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Bordes Henry Saturné

Called to Lead in Tumultuous Times

The past decades have seen a substantial amount of tumult in the world of education: admissions scandals, decreased enrollment, deferred maintenance on aging facilities, excessive student indebtedness, faculty and staff layoffs, institutional closures or mergers, mass shootings, rapid tuition rate increases, sexual misconduct, and so much more. Observing the rapidly shifting educational landscape and unsustainable models of funding, Armand Alacbay notes that “the need for engaged trusteeship is at an all-time high. Boards can play a significant role in improving institutional strategy and efficiency without compromising academic quality or raising tuition.”¹

Worldwide, the Adventist education system is growing. New programs and schools are being added at a steady rate.² Boards of institutions that are doing well financially and growing have a responsibility to ensure that growth is managed and sustainable. Yet, while demands for access to education continue to grow, increasing rates of poverty continue to limit this access for the world’s poor.³

In most parts of the world, education is the solution to growing economies and eradicating poverty. In the United States, a different challenge is emerging. Growing in number are the chorus of voices contesting the value of education. Last year, Bryan Caplan, economics professor at George Mason University, published *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*.⁴ In 2016, Tamara Hiler and colleagues asked the pointed question, “Is college

good enough?” commenting on the striking trend in higher education where “nearly half of the students aren’t graduating, many students aren’t earning sufficient incomes even years after enrollment, and far too many are unable to repay their loans.”⁵

Also of great concern is the increasing financial instability of educational institutions. A few months ago, Michael Horn, in a troubling article titled, “Will Half of All Colleges Really Close in the Next Decade?” made the observation that U.S. colleges and universities are finding it increasingly difficult to bring in enough money to cover expenses, primarily due to shifting demographics and changing enrollment trends. Horn predicts that “25% of existing [U.S.] institutions—be it 550 nonprofit and public four-year institutions or 1,100 degree-granting institutions” will “close, merge or declare bankruptcy in the years ahead.”⁶

Richard Hart, president of Loma Linda University (Loma Linda, California, U.S.A.), referring to a “sobering meeting” he attended with the officers of several other Adventist colleges and universities, states that for various reasons, in “the past five years, our collective enrollment in the U.S. Adventist higher education system has dropped about 2 percent a year, from nearly 29,000 in 2012 to 24,369 this year, a loss of over 9 percent . . . It is not panic time, but it does require some rethinking of our priorities and strategies.”⁷

About Adventist elementary and secondary schools, Larry Blackmer, then vice president for education for



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the North American Division, reported in 2017 that 274 schools were closed in 15 years.⁸ These are, indeed, challenging times for all levels of education, and many proclaim that the tuition-driven model is broken and unsustainable.⁹ According to John Farber of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), “We can no longer rely on our traditional strategy of increasing tuition year after year and fund-raising often for our endowments and programming.”¹⁰

Hard-pressed by the financial crunch, educational leaders are looking for solutions to increase and/or diversify their sources of revenue, with mixed success, from partnering with investors to finance the cost of constructing new, non-tuition-generating facilities such as boutiques and hotels¹¹ to offering deep tuition discounts,¹² launching innovative and/or new online programs, or recruiting more international students to improve their institutions’ cash flow.

Several schools have sought additional revenue by turning their eyes toward the government,¹³ in addition to pursuing large donations from the private sector. Yet, these fundraising methods come with their own challenges—primarily a shifting of priorities. David Kirp laments that “priorities in higher education are determined less by the institution itself than by multiple ‘constituencies’—students, donors, corporations, politicians—each promoting its vision of the ‘responsive’ (really the obeisant) institution.”¹⁴

However, challenges always come with opportunities. These tumultuous times should motivate our institutions to work in closer cooperation, the main conclusion of the Chicago Summit,¹⁵ and also an approach advocated by Jeffrey Selingo in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: “There is a better option: true collaboration with other universities, in areas from academics to administrative management.”¹⁶ To accomplish such ambitious goals, we need, both at the board level and in the executive suite, leaders who are “anticipatory thinkers, tolerant of risks and failure, and courageous decision makers.”¹⁷ Financial challenges can test an institution’s commitment to mission; yet such challenges require leaders who are resolute, knowledgeable, visionary, innovative, and deeply spiritual.

In This Issue

This special issue of THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION focuses on the role and responsibilities of board members, who provide leadership and oversight to an impressive global system of more than 8,000 Adventist educational institutions teaching students from early childhood through the graduate level.¹⁸

The educational ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is directly connected to its mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels’ Messages in preparation for His soon return.”¹⁹ Therefore, serving on a board is a ministry. It is essentially a spiritual matter. This is why two articles in this issue address the profound impact of board members’ spirituality on the institutions they govern (Bordes Henry Saturné) and the

moral and ethical work school board members are called to do—a sacred duty that must be exercised with the highest level of integrity and fairness (Duane Covrig).

Additional articles address 10 practical ways board chairs can be more effective in their important responsibility (Ella Smith Simmons); the personal experience of a college president working with her board in the Asian context (Arceli Rosario); counsel to help K-12 board members stay out of legal trouble (Lyndon G. Furst); valuable guidance to help board members fulfil their fiduciary duties of care, loyalty, and obedience as they attentively oversee the finances of the institutions they govern (Annetta M. Gibson); an exploration of the complexities of building a working relationship with various chartering authorities around the world (Hudson Kibuuka); and, tips for preparing to serve on a school board (Craig Mattson).

Additional articles in future issues throughout the remainder of 2019 will address effective governance of institutional boards (Karnik and Joseph Doukmetzian); professional learning for board members, who also have the responsibility to ensure that adequate and relevant professional learning opportunities are afforded to the faculty and staff (Betty Bayer); and, preventing school board members from “going rogue” (Robert Crux).

Called to Lead

When trustees look at a landscape full of challenges, they are often tempted to ask the question: “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” The answer remains, “Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them” (2 Kings 6:15-17, NKJV).²⁰ Trustees also have precious counsel from Ellen White: “Let us be hopeful and courageous He knows our every necessity He has means for the removal of every difficulty, that those who serve Him and respect the means He employs may be sustained.”²¹

We must focus on our mission and preserve the uniqueness of Adventist education.²² As trustees and board members, let us embrace our calling. As teachers and administrators, let us learn more about how school boards function so that we may collaborate with them in supporting and extending the mission of our schools. Let us not focus on the raging waters of the Jordan River, but on the mighty hand of our God (Numbers 13:30; Joshua 14:12; Psalm 20:6-9).

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eral manager, school principal, superintendent of schools, college and university vice president in several U.S. states and two countries: New York, Massachusetts, Haiti, and Thailand. His research interests focus on challenges and opportunities unique to faith-based educational institutions. Dr. Saturné currently serves as the chair of the Ruth Murdoch Elementary School Board in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

As coordinator of this issue, Dr. Saturné assisted in all aspects of its development, from identifying topics, authors, and reviewers to providing input on manuscripts and answering questions. The Editorial Staff of the JOURNAL express heartfelt appreciation for his assistance throughout the planning and production of this issue.

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