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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE FOR FIRST TIME
LOCAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS IN THE NORTH AMERICAN
DIVISION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS: NARRATIVES
FROM CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS' CAREER TRANSITIONS

by

David E. Weigley

Chair: Erich W. Baumgartner, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: EXPLORING THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE FOR FIRST TIME LOCAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS IN THE NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS: NARRATIVES FROM CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS' CAREER TRANSITIONS

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Date completed: July 2016

The position of the president of a conference in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (a senior leadership role) has currently no policy stipulating leadership training prerequisites. Leaders transitioning into the president's position typically are selected from a pool of successful pastors, departmental directors, and executive secretaries by a constituency meeting of delegates from local churches and conference institutions. This qualitative study probed the transition of 12 first-time local conference presidents. The information was gathered by recording in-depth interviews. Eight themes surfaced from the exploration. Leaders experienced the transition as overwhelming, challenging their spirituality, involving new constellations of

relationships, and a shifting of identity. They also noted its impact on their family. Other themes dealt with the leaders' prior job experience, intentional leadership preparation, and mentors.

The findings suggest the need for more intentional leadership and managerial training, including knowledge of basic business principles and financial management. There is also a need for gender diversity training and for support in the form of mentors, assessments, and cohort groupings.

Andrews University
Department of Leadership

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A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
David E. Weigley

July 2016

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*To my wonderful wife, Becky, who has stood by
my side as I devoted countless hours to this study.
Her exceptional love, support, and encouragement
to me will always be treasured in my heart.*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

Successful organizations are intentional in preparing those who lead. Leadership is a skill that can be taught or learned (Avolio & Hannah, 2008). Consequently, successful organizations are deliberate about preparing those who ultimately lead them. They orient the leader to the organization's strategic direction and articulate the "behaviors and perspectives" necessary for leadership (Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004, p. 224).

Structured intentional preparation prerequisites do not exist for first-time local conference presidents within the Seventh-day Adventist church even though, in many places, the organizations they are asked to lead represent large business structures. Local conference presidents in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are leaders who possess what some authors describe as position power (Hughes, Ginnet, & Curphy, 2009, p. 593). Because they chair the organization's chief governing body, the conference executive committee, their position is the most influential position in the local conference. This committee, which is charged with the responsibility of faithfully supporting the mission of the organization, depends upon the president and his administrative team to recommend initiatives that advance the organization's primary objectives. In addition, the

president leads the committee in managing the conference's personnel and financial assets.

The conference committee derives its authority from a set of bylaws for the organization which specifies that this committee represents its constituents between their regular sessions, and transact the business of the conference (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. B-20). A "conference" is a grouping of churches and schools in a geographic region with central headquarters called a conference office. It is in this office that the administrative team (president, executive secretary and treasurer) and support ministries (departments such as: ministerial, youth, personal ministries, health, communications, etc.) work, and execute the mission of the SDA organization in their local context, guided by the approval of the local conference executive committee (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. B-3).

The Seventh-day Adventist church is a "worldwide community of believers united in mission," and operates under a representative form of governance with executive authority assigned to the constituencies and officers as prescribed by constitutions, articles of incorporation, and bylaws (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. B-1). The "primary building blocks" of the organization are: local churches, conferences, unions and divisions, which are part of the international organization entitled "General Conference" (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. B-1). Local conference constituencies participate in the operation and election of leadership for the conference through electing local representatives from each church.

Election of leadership for the local conference and other units, though not a focus of this study, is the purview of the constituents expressed in representative form through

either delegates at a session which transpires every 3 to 5 years according to their own respective bylaws, or by a conference executive committee between sessions. At constituency session time a nominating committee considers candidates for executive officers (president, executive secretary, and treasurer) from any pool of candidates they deem worthy and qualified to serve (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. B-19). The only stipulated requirement according to church policy is that the individual should be ordained to the gospel ministry (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. E-33). Following their deliberations, the nominating committee presents a name to the delegates of a constituency session for their approval. Typically, the selection committee (nominating or conference executive committee, depending on whether it is during a constituency session) chooses an individual who has demonstrated leadership at the local conference or church level. The primary information these selection committees use to determine whether or not an individual can be entrusted with leading a local conference is a candidate's formal education and experience. Selection committees must be careful in their choosing, for much depends on having the right leader (Collins, 2001, p. 13). Jan Paulsen (2011), former world president of the Seventh-day Adventist church, claims that members of the church organization believe their leaders should be both "competent and committed" (p. 76). John Maxwell (2007), noted author and leadership trainer, claims the "impact of your organization" and one's own "effectiveness" is determined by the executive's "leadership ability" (p. 24). Jim Collins (2001), author of *Good to Great*, discovered in his comparative study of "great" as opposed to "good" companies, that senior leadership did contribute to an organization's performance. Leadership is a valued

commodity within the SDA organization, and possessing qualified, competent leaders for top administrative positions is a priority.

