Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

Directions for Cultural Harmony in the Adventist Church

by Harold L. Lee
A copy of the full 100-page version of this booklet can be obtained from the source noted below for $25. It includes all of the additional readings and helps.

Center for Creative Ministry  
2935 Pine Lake Road, Suite J  
Lincoln, NE 68516  
(800) 272-4664  
www.creativeministry.org
Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

layers of leaders, and the leadership function is different at each level. Without this “wiring harness” the poly-cultu-ral approach will not work for the Adventist Church.

Local leaders direct the Church in its presence and ministry in a particular, local community. They cannot simply be “franchise” operators, using blueprints and manuals sent from corporate headquarters. They must come to understand and diagnose their local community and structure a ministry that best represents God’s eternal purpose in that context.

Cultural leaders coordinate the congregations that exist within a specific culture across a reasonable span of local communities. This may not always involve the organization of a “sisterhood of churches” within that culture. It may on occasion be leadership mediated through a loose fellowship of congregations who are also part of different, multicultural “sisterhoods,” or even through a resource center of some kind. This kind of leadership can be provided—and is essential in a poly-cultu-ral approach—even if, for historic and administrative reasons, the denominational structure does not follow the contours of cultures.

Transcultu-ral leaders function outside the various cultures and focus on the mission of the Church, its divine message and the development of a multi-cultural strategy. They serve the cultural leaders and local leaders by encouraging faithfulness to Christ’s mission, by holding them accountable to the principles of multi-cultural mission, and by sharing learnings among the various cultures. When one group learns to effectively translate the everlasting gospel into the context of one culture, those learnings often provide suggestions that will be helpful for evangelistic breakthroughs in other cultures.

6. Teamwork among the layers of leaders—This approach cannot work unless the leaders in the various layers or overlays work closely with all of the other leaders in the total system. A multicultural team with shared standards for cross-cultural skills is the core administrative requirement for this approach. It is also the primary asset for a Church which believes that it has a multicultural mission and a sense of urgency at this time in history. These leaders and their cross-cultural skills are gifts from God intended for His purposes.

7. Highly developed communication among leaders—The leaders of a poly-cultural approach must constantly communicate about multi-cultural and cross-cultural issues, as well as issues particular to each culture. They must communicate about culture. They must have the language skills, the professional terms and education, necessary to such communication. All of this requires high-tech communi-ca-tion and information management systems.

Requirements for Success as a Polycultural Church

- Strong leaders
- Three layers of leaders
  - Local leaders
  - Cultural leaders
  - Transcultural leaders
- Leaders with great cross-cultural skills
- Teamwork among the layers of leaders
- Leaders with a vision for shared mission
- Highly developed communication among leaders
- Leaders with passion for a polycultural Church

Page 32
The Church as Polyculture

- The Church provides a shared culture which is superimposed upon all of the cultures within the community of faith
- This shared culture partakes of the various cultures but has a common center

is centered in God’s will, the mission of the church.

In a polycultural church each group can maintain its identity but still be part of a shared mission and a common faith. Differences are celebrated because each participating culture represents a “gate” in the “New Jerusalem,” an avenue through which the gospel travels out into the world and through which new believers return into the Kingdom of Christ. All cultures become instruments in God’s plan to save the world!

A polycultural church is mission-driven and grace-oriented instead of focused on internal strife over culture issues and inter-cultural conflicts. The differences between cultures are positioned as tools for “finishing the work” instead of causes of action against one another.

A polycultural church is in a better position to take the message to “every nation, kindred, tongue and people” than is a mono-cultural church, a “melted” church or even the transcultural ideal. It is “in the world” of each culture, but not “of the world” of each culture because its origin and purpose is in God’s will for His people.

In the polycultural church, each congregation is supported and affirmed in understanding the culture of its local community and learning to minister to that community in culturally-appropriate ways. There is no “one, right way” to do ministry, but many ways to minister, each calculated to best achieve God’s purposes in its particular context. But, all congregations and leaders are held accountable to God’s central purpose and will. Each is evaluated on the basis of their contribution to the mission of Christ.

