    - ◆ Small group ministries
    - ◆ Outreach seminars (today)

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**Networked ministries**

- Satellite seminars
- Adventist Community Services, including Inner City, Disaster Response, health screening, etc.
- Adventist Singles Ministries
- Marriage Encounter
- Prison ministries

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**Franchise ministries**

- Discover Bible Schools
- Bible Information Line
- Campaign for Community
- Heatbeat Community Coronary Risk Evaluation

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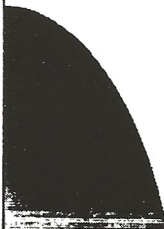
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**Free-form ministries**

- Personal evangelism
- Family-life ministries
- Women's ministries
- Teen and young adult ministries
- Stewardship education
- Communication, including media relations, broadcasting, etc.

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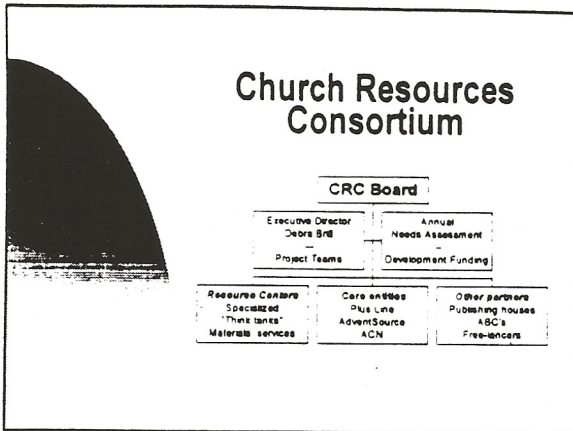
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- ### Core resource entities
- Plus Line
    - ◆ Access help desk
  - AdventSource
    - ◆ Specialty publisher, direct marketing
  - Adventist Communication Network
    - ◆ Satellite linkage of live events
  - NAD Ministry Departments
    - ◆ Content specialists and advocates

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- ### Resource centers
- Black Youth Resource Center
  - Center for Creative Ministry
  - Center for Youth Evangelism
  - Family Matters
  - Hancock Center
  - HART Resource Center
  - Institute of Church Ministry
  - NAD Evangelism Institute
  - Seminars Unlimited

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### Other partners

- Publishing houses (R&H, PPPA)
- Adventist Book Centers
- College printers
- Specialty manufacturers (felts, campaign buttons, T-shirts, etc.)
- Free-lance writers
- Creative services providers
- AIM, the media ministries, etc.

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### How are resources created?

	Need identified	Product R&D	Distribution	Product support
CRC	<i>Focus groups &amp; survey</i>	Convenes a team & provides funding	Helps to fund new product information	Provides subsidies
Resource centers		<i>Manages assigned projects</i>	Some "retail" marketing	<i>Direct provider</i>
Advent Source		Provides subsidies	<i>Direct marketer &amp; funds inventory</i>	Supports the resource center
Other partners		Provide creative services	Market & fund some selected products	

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### What does a resource center do?

- Narrow focus
- Action research; What works, what doesn't work?
- Clearinghouse for information
- Networking hub
- 800 # "help desk"
- List of trainers
- Training events
- Team of skilled consultants
- Manage assigned projects for CRC
- Provides support for products
- Web site
- FAQs for Plus Line & Fax Plus
- Newsletter

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### Source of data

- Interviews with 417 church board members
- Random sample across North America
- Sampling error allowance 5% at 95th percentile of reliability
- Interviews with 409 pastors
- Same sampling methods and level of reliability
- Conducted in 1995 for the Commission on Mission and Organization

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### Needed; please improve as seen by pastors, lay leaders

Category	Pastors (%)	Lay leaders (%)
In-church training	45	55
Youth ministry	40	50
Witnessing training	40	50
Bible lessons	35	45
Public evangelism	35	45
Health ministries	35	45
Stewardship	35	45
Women's activities	35	45
Small group activities	35	45
Consultants	35	45

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### Are departments needed?