For the elected candidate, his or her experience will be a major component for them to refer to in leading in the new context—experience in leadership which may or may not be adequate to now equip, manage and lead a complex organization. Because there is no intentional required leadership training program in the NAD, leaders are chosen solely based upon the experience they have received in previous roles. Before being elected to the office of president most individuals served either as pastors of a parish church, conference departmental directors, or conference executive officers (secretary or treasurer). Absent a deliberate preparation plan for local conference presidents, one can only surmise the effect that inheriting such an influential role has upon both the conference and the new leader. And yet it's puzzling that there are clear recommendations that those who pastor a church congregation become qualified by possessing a Master's degree and ordination to the gospel ministry (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. L-1). Yet, there are no recommendations for those who administrate a conference except as the previously mentioned requirement of ordination.

In addition, this lack of intentional development continues even after the new president is installed—the problem deepens because now they are in new leadership territory, and few union conferences, from my observation, invest in equipping the new leader, even though there is a NAD policy which states that the next higher organization is responsible for providing leadership training for new recruits in significant leadership roles (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. B-22). This is only a suggested policy. My experience within the organization informs that little is done in this area, and leadership

training is not a requirement, leaving the new president without adequate training for their new role.

The NAD invites new presidents to a two-day orientation. This may help the new president understand his impending role, but it lacks the refinement and development that an intentional preparation program would present. One might also argue that the orientation is deficient for it does not incorporate the local context of leadership that could be given if such orientation involved the next higher organization, which is the local union conference. Incorporating involvement with the local union conference is the recommendation according to policy (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. B-22). In addition, leadership commentators Van Velsor, Moxley, and Bunker (2004), of the Center for Creative Leadership, discuss the value of providing only events for leaders in their preparation as lacking in delivering lasting results. They suggest, rather, an approach that “exposes the leader to multiple developmental experiences . . . linked together,” a process that is done over time (p. 207).

Organizations today must be cognizant of the need to prepare leaders with the challenges associated with transitioning to new leadership roles. Transitions are fraught with new challenges and adjustments, especially those considered “upward” with greater responsibilities, that if not managed appropriately could lead to unfavorable consequences for both the leader and the organization (Freeman, 2011, p. 144). Those who study individuals in role transitions realize there are various stages leaders experience as they assume new responsibilities, and believe a knowledge of these can provide helpful information to both the individual and the organization (Gabarro, 1987; Hill, 2003). While some organizations are intentional in preparing a future leader for the

realities of the new position, others seem to believe that leaders will gain enough knowledge and experience on their own without any formal instruction (Levin, 2010, p. 57). Some organizations are so intentional in preparing future leaders that they actually develop a succession plan for identified potential individuals and encourage the leader to engage in a formal leadership development plan (Reeves, 2010, p. 63). Finally, some organizations recognize the pitfalls inherent in the transition process and actually advise persons in transition how to adjust to their new position (Freedman, 2011, p. 145).

Statement of the Problem

Successful organizations are intentional about leadership development, and create opportunities for their future leaders to obtain the necessary training to function effectively in new leadership roles (Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004, p. 224). First-time local conference presidents in the NAD occupy their new roles without any leadership equipping programs mandated by administrative levels of the organization to ensure a degree of preparation for the new assignment. This lack of intentional preparation surely creates challenges for the new local conference president: role ambiguity, ignorance of sound business practices, and a lack of effective leadership principles. While research has addressed training for pastors and others in leadership, no research to date explores the experience of first-time presidents in positions for whom intentional leadership development does not exist. The focus of this study is the transitional experience of first-time conference presidents. New leaders in this position are dependent upon past leadership experiences to guide them in now managing and leading a conference, which begs the question—how did their previous leadership experience assist or hinder them?

Purpose of Study

This study seeks to understand how first-time local conference presidents experience the transition into the presidency and how their previous professional experiences prepared them to serve as local conference presidents.