In a polycultural church each ethnic and cultural segment would have a recognized structure for mission to its culture in the outside world. The structures and ministries of

A Polycultural Church

- Each group can maintain its identity but still be part of a shared mission, common faith
- The church is mission-driven instead of focused on internal strife over culture issues and inter-cultural conflicts
- The church is best positioned to take the message to “every nation, kindred, tongue and people”

the church would be structured around the multicultural realities of its mission in the world rather than internal traditions and politics. A “mission” structure of some kind
Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

only tool we have with which to study the Bible, listen to the evangelist, come to conclusions and take action. Evangelism today is multicultural whether we like it or not!

Because the gospel takes on material form, the question then becomes which forms from which cultures will be selected to mediate the gospel. As preachers pick and choose illustrations, as they explain Bible texts, as they bring sermons to concrete action steps and announce a “call” at the end of each message, they are cultural operators. One of the reasons for uneven church growth is the fact that more and more people in North America live multi-cultural lives as described here, and fewer people live monocultural lives dominated by a single culture. Yet, sermon preparation and all pastoral communication is still premised on monocultural techniques.

The choice of cultural forms with which to convey the gospel is often a decision made without awareness, based on prejudice and myth. This can result in the glorification of traditional forms and the too-easy adoption of popular culture. A multicultural church must educate its pastors and lay leaders to make these decisions with a full understanding of both the cultural and theological issues. Every church board must understand some fundamental missiological concepts that were once taught only to overseas missionaries.

Can the Church be Transcultural?
Some would argue that the church, because it represents God—who stands outside human cultures—must operate beyond any particular culture. The “transcultural” approach begins not with human culture but with the church and its worship of God. It asserts that the church’s worship of God, by its very divine focus, transcends all cultural boundaries. The transcultural character of the church reflects the transcultural nature of God, who knows no bounds.

This is an idealistic approach that ignores the fact that all believers perceive God and His worship through the lens of their culture. As human beings they can do no other.
Culture is not genetic. It is not innate, but learned. A child who carries the genetic code of Vietnam, brought to California as a baby and growing up in a white, Anglo family comes to adulthood with the culture of sub-urban southern California Anglos, not the culture of rural Vietnam. She will not even know the language of her Vietnamese origins, nor have much interest in where she came from until well into adulthood. She will always be an outsider to the culture of a rural, Vietnamese village, even if she learns the language and travels back to find her roots.

Culture is the product of a process of socialization. It is not biological or racial. It is socially learned and assimilated.

It is difficult to describe or pin down with precision the nature of a particular culture. Culture is dynamic, fluid and open-ended. It changes with new generations even as language adopts new words and concepts.

Culture is the way of life of a people group. It goes beyond language, dialect or habits of speech, although those are powerful elements in the construction of culture. It includes everything that is passed on from generation to generation, everything experienced or practiced by a people group.

A culture can be quite primitive or highly sophisticated and technological. Culture involves information, education, technique and invention. Participants innovate and change the culture, often without intending to do so.

Culture includes customs, habits, aesthetic choices, beliefs, rites, traditions, myths, legends, superstitions, stories, songs, dance, jokes, tastes, inherited artifacts, prejudices, attitudes and values. It is sometimes called “psychographics” in distinction to demographics, which involves only “counting heads.”

Culture is what people are. “Culture is, in short, everything that is part of one’s social heritage and environment,” writes Pedrito Maynard-Reid. “It is the sum total of all those ways of doing things, of thinking about things, of feeling about things, of believing, that make up the life of a group of people.” (Diverse Worship: African-American, Caribbean and Hispanic Perspectives, pages 17-18)

Multiculturalism

This can be a controversial topic. Multiculturalism is a word used today in many political and even theological debates. I can appreciate the concerns of political analysts who focus on the changing nature of the American or Canadian democracies. The Adventist Church is far ahead of national demographic change and must deal with these issues sooner than does either nation.

I am not using “multiculturalism” as a code word for letting down the standards or the entry of a relativist approach to truth into the Adventist Church. Some writers have labeled “multiculturalism” with this baggage. It is a valid concern, although some of those who have raised the concern are, in fact, tainted with
Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

table and the unique differences of each culture are strategically essential to this mission.