Response	Pastors (%)	Lay leaders (%)
Not worth it	25	10
OK as is	45	40
Increase funds	25	40
Don't know	5	10

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**How does this work in the congregation?**

- Local leaders develop the local strategy to achieve mission
- Wide menu of tools, services and sources available
  - ◆ Get information about possibilities
  - ◆ Make choices
  - ◆ Get help to achieve best results

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**New role of conference staff: *consultant***

- Primary concept is a particular kind of consultant, *not* generic
- Primary role:
  - ◆ Help congregation as a consumer of tools and services from the extensive menu
    - ◆ What kind of ministries, tools and services will work best for your congregation?

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**Continuing roles of conference staff**

- Specialized consultant to local congregations, ministries
  - ◆ Includes role as a trainer
- Manager of centralized, parachurch programs such as summer camps
- Advocate, organizer for networked ministries and special campaigns
  - ◆ Includes role as a trainer

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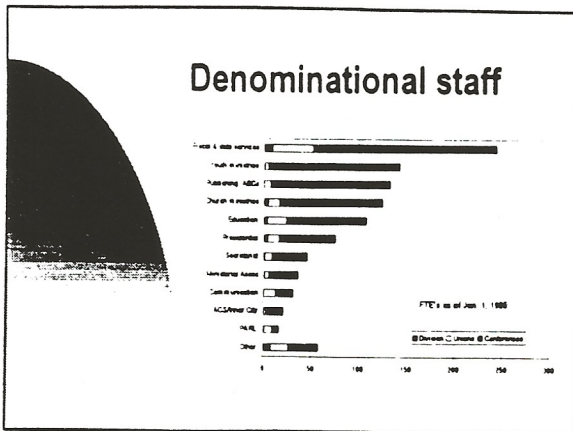
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- ### That is . . .
- 26.4 pastors per Church Ministries FTE
  - 36.8 congregations per Church Ministries FTE
  - 360 lay leaders per Church Ministries FTE

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- ### Human resources
- Volunteers are the key resource
  - Volunteers require professional leadership
  - The most effective churches today have a professional director for their major ministries
  - Almost all Baptist churches have at least a part-time youth pastor

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**Some new options for human resources**

- Stipends for part-time ministry directors
- Young adult volunteers who spend a year or two on subsistence allowance
- Cluster of churches pool funds to hire a youth pastor (for example)
- Retirees

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**Why stipends?**

- Accountability
- Underlines serious expectations
- Encourages professionalism
- Encourages intentionality
- Frees up time in an age when the average American married couple has 2.5 jobs

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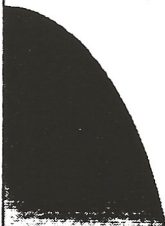
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**Small churches**

- Bivocational pastors
- Lay pastors
- Pastoral teams in larger districts
- Joint ministry teams
  - ◆ Example: One Pathfinder Club serves four small churches
  - ◆ Example: Eight churches rotate outreach seminars

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**New system for human resources**

- NAD Center for Volunteerism
  - ◆ ARMS experiment folded
  - ◆ YouthNet
    - ◆ Taskforce
    - ◆ Young Pioneers
    - ◆ ADRA Affiliates AmeriCorps project
- 2 unions have Lay Pastor Training Schools

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**New system for human resources: volunteers**

■ <i>Old system</i>	■ <i>New system</i>
■ Nominating committee	■ "Connections" curriculum
■ Single cell church	■ Multi-cell church
■ Individual assignments	■ Team goals & responsibilities
■ Focus on role	■ Focus on ministry
■ "Associational" model	■ "Body life" model

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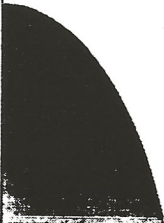
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**Questions for the future**

- What is not working in the Adventist Church?
- Does it work anywhere else?
- What are other organizations doing?
- What is the future likely to bring?
- Can we discern God's will separate from our traditions?

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### The process of change

Past zone (in captivity in Egypt)	Zone of instability (wandering in wilderness)	Future zone (promised land)
Build readiness for change	Manage transition	Embed strategic leadership

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### Next Steps

- What pleased you & what troubled you about this information?
- What are the needs in your congregation(s)?
- What suggestions do you have to improve the system?
- What new ideas should we experiment with?

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