Research Question

The study was guided by two questions: (a) How do local conference presidents describe their transition into becoming a conference president, and (b) How did previous leadership experience prepare them to serve as a local conference president in the NAD?

Conceptual Framework

This study incorporated two themes to guide the research: transition and preparation. It observes how first-time local conference presidents are affected by their transition into and preparation for their new role as administrators.

Exploring the transitional experience with the first-time local conference president revealed how these individuals adjusted to the changes they encountered. According to William Bridges (2009), noted scholar on career transitions, organizations typically do not adequately acknowledge a person's feelings of loss in the transition process (p. 7). Bridges maintains that "unmanaged transition makes change unmanageable" (p. 8).

Intentional leadership preparation programs in non-clergy endeavors have reaped positive results. Pounder (2010) notes the value of graduate-student leadership preparation programs for potential school principals. Intentional instructional and experiential field-work preparation apparently contributed to the first-time principal's

ability to implement “specific leadership practices that influence student learning” and an improved confidence in their ability to tackle “real-life reform efforts” (p. 260).

These concepts of transition and preparation are further explained in chapter 2, as is their use during the interview process.

Research Design

A qualitative research method was chosen for this study to explore the transition experience of first-time local conference presidents in the NAD. A qualitative study was chosen instead of a quantitative one because, as Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) point out, the explorative and probing nature of a qualitative study provides a better understanding “of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (p. 7). Research participants were selected from a diverse group of first-time local conference presidents whose prior experience was one of either: an executive secretary, departmental director or pastor. To determine their willingness in being part of this research, I contacted each of the participants in the study; having received their agreement to participate, an appointment was scheduled for me to meet with them in person. The majority of the interviews were conducted in the participant’s conference office. And, prior to the interview, all participants signed a release allowing me to record the meeting and use their personal experience for research. Following the interviews all recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, and then the data was coded into a computer software called Dedoose to facilitate the discovery of common themes.

Self as the Instrument

I personally observed this inadequacy of leadership preparation from a number of different perspectives. Precisely as I began pastoring, some within our church organization engaged in very poor and questionable business practices. As a result of heavily investing in Davenport (a church member who owned an investment company and persuaded numerous organizations and individuals to invest with him at unrealistic interest rates in the manner of a Ponzi scheme), church organizations, including local conferences, lost millions of dollars (Wilson, 1983). About the same time, Harris Pine Mills, a large church-managed furniture company that provided much needed student employment on some of our academy campuses, declared bankruptcy (Spangler, 1987). My parishioners and pastoral colleagues expressed wonderment that former pastors, now presidents and managers of conferences equivalent to both small and large businesses, would be tasked with such a responsibility when they could claim little or no business education or experience.

This assessment of church leadership business acumen is still held today by some members in the church. An email regarding the business decisions at a church higher education institution bears this out (see Appendix B). Later, when I became a local conference president, I sensed the awesome responsibility resting on me, and the learning curve was major. My role changed in relationship to the employees as major decisions came across my desk to be referred to the executive committee. Some major programs happened only because of my personal recommendations to the appropriate committees. The organization's culture, especially that of the headquarter's office, was affected by my own attitudes. And though I recognized the authority of the conference was our executive

committee, it still became my responsibility to influence it to practice fiduciary financial management for the organization. In addition, the unpleasant duty of recommending to the conference executive committee the discipline and/or termination of employees due to unethical or immoral behavior fell to me. Yet, amazingly, at the time there was no orientation at the NAD. On my own I tried to gain a better understanding of the position. For example, I requested a meeting with my union conference president (the leader of the next higher church organization) to better understand my new role. And yet I did not believe that I was totally ill-prepared, for had taken some important steps in the event I was ever given the opportunity to serve as a local conference president. My self-imposed preparation included study towards a Master's in Business Administration; work as the executive vice-president of a conference (with the privilege of closely observing a president); service as a departmental director in a conference; and attendance at various leadership workshops and seminars. Self-initiated preparation was not unique to me for a number of gifted administrators within the NAD had been just as intentional, or even more so, in preparing themselves for administrative leadership. This very practice is becoming more utilized by others for future leadership positions (Gibson, 2008). But the above preparation was destined to serve me well in the challenges of my first years as a conference president. Listed below are some of the ways my self-imposed preparation assisted me:

1. The MBA helped me become a knowledgeable fiduciary manager.
2. The executive vice-presidency provided insight into "how to" and "how not to" lead.