5. What needs to happen to deepen its commitment to this unique ministry? How do we move our members beyond a self-interested focus on their own needs, their own families and their own kind? What must we do to challenge them to this major missional imperative in North America? Somehow in every discussion of the purpose and goals of the Church, in each conference and union conference executive committee, in every mission report and planning session, the mission fields of the large cities must be held up before the people. Some need to be challenged to consider moving into unreached urban neighborhoods and suburban towns. Others already live in unreached areas and need to be asked to open their homes to small group ministries or learn to share Christ where they work. Church members must be encouraged, enabled, equipped and empowered to work together in multicultural teams in the cities. As they serve the poor and community needs, as they share the gospel message with non-believers, they will also learn to appreciate the contributions of other cultures and come to see the differences as assets. No tactic has greater potential for solving the internal, cross-cultural conflicts and prejudices of the Adventist membership than working together across “turf” lines in urban missions.
Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

marketplace, and we cannot avoid the use of contemporary art, music and language in presenting our message. We must also recognize the emergence of significant numbers of adherents to major world religions other than Christianity. There are millions in North America who have grown up with or adopted Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. There is also a renewal of Judaism and renewed resistance to the loss of Jews to Christianity with its long, bloody history of anti-Semitism.

4. The North American environment is characterized by the omnipresent high technology and entertainment of “the information age.” The telephone 800 number, the Fax machine, the Internet as well as television, radio, recordings and cinema, are all tools which must be used if the evangelization of North America is to be seriously addressed. A whole generation has come to adulthood which believes that “if you are not on the Web, you don’t exist.” These new media not only convey information, but change the nature of information and the way it is perceived and handled. The logic of “infotainment” is inescapable for the Adventist message if it is to be proclaimed to new generations in North America.

5. North America has come to a time of pervasively individualistic religion. Faith is defined as a private matter. It is considered bad manners to talk openly about something so intensely personal except among close friends. Outside authority over matters of faith is an anachronism which has been co-opted by the notion that submission is good in and of itself. A self-centered, do-it-yourself approach to spirituality is the result, in which largely untutored, secular people seek to meet their inner yearnings toward God by assembling whatever random set of superstitions and doctrines seems right in their own eyes.

6. The Adventist Church is more marginalized than it has been since the early 20th century. Polls of the general public show that it is largely invisible to the average person, as well as the media and opinion leaders. Too many of our resources are being invested in aging institutions struggling for survival and unable to compete effectively. There are growing sectors in North America in which there is no Adventist presence at all.

In order to respond this situation will require the full mobilization of the entire Adventist community in North America. This cannot be handled by the clergy alone or denominational employees. The skills and insight of professional people among the church members will be needed. An entirely new ecclesiology and vision must be crafted which again makes clear to every Adventist where his or her missionary role is; what God expects and how to do it effectively.
Ministry in a Multicultural World

The challenge which confronts church leaders today is to re-vision Adventism for the 21st century in a multicultural context. Business as usual—which has carried the Church through the 20th century with a structure and program largely unchanged since 1901—simply will not meet the tests of the future and certainly will not take full advantage of the new opportunities available.

The bold steps necessary to engage the multicultural future of the Church require that leaders and believers be clear about “who it is,” with a strong sense of identity rooted in Scripture and Adventist heritage, and what it is called to be and do; a clear vision of the eternal mission of the church, especially in the prophetic context of the Remnant people of God.

Perhaps more important, such bold steps will require of the Church a strong sense of “whose it is.” The issues faced by the Church in this new, multicultural context will require a passionate spirituality on the part of leaders. They must never lose sight of the fact that the Adventist Church is God’s church; that its mission is Christ’s mission. As we are faithful to Him, He will be faithful in opening doors and providing blessings for His people.

A Missionary Challenge

North America needs to be treated as a mission field in the same way that we in the West have approached much of the rest of the world. The U.S. is no longer a nation with a Christian consensus and in Canada the vast majority of the population of long ago severed any relationship with the established churches. Especially for Adventists, North America must be viewed as a largely “unreached” land where most of the people have no real knowledge of the Bible and no basic commitment to faith in Christ. Certainly, very few have any knowledge of or commitment to Christian ethics as a code for their lives.