3. The departmental position provided an understanding of role dynamics at a conference office.

4. The leadership workshops exposed me to leadership principles I could utilize.

A third personal perspective would be the more recent one of observing the selection of individuals across the NAD to serve as first-time conference presidents. I have seen conferences successfully advancing their mission and improving or maintaining a strong robust financial position. I have also seen the opposite. And not only is the organization itself affected by the decision of who serves as president: the individual appears to be affected as well. In the success stories they are affirmed and motivated to seek new heights for the organization; in the opposite scenario they are frustrated, disheartened and in some cases wanting to vacate the position.

Significance of Study

There has not been a formal study such as this type allowing a group of leaders to have a “voice” regarding their experience as they transitioned from a previous leadership role into that of a local conference president. This study could potentially assist a number of individuals, committees, and organizations in how the leaders are selected and prepared to become a local conference president. First, for the individual who may sense a call to become a conference leader, this study could inform them on how others have experienced the transition to president. For selection committees (conference executive, nominating, etc.), such information could assist them as they consider individuals to lead their conference. For the NAD and local unions, discoveries in this study could potentially guide them in creating supportive networks for new presidents to both assist and encourage them in developing leadership enrichment programs for potential

conference leaders. In both of the two aforementioned areas, this study would aid me as one who is tasked with many times chairing selection committees and with supporting a newly elected president in their new role. In addition, such material may be an aid to others in various organizations who are either contemplating a transition to a senior leadership position, or are involved in selecting an individual to lead their establishment.

Assumptions

This study assumes that first-time local conference presidents desire to be successful in their new experience, that a qualitative study can explore this experience in a meaningful way, and that the participating presidents willingly provided open and honest responses.

Limitations

Being that I serve in a position that provides committee leadership in selecting or re-electing a local conference president (typically the union president chairs the local selection committee, albeit a nominating or executive committee), I was conscious that participants may be guarded or restrained in being vulnerable about sharing their experience (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. C-15). However I felt that my more than thirty years in church leadership, serving in various roles (pastor, departmental director, executive secretary, and conference president) would be a connection where the participant sensed I had “walked in his moccasins” and would therefore be willing to be open with me in sharing their journey. I cannot deny my bias regarding those individuals I personally believe are better prepared to serve as a local conference president because of their varied experience in previous conference office (executive officer or

departmental director) roles. My bias also informs me regarding leader development initiatives I believe should be implemented to adequately prepare presidents based upon my own journey.

Delimitations

This study will be delimited to first-time local conference presidents in the NAD who served as conference executive secretaries, parish pastors, or conference departmental directors before their election to a conference presidency.

Definition of Terms

Local Conference: The conference is a group of local churches joined together in a certain geographic region that has been officially recognized by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (NAD *Working Policy*, 2008-2009, p. 36).

Conference executive secretary: The local conference executive secretary is an officer of the conference and secretary of the executive committee. Together with the president and treasurer he shares in the administrative duties of the organization (NAD *Working Policy*, 2008-2009, p. 158).

Conference executive committee: The conference executive committee is the chief governing body of the organization, charged with “full administrative authority,” over the work of the church in a given conference region (NAD *Working Policy*, 2008-2009, p. 156).

Conference executive officers: According to their prescriptive bylaws, the executive officers of the local conference are as follows: (a) president, (b) executive secretary, and (c) treasurer. The main responsibility of these officers is to “carry forward

the work according to plans, policies, and programs voted by the constituency and/or the conference executive committee (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, p. D-25).

Conference president: The local conference president is the organization's representative at the state or regional level, empowered to "supervise and carry forward the work in the local conference" in conjunction with the other two executive officers as empowered by the executive committee (*NAD Working Policy*, 2008-2009, p. 50).

Conference departmental director: A conference departmental director serves a local conference in an advisory role to the field and is ultimately responsible to the executive committee and president. Their main responsibility is to provide oversight and support for a specific ministry within the conference, such as: youth, ministerial, or education (*NAD Working Policy*, 2013-2014, pp. B-16, B-17).

North American Division (NAD): The North American Division is a regional international governing body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church covering the area of the United States of America, Canada, Bermuda, and Guam. It "is an administrative unit of the General Conference with commensurate authority to carry out responsibilities in the territory assigned to it. It is not a separate constituent level of organization" (*NAD Working Policy*, 2008-2009, p. 1).