Critical to making this shift in perspective is the development of the skills and

The Challenge

- The challenge is to re-vision Adventism for the 21st century in a multicultural context ...
- To discover whether the church knows:
  - who it is
  - what it is called to be and do
  - whose it is

tools necessary to function as missionaries in the North American context. Pastors and congregations must be led to see themselves as a missionary people operating at a “frontier” of mission by learning to understand and diagnose their local communities as “unreached” people groups, to articulate the gospel in a non-Christian context, to meet the needs of nonbelievers and win their friendship, and to
Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

together in sophisticated structures capable of far-reaching impact. Mission calls for a unity that can utilize high technology and complex strategy, a “togetherness” far beyond the simple gathering of believers who pray, sing and talk.

A shared message is to be conveyed by the missionary enterprise. An important platform of doctrinal agreement is necessary to convey a coherent message to the world. This calls for careful study of Scripture, the gifts of as exercising that gift. The heritage of her writings provides important guidance toward unity and diversity within the Church.

Ellen White was an abolitionist, an active believer in social justice. "It has become fashionable to look down upon the poor, and upon the colored race in particular," she wrote. "But Jesus the Master, was poor, and he sympathizes with the poor, the discarded, the oppressed, and declares that every insult shown to them is as if shown to himself." (The Southern Work, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966; pages 10-11)

Her favorite depiction of God's special concern for the oppressed blacks in America was her comparison of their plight with that of the Israelite slaves in Egypt. In one such analogy she boldly declared, "The Lord did not wait until His people went forth and stood in triumph upon the shores of the Red Sea before He called Israel His son, but while they were under oppression, degraded, downtrodden, suffering all that the power and the invention of the Egyptian could impose to make their lives bitter and to destroy them, ... God under-takes their cause and declares to Pharaoh, 'Israel is my Son, even my first born.' God cares no less for the souls of the African race ... than he cared for Israel." (Ibid., page 14)

Ellen White saw the hand of God in the differences among individuals and cultures and taught the value of diversity. "There is no person, no nation, that is perfect in every habit and thought. One must learn of another. Therefore God wants the different nationalities to mingle together, to be one in judgement, one in purpose. Then the union that there is in Christ will be exemplified." (Historical Sketches, pages 136-137)

### Unity in the Body of Christ

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one on another; we are we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source the oneness of the trine God, who has adopted us as His children. (Rom. 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 12:12,14; Matt. 28:19,20; Ps. 133:1; 1 Cor. 3:16,17; Acts 17:26,27; Gal. 3:27; Col. 3:10-15; Eph. 4:14-16; 4:1-6; John 17:20-23).

scholars and open dialog. The Adventist Church has a Christ-centered structure of spiritual truth that brings more complete dimensions of faith to the Christian community at a prophetically important point in Christian history.

Among the statement of Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, number 13 is specifically about “Unity in the Body of Christ.” This understanding of Bible truth, which each of us accepts at the point of baptism or Profession of Faith, provides an important basis for unity and diversity in the Church.

Adventists also believe in the continuity of the prophetic gift. Ellen White was confirmed by the pioneers of the Adventist Church
Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

mission. The New Testament makes this a fundamental concept about how role and function is established within the Body of Christ.

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

God calls a missionary people among whom all are gifted and all are valued. His Remnant is defined as a visibly diverse, active force for articulate proclamation of the gospel and compassionate service in Christ’s name. (Matthew 25:31-46, Revelation 7:9-14)

New Testament diversity is defined in ways that were decidedly bold in the context of the First Century world. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) To this day this text confounds human wisdom and causes the church to squirm, explain and interpret, often in ways not honest to the Holy Word.

The New Testament also records the difficulty that believers have in living out this Bible principle. Within a very short time, “the Greeks” among the largely “Hebrew” original body of believers in Jerusalem expressed concern “because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution” of food. (Acts 6:1)

The apostles immediately met and developed a significant organizational modification in order to make sure that social justice prevailed. The office that we have come to label as “Deacon” was created and the seven set aside with prayer and laying on of hands all had Greek surnames. (Acts 6:3-6)

Not long after that Peter was given a vision which seemed to contradict God’s instructions about clean and unclean meat. The apostle came to understand that God was speaking to him about diversity.

Even Roman soldiers were to be given the gospel and extended a welcome into the Body of Christ. (Acts 10) “The believers ... were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.”