Pastor (local church or parish): The local pastor is the spiritual leader of the church. He or she is appointed by the conference executive committee and is responsible for chairing the church governing bodies and providing adequate pastoral care to the congregants (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 2010, p. 49).

Regional conference: A regional conference is a local conference first created in 1944 “to provide for the organization of black-administered conferences where membership, finances, and territory warranted” (*NAD Working Policy*, 2008-2009, p. 49).

Preparation: Preparation is an organization’s structured intentional model in which candidates for future leadership positions are required to experience prior to accepting a particular position (Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, & Basom, 2010).

Seventh-day Adventist: The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a Protestant Christian denomination (Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck, 2009). Two of its prominent and distinct beliefs are alluded to the church’s official name: (a) the observance of Saturday as the Sabbath and, (b) the anticipated return of Christ to this earth in a catastrophic event. It has a worldwide baptized membership of approximately 18.5 million people with a presence in over 200 countries and territories. Worldwide it has nearly 80,000 churches and operates numerous ministries in the form of schools, hospitals and publishing houses (The Official Site of the Seventh-day Adventist World Church, 2015).

Succession planning: Succession planning is a method organizations utilize to evaluate, develop, and promote leadership talent within their respective bodies (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2009, p. 96).

Transition: A transition is a psychological process by which an individual releases a hold on the past and begins to adjust to the future (Bridges, 2009, p. 7). Bridges describes a career transition as a three-step process: “letting go of the old,” “neutral zone,” and “making a new beginning” (p. 4).

Union conference: According to the NAD Working Policy (2013-2014), a union conference is a governance unit of the Seventh-day Adventist church that provides

support and oversight for a collection of local conferences “within a defined geographic area” which finds its legitimacy by being officially recognized by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (pp. B-6, B-15).

Organization of the Study

While sharing an inside view of relationships between living former United States presidents and the current one in *The Presidents Club* (Gibb & Duffy, 2012), the authors also indirectly present a candid glimpse of how the job impacts the man, acknowledging that only former presidents know “what the job does to a person.” Understanding better the experience of the chief executive in any organization could be of value in preparing future leaders to assume such a role. This study probed to determine what experience, if any, provided the participants with the knowledge and understanding for leading as a senior executive. As noted by Freedman (2011), some organizations actually use incumbents to provide an understanding of the new challenge for individuals transitioning into a new leader position (p. 145).

This qualitative study identifies themes in the experience of leaders who transitioned from different roles into that of a local conference president. The resulting information may be of benefit to various groups; those aspiring or recently elected to the leadership role of conference president, selection committees who chose or nominate new leaders, union conference and the NAD leaders tasked with the responsibility of supporting the new presidents, policymakers, and other individuals and organizations involved with leaders in transition.

This chapter articulates the central theme of the study and reviews the conceptual framework and research method. The following chapter presents more information on the

literature deemed appropriate for this qualitative study. The third chapter presents the research model to be utilized in the study—a model that includes the research questions, describes the information gathered from the interviews, evaluates the data and establishes the veracity of the information. The fourth chapter discloses the findings from the twelve interviews. And chapter five draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study explores the experience of, and preparation for, leaders who have transitioned into becoming local conference presidents in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (NAD). In this chapter I will review the scholarly research that informs this study. I will first provide an organizational context of what a conference is, and how its leaders are elected within the NAD.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how first-time local conference presidents experience the transition into the presidency, and how their previous professional experiences prepared them to serve as local conference presidents. This research attempts to give a “voice” to those leaders who have not had the previous opportunity to present their voice in a formal study such as this.

A qualitative system of inquiry was used to “tease out” the participants' complex nuances regarding their transitional experiences. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) point out that the explorative and probing nature of a qualitative study provides a better understanding “of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (p. 7). Also, this literature review follows the Bloomberg and Volpe advice on ways that literature can inform qualitative research. This is done not by trying to locate a certain theory to be tested or correlations to examine, but rather, to

“provide a clear and balanced picture of current leading concepts, theories and data relevant” to the topic (p. 46). More of the qualitative research model will be discussed in chapter three.

Three broad areas especially inform this study: role transition, socialization and leadership development. A role is an “organized collection of behavioral expectations” (Neale & Griffin, 2006, p. 24). A work role transition, according to Nicholson (1984), is a change in our work responsibility where outcomes are different from our previous role, and “the work is radically reshaped by changes in organizational goals or structure” (p. 173). Socialization in this study refers to the “process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role,” and how that new role's environment can impact one’s self-identity (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). Leadership development is a process whereby individuals learn the skills and abilities necessary to be effective in various leadership roles (Dragoni, Tesluk, Russell, & Oh, 2009; McCauley, Kanago, & Lafferty 2010).

I draw most heavily from individuals experiencing a new role in administration in “formal organizations, specifically, principal transition as in the transition from teacher to principal,” for this is a somewhat similar to that of pastors to presidents (Hart, 1993, p. 6). However, there is also rich theoretical data from business leaders in role transitions: frontline to manager (Freedman, 2011), executive assimilation (Levin, 2010), managing the process (Bridges, 2009).

Organizational Context

The organizational context is a governance unit in the NAD (U.S., Canada, Bermuda, Guam) which provides administrative support primarily to churches and

schools in a given region. This governance unit is known as a *local conference* in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and dates back to the late 19th century. According to Adventist church historian George Knight (2007), a precursor of what would be known as the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was the emergence of local state conferences. In 1861, churches in the state of Michigan voted to create the first conference. In the following year, six more conferences were formed by churches in various states of the Midwest and New England. These state conferences specified leaders. For example, Michigan's leadership “consisted of a conference president, a conference clerk, and a conference committee of three” (p. 76). This particular church structure mirrored Methodist church conferences, which functioned as “a permanent operating organization of a group of churches” and existed solely to advance the mission of the church (pp. 79-80). Ellen White (1893), Seventh-day Adventist pioneer, reflected upon the need for organization:

As our numbers increased, it was evident that without some form of organization, there would be great confusion, and the work would not be carried forward successfully. To provide for the support of the ministry, for carrying the work in new fields, for protecting both the churches and the ministry from unworthy members, for holding church property, for the publication of the truth through the press, and for many other objects, organization was indispensable. (p. 22)

Local Conference Governance

Today the local conference operates as “the highest level of self-governance,” and the leaders of conferences, specified as executive “officers,” are selected by vote at a regular “constituency session,” or conference “executive committee” (*GC Working Policy*, 2013, p. 55). According to the *Church Manual* (2010), a conference is among the official levels of church governance:

1. *Local Church*—A group of members in a defined location . . . granted, by the conference in session, official status as a church.
2. *Local Conference*—A group of churches, within a defined geographical area, that has been granted, by action of a division executive committee, official status.
3. *Union of Churches*—A group of churches, within a defined geographical area, that has been granted, by a General Conference Session, official status.
4. *Union Conference/Mission*—A group of conferences, within a defined geographical area, that has been granted, by a General Conference Session, official status as a union conference/mission.
5. *General Conference and Its Divisions*—The General Conference represents the worldwide expression of the Church. To facilitate its worldwide activity, the General Conference has established regional offices, known as divisions of the General Conference, which have been assigned general administrative oversight for designated groups of unions. (pp. 30-31)

Though listed as a part of a multi-structured organization, the local conference enjoys significant autonomy. It is self-governed, and its authority lies in (a) its respective constituency in session and executive committee, which meet between sessions, and (b) its constitution and bylaws. Its relationship to other levels of church organization is primarily one of trust, and it is accountable to the sisterhood of conferences by virtue of its official status and its willingness to abide by “denominational practice and policies, demonstration of adequate leadership and financial capacity,” and general “faithfulness to Seventh-day Adventist doctrines” (*GC Working Policy*, 2012, p. 52). Furthermore, it has final and exclusive authority in employing local church pastors. As stipulated in the *GC Working Policy* (2012-2013), whereas “different elements of organizational authority and responsibility are distributed among the various levels of denominational organization . . . decisions as to the employment of local church pastors is entrusted to the local conference” (p. 53).