Yet even this direct word from God was slow to be fully understood and accepted. Many felt that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and become converts to Judaism in order to be fully accepted into the Body of Christ. The conflict over this issue surfaces in many places in the New Testament and finally resulted in the first worldwide council of the Christian church.

The first doctrinal declaration of a church council is “that we should not prevent those of the Gentiles who turn to God,” but welcome them into the Body of Christ. (Acts 15:19) It does not seem that this immediately settled the question for every Christian. Paul
Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

worshiping and ministering with some degree of harmony and perhaps as equals.
Despite these attempts, however, Adventists remain as racially separated as the

Diversity Defined

Diversity is a term normally used to describe the coexistence of variations around a single, common center or focus.
For example, within in the church there are persons of many races, cultures, political orientations, educational backgrounds and socioeconomic levels

rest of Christianity and the rest of society. It is still true that 11 o'clock Sabbath morning is the most segregated hour for Adventism in North America. Institutional racism is a costly separation, and when African Americans or Native Americans speak frankly to their white counterparts, they receive apathy, indifference, or the attitude that the issue is not really important. Blacks feel angry, hurt, and betrayed by what they see as society's and the Church's failure. White racism in white institutions must be eradicated by white people and not just black people. In fact, white racism is primarily a white problem and responsibility.

This includes the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We must get our house in order. Our church is still riddled with racism and segregation. Our church still has the capacity to be the much-needed prophetic interrogator of a society that has always depended upon racial oppression. The eternal gospel remains clear. The third angel's message is everlasting; it is for every nation, kindred, culture, language, and people group. The church can still be a community where the ugly barriers of race are finally torn down to reveal the possibilities of a different future. The wall of racism is a major blocking force to a multicultural ministry and the mission of the church.

In spiritual and biblical terms, racism is a perverse sin that cuts to the very core of the gospel message. Racism is demonic. Racism negates the reason for which Christ died—the reconciling work of the cross. Racism is at the core of sin. It is a lack of trust in God and a denial of His transforming grace. The devil has used racism as a primary tool to divide not only nations but the Christian church as well. Racism denies the mission and purpose of the church, which is to bring together, in Christ, those who have been divided from one another, to remove the middle wall of partition—Jew and Gentile—a division based on race.

James, the apostle, reminds us that partiality in any form is always sin (James 2:1-13). Unfortunately, if racism ceased to exist (and there is no indication that it will), the problems of class and anti-intellectual attitudes would still persist.

An Inclusive Church

The current groundswell for inclusiveness is causing an identity crisis in the Adventist Church, confusion as to who we are and what uniquely identifies us as Christian believers. This confusion is being exacerbated by a blurring of the distinction between two mutually exclusive terms, both of which are currently used as synonyms for inclusiveness. These terms are “diversity” and “pluralism.”
Diversity and the Remnant Church

Three basic approaches have been used to deal with diversity. These are (1) the "Golden Rule" approach, (2) the "right the wrongs" approach, and (3) the "value all differences" approach. Judith Palmer was one of the first scholars to attempt to describe these approaches in "Three Paradigms for Diversity Change Leaders."

The Golden Rule Approach

This approaches gives emphasis to idea that people are more similar than they are different. Therefore, all people should be treated the same, no matter what the culture they belong to might indicate or what their special concerns might be.

The problem with this paradigm is that real differences are disregarded, to the discomfort and even the harm of individuals on occasion. There is also the expectation that all people should assimilate to the dominant or majority culture. When people feel different from the dominant group and are unable or unwilling to assimilate, these individuals respond by either becoming angry and agitated or withdraw and isolate themselves from the rest of the community.

Present Truth and Diversity

Nowhere has commitment to “present truth” been more seriously tested in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church than in its often-halting progress toward a worldwide fellowship in which persons are valued and embraced without regard to race, gender, age, and physical ability.

—Adventist Review, 1999 Special Issue, p 35.

Right the Wrongs

This paradigm recognizes the legitimate anger or isolation of the specific groups in an organization that, as in the larger society, have been systematically disadvantaged by the dominant culture. In the United States, some examples are Native Americans, African Americans, and immigrants whose native tongue is other than English or who are people of color. In Canada it may be the Québécois or First Peoples.