Conference President

According to the Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* (2010), the president is to be “an ordained pastor of experience and good report,” and the “chief elder, or overseer, of all the churches” within the local conference (p. 32). Some of his official duties are (a) to “preside over any meeting of any church when necessary” (p. 32); (b) to “direct” in consultation with the conference executive committee all the credentialed employees of the local conference “such as pastors, Bible instructors, departmental directors,” and approve their respective credentials (p. 35); (c) to process requests to the conference executive committee from groups desiring to become churches and to conduct the formal organizing meeting of new congregations (p. 37); (d) to be the first “elder” of groups in the conference (not yet churches) known as companies (p. 39); (e) to preside over the dissolution of a church (p. 41); and to provide counsel to a local church when it is considering for membership a person who has been a previous member elsewhere (p. 51); (f) to consider request(s) from a local elder to officiate and perform a baptism (p. 71); and (g) to ultimately decide who may preach or speak from the pulpit of a local church in his respective conference (p. 116). The *GC Working Policy* (2012-2013) cites two significant duties of the president: (a) chairing the conference executive committee, and (b) chairing the local conference constituency meeting (p. 182).

The president’s authority derives from his relationship to the conference executive committee, and ultimately the constituency session. The *GC Working Policy* (2012-2013) states that “the highest level of authority within the powers granted to each level of denominational organization resides in the constituency meeting,” and each officer is

given authority by this meeting and/or the executive committee that operates in its stead, and it is to these bodies the officers are accountable (p. 52).

Transitions in Jobs and Employments

Four different observations from scholars regarding transitions inform this study:

- (a) career transitions today, (b) phases in transitions, (c) transformative learning, and
- (d) proactive methods for transitions.

Career Transitions Today

In the nature of careers today, many individuals will experience a change in their work role or vocation sometime during their working lifetime (Lyons, Ng, & Schweitzer, 2014; Stephens, 1994). There are several reasons for changes in work roles and tasks. First, technology has done much to change the way we work. For example, even routine work in an automobile factory has changed because of the introduction of new machinery, new technology, or modified automotive products (Streeck, 1987). The teaching profession has changed drastically due to such technical advances such as distance learning (Duncan & Barnett, 2009).

Secondly, our understanding of what does and does not work is changing, which requires individuals to update and alter how they work. This flux in the general work environment has created numerous work-related transitions, and many individuals need to be adept at moving between jobs (Stephens, 1994).

Any basic job-related transition is noteworthy, but here we focus more upon individuals moving from subordinate to supervisory roles, similar to a teacher or vice-principal who transitions to principal. This study focuses upon pastors and organizational

personnel who are in a secondary leadership position moving into the primary one; in this case departmental directors and executive secretaries transitioning to president of a local conference within the NAD.

Career role transitions may involve an alteration in work assignments, such as changing to a different “employment status” at the current job, or to a completely new employer (Nicholson, 1984; Nicholson & West, 1988, p. 48). Some scholars liken such a transition to “crossing boundaries” and claim that when a person leaves one role and enters another they are, in effect, traversing a perceived “boundary” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 5). In my own study all of the participants were, at one time in their careers, either a pastor or a teacher. In those particular roles they experienced different assignments in different locations before taking administrative positions.

Job or career-transition research is quite recent, and has developed various nomenclatures. Noted sociologists Van Gennep (1960) and Glaser and Strauss (1971) describe transitions as *passages*. Nicholson and West (1989) speak of them as *trajectories*. Bridges (1980), who has written voluminously on this phenomenon, first called them *journeys*. Denise Armstrong (2011) in her more recent study of classroom teachers transitioning to become administrators shares how psychologists and sociologists approach the subject a little differently. While psychologists develop constructs and theories surrounding the “subjective or internal nature of change” within the individual as he or she relates to the organization, sociologists concentrate more upon the “external and objective aspects of this passage”—in other words, how individuals are shaped by the “organization” (Armstrong, 2011, p. 13).

Phases in Transitions

This literature review attempts to highlight various aspects from both psychologists and sociologists. Psychologists have enumerated three predictable stages in the transition process: (a) precipitating a change, (b) middle state, and (c) new beginning (Lewin, 1947; Viney, 1980). Some sociologists posit a three-point “passage,” but with a different terminology: (a) separation, (b) transition, and (c) reincorporation (Butler, 1998; Van Gennep, 1960). Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) suggest a transition happens “within a development framework” occurring in stages, “with each stage relating to the next for adaptation and successful adjustment” (p. 48). Armstrong (2011) built upon the seminal work of both research psychologists and sociologists, suggests four stages, or *epicycles* of transition: “Exit-Entry, Immersion-Emersion, Disintegration-Reintegration, Transformation-Restabilization” (pp. 62-63). All of these models have similarities in that they suggest a person in transition experiences various phases or stages where separation occurs, then their orientation into it, followed finally by assimilation into their new role.

According to Bridges (2009, p. 5), career transitions entail three distinct psychological phases which simultaneously impact the leader: (a) “ending, losing, and letting go,” which deals with bringing closure to the past position; (b) “the neutral zone,” which some might call a “no man’s land” or a liminality where the past has vanished but the new has yet to become functional, a phase “when the critical psychological realignments and repatternings take place;” and (c) “the new beginning,” which is when the leader understands he or she has experienced a transformation and feels both a “new identity” and a renewed vitality. As the leader progresses through the transition process,

internalizing its affect, he or she must let go of the past. Situational change hinges on the new position and its novelty, while psychological transition depends on letting go of the old reality and old identity experienced before the change took place (Bridges, 2009, p. 7).

Elsner and Ferrands (2006, p. 44) claim that transitions actually have “different stages and styles of beginning.” They posit that how one transitions into a new position depends on how the exit from the last one occurred, meaning fresh starts are affected by how we close past ones. According to Bridges (2009, p. 7), organizations do not acknowledge the need for this “letting-go process,” and as a result they experience unnecessary failures in numerous employee transitions. He claims that “the failure to identify and get ready for endings and losses is the largest difficulty for people in transition” (p. 8). In their “three-wave longitudinal study,” Niessen, Binnewies, and Rank (2010) discovered a similar situation requiring employees to relinquish “psychological attachment” to previously held self-concepts related to their work-roles. In their study of 131 creators of small businesses, they found that “disengagement from the past work-role was positively related to the pursuit of learning in the new work-role,” and that there was a negative correlation to “pursuit of learning and fit with the new work-role” when an affection remained for previous work roles (pp. 707-708).

My own study of local conference presidents probed this difficulty of relinquishing prior role identities in transitions. In her study of educators positioned to become principals, Browne-Ferrigno (2003) determined that “changing educational careers requires an individual to relinquish the comfort and confidence of a known role—such as being a teacher—and experience the discomfort and uncertainty of a new,

unknown role—being a principal” (p. 470). Crow and Glascock (1995) confirmed this need for teachers to distance themselves from their teacher-role identity in order to embrace a new identity as an administrator.

In his seminal work on role transition, Nicholson (1984) describes the impact of role adjustment whereby the participant either changes to meet the role, or changes the role to adhere to his/her perception of how the role should be fulfilled. Ashforth (2001) posits that role transitions are associated with some degree of a “cognitive change of gears,” and that the larger transitions create more feelings of change for the participant than the smaller transitions (p. 51). Job factors may encourage participants to alter their self-concept, especially if those factors involve positive evaluation by peers or work associates. More recently, Neale and Griffin (2006) exposed these elements in role transitions: (a) “system requirements,” which is an organization’s expectations of the individual; (b) “role-schemas,” a person’s own perception regarding role fulfillment; and (c) “role pre-suppositions,” which are personal beliefs regarding the role. According to their model, the congruence of all three elements creates the most positive outcome for the participant executing the role. According to their research, individuals who experience their model are less prone to have conflicts regarding the organizations’ expectations of them, and are more apt to demonstrate the appropriate behaviors to execute their new role.

Transformative Learning

Both Isopahkala-Bouret (2008) and Browne-Ferrigno (2003) see career transitions as transformative experiences in a leader’s life. Browne-Ferrigno, in her year-long qualitative study of 18 professional, front-line educators, discovered how they had

difficulty relinquishing their self-concept as a teacher to assume a new one as an administrator, thereby needing a role identity transformation. Isopahkala-Bouret (2008) discovered that many of the 16 transitioning participants of a technology company experienced difficulty enacting “their new roles according to their prior perspectives” (p. 80). Both studies revealed the value of self-reflection in ameliorating the issues of transition transformation. But Isopahkala-Bouret found the transformative learning theory of Mezirow (1990) especially helpful since it incorporates critical self-reflection as a mode of attempting to understand decisions and actions embraced by an individual in transition.

According to Mezirow (2003), “transformative learning is metacognitive reasoning . . . and emphasizes insight into the source, structure, and history of a frame of reference, as well as judging its relevance, appropriateness, and consequence” (p. 61). Malkki (2011) reports that numerous scholars criticize this approach because it only depends on the “rational and cognitive aspects of learning, at the expense of the non-rational, emotional, and social aspects.” But Closs and Antonello (2011) maintain the