The "right the wrongs" approach involves two kinds of efforts: accommodating members of the disadvantaged group with special advantages to compensate for the barriers they face and enhancing the sensitivity of the dominant culture to the unique concerns of the disadvantaged group. Unfortunately, these efforts often result in "we/you" dialogue and people are prompted to take sides. The result is anger among members of the disadvantaged group and defensiveness or avoidance on the part of the majority group.

Value All Differences

This is the newest approach, which is still in the process of being defined. People are appreci-
are experimenting with various efforts at dealing with diversity and overcoming the difficulties.

The Changing Face of Adventism
In recent years, 75% of the new members added to the Adventist Church in the North American Division have been immigrants from countries in the developing world. Between 1980 and 1990, Hispanic membership increased by 127%, black membership increased by 71%, and Asian/Pacific Islander membership increased by 62%, while the non-Hispanic white membership increased by only five percent.

Another 19% of baptisms during this same period were the children of church members. Accessions among the native-born ethnic majority of Americans and Canadians have slowed to a virtual standstill. The Adventist Church is simply not reaching the vast majority of the population.

“The proportion of Caucasians in the division declined from 72% in 1980 to 60% in 1990,” reports City University of New York sociologist Ronald Lawson. “They were estimated as 52% in 1996, and are expected to become a minority by 2000.”

The white, non-Hispanic church membership has almost entirely vanished in several major cities. In New York City, for example, nearly half of the members (47%) are English-speaking immigrants from the Caribbean. One in five (19%) are Hispanics and almost as many (17%) are immigrants from Haiti and other Franco phone nations in the Caribbean basin. Only 8% are native-born African Americans and a handful (3%) are non-Hispanic whites. (Ronald Lawson, "From American Church to Immigrant Church: The Changing Face of Seventh-day Adventism in Metropolitan New York," Sociology of Religion 59:4, 1998; pages 359-391.)
Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

The scale and complexity of the administrative and pastoral problems faced by the Adventist denomination is simply beyond most of the individuals in its membership.

"Over three generations almost everything has changed in the way the white, Anglo majority culture of the United States experiences the realities of ethnicity," writes Monte Sahlin. "The experience of my own family is instructive. My father attended Enterprise Academy in Kansas just at the beginning of World War II, and the student body included no minorities. When I attended Glendale Academy in the 1960s, the civil rights movement was a topic of discussion and there were a handful of African Americans, Hispanics and Asians among the students. In the 1990s my daughter attends Takoma Academy where she, as a Caucasian, is a minority.

"The Seventh-day Adventist Church is ahead of the trends that are advancing slowly in the demographics of America. White Americans are already a minority in the North subtracted from the total membership, less than 50% remains. By the end of the decade, people of color will make up the majority of the membership across the division. This creates the unique and difficult category of the Majority minority; a major challenge for the Adventist Church in the years ahead."

("Diversity Needs to Include Everybody," Chapter 8 in Make Us One, Delbert W. Baker, ed.; Pacific Press, 1995; page 181)

One of the consequences of a situation in which there is no longer an ethnic majority is that it upsets the conventional system of inter-group relations. The majority has always served as a reference point for minority concerns and proposals to improve social justice. The majority has seen themselves as the norm for a democratic community. Now the Adventist community in North America is into uncharted seas. No matter how painful the power, blindness and unfairness of the majority may be on occasion, it did provide an anchor for the whole community. Now fears of fragmentation result from the sense of the loss of that anchor. Solutions to problems based on concessions by the majority are no longer possible. Leaders must learn the art of coalition politics in order to achieve any goal.

Before World War I and after World War II, there were massive waves of immigration to the United States from Europe. These immigrants made up what was called by some, the great "melting pot" of the U.S. culture; they were educated, and worked toward assimilation and toward adopting mainstream American values. The Adventist Church responded initially with the planting of German, Italian, and language-group churches, but as the process of assimilation moved on, these congregations

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<th>Ethnic Background of Members</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000*</th>
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<tr>
<td>Anglo, Caucasian</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>3%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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*Projected.

Source: NAD Office of Information & Research

American Division; when African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans and Canadians and Bermudians of all races are
Adventism’s Changing Context

In the United States and Canada, Adventism faces a changed context in which former conceptions of our identity as the Remnant Church whose purpose is to present the Three Angels messages in the context of Revelation 14:6-12 to "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people," is being seriously challenged.

Not so long ago the North American church—and the leadership of the world church—was dominated by a white, northern European, rural, Protestant mind set. People of color were “over there . . . in the mission field,” and different cultures were seen as “foreign,” often “primitive” or inferior, and soon to be replaced by advantages of the modern tools and methods brought, along with the gospel message, by the missionary.

The growth of the Adventist Church can be measured by more than its amazing expansion from fewer than one million members in 1950 to nearly 12 million today. It is currently doubling in membership about every four years, and at that rate will reach 100 million members by 2015.

These numbers represent a qualitative dimension of growth which has far greater impact on the Church than the phenomenal quantitative expansion. As the Adventist community becomes larger, it also becomes more complex, including many different kinds of people—personalities, occupations, socioeconomic levels, religious backgrounds and cultures.

As the Church grows larger it becomes more difficult for the individual members to encompass in their perceptions the entire Adventist community. Instead, they increasingly live and think entirely within their own local setting. This is manifest in a kind of congregation-centered perspective, in widespread ignorance of the larger denominational picture and of other cultures within the Adventist family, as well as in increased concern about local needs as opposed to loyalty to national and international programs. The world-wide “family” of Adventism is so large that it is impossible to feel very close to such an abstract entity. A shift to a local focus results.

Out of this localism emerges a wide spectrum of styles of Adventism. This is a difficult issue. On the one hand, the Adventist faith must adapt to many different cultures and settings in order to penetrate every people group. On the other hand, in the variety of forms, the clear, single identity appears to lose focus. Adventists in North America must decide if they are a singular, religious

Adventism in a New Context

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Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

communities, which express their religion in different ways than the majority, are struggling with the problems of translating their religious concepts and words which are, in many ways, unacceptable to the dominant Anglo culture.

Those who have been victimized by walls of exclusion know the joy of seeing them come down. Minority groups in North America know about walls. Blacks know about walls! They learn about them early in life. Parents tell black children how their forebears had to sit in low ceiling balconies of white churches with signs reading "B.M." [black members] or "colored" referring to drinking water.

African Americans, the psychological scars of slavery, "Jim Crow" and continued racism etched indelibly upon their minds, know about walls! Native Americans, whose ancestors have been slaughtered, robbed of their land and confined to reservations, know about walls. Hispanics who have often been played against blacks in the fight over crumbs, Jews who were victims of Hitler's madness, women from all ethnic groups who have been dominated, demeaned and excluded by chauvinistic attitudes--all know about walls!

Multicultural sensitivity, cross-cultural talk about relationships--black and white, white-nonwhite--often causes fear. People suffer paradigm paralysis. They hear what they will hear and what they hear, filtered by the grid of their own ignorance and prejudice, often takes on a completely different meaning than what is intended.

In discussions of ethnic and racial issues in North America, it often appears that we are watching different videos. Whites see one reality, Blacks see another; Hispanics and Asians yet others.

When the pollsters ask, we sound as though we all believe in the same thing. Annual surveys by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago show support for the principles of integration and racial equality increasing among both whites and blacks every year. But when confronted with racial Rorschach tests—Reginald Denny, Rodney King, Lani Guinier and the O. J. Simpson trial—we come away with very different interpretations and behavior.

Signs of the Times

We must consider the signs of the times. As we enter the 21st century, profound social, economic, religious, and demographic changes are transforming the global map and shaking the contours of freedom. Our world is becoming increasingly complex and unforgiving. With a post-apartheid nation, can South Africa rise above its 342-year history of exploitation to build a multiracial society? Without the rigid system of segregation, whites are worried about attempts to redistribute the wealth of the nation—their wealth, they say.

We live in a world where the tensions are northern hemisphere vs. southern hemisphere, rich vs. poor, developed vs. underdeveloped, educated vs. uneducated. As a result, a new reality is emerging, not just for America, not just for the Adventist Church, but for the whole world. Part of that reality is the diversity and multicultural nature of society in the global context. The demographics are clear. We are becoming increasingly diverse, whether we want to be or not.

We use to talk about a melting pot, integration, and assimilation. But that is not the multiculturality that is emerging for the future. It's a multiculturality where there is going to be a fierce holding on to language, identity and understandings of who one is. It will be a multiculturality where there are clear and distinct particularities that each person holds to as part of their culture.
structure of Regional Conferences, the historically African American Adventist congregations have multiplied and enjoyed significant church growth. At the same time much of Adventist life remains segregated by race and culture.

Canada has had a somewhat different history. It is more tolerant of diverse cultures and has seen itself as both a multilingual and multicultural nation to a much greater degree than the United States. Yet, there are tensions and problems between cultural groups. The Adventist Church in Canada has resisted the creation of conferences defined by ethnic territory, but today it faces some of the same issues as the U.S. Church.

Understanding American Culture
Everyone lives in culture. Consequently, the church must give careful study to its context in order to translate the truth of the gospel as good news for the society to which it is sent in archaelogy knows that in order to read the Bible accurately, we must understand the original cultural context. If we want to proclaim Bible truth today, we must also understand the cultures into which we speak.

Language is only one element of culture. Language cannot stand alone, apart from the total fabric of a culture. The meaning of language is shaped by the total experience of those who hear it and use it.

Culture is neutral. It does not have moral or theological meaning in and of itself. It is simply a medium in which an expression of eternal truths can be shaped. Contextualization actually assists the church in seeing how it may be compromising gospel truth as it lives out its obedience to Christ.

In order to responsibly contextualize Bible truth, the church must assess cultures critically. This involves discerning, unmasking the philosophical foundations and values of a culture. The gospel is not only a message to be conveyed through culture, but also a basis for an ethical critique of the culture. Both evangelistic communication and social ethics are part of the mission of the church.

The cultural context of North America has been going through fundamental changes over the past few decades. These changes now require congregations and conferences to think increasingly of their location in the larger community in missionary terms and to utilize missionary tools for developing ministry.

Generic assumptions can no longer be made about how any evangelistic approach or outreach tool will work. Instead marketing, advertising and the media increasingly deal with "segmentation," the reality that there are many different communities and people groups. Successful businesses target a specific market

Understanding the Culture

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- The church must study of its context in order to translate the truth of the gospel as good news for the society to which it is sent.
- Culture is neutral—a conveyer of messages
- Contextualization helps the church to see how it might be compromising gospel truth as it lives out is obedience to Christ.
- To contextualize responsibly, the church must assess its culture critically, discerning and unmasking its philosophical foundations and values.

Christ's name and authority. It is a mistake to think that the gospel can be articulated outside of culture. Anyone educated in the original languages of Scripture or aware of Biblical
Introduction

We must address the diversity that is a hallmark of the context for mission today. We cannot ignore these realities. To do so is both an ethical lapse and strategically blind.

I will focus on diversity in North America, the United States and Canada. At the same time it could be said that many of the issues addressed here have parallels elsewhere in the world. Of course the principles remain the same whatever the location of attention. Those principles have been well stated by others and reference is made to them in the brief bibliography at the end of this introduction.

I want to deal with the issues related to race, ethnicity and culture that are of primary importance to the mission of the Adventist Church. How does diversity create both challenges and opportunities for the everlasting gospel today and in the future? How can we best make use of the opportunities and best deal with the challenges so as to advance Christ’s mission in our world at the threshold of the 21st Century?

My plan is to present an overview of the strategic challenges facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America relative to multicultural realities; to seek to discern how the gospel commission may be best served in this multicultural context; and discover new directions for cultural harmony in the Adventist Church. Additional information is presented to provide practical helps to those also seeking to function as church leaders in this complex of multicultural realities.

Certain learning objectives for the reader were in mind as I prepared these materials. (1) That you might learn to value ethnic and cultural diversity. (2) That you may learn how to relate productively to diverse evangelism and witnessing opportunities and contexts. (3) That you will understand the strategic issues facing the leadership of the Adventist Church in North America—relative to inter-cultural relationships—as they attempt to minister to a diverse community of believers and respond to a multicultural missionary context.

It is my prayer that you will allow the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ to dwell in you as you are confronted with information which may be new to you and even quite disturbing at times. In order to be faithful to His mission in our time, we must learn to discern between the core Third Angel’s Message and the cultural wrappings in which it has come to each of us; and respect the cultural envelope in which each of our brothers and sisters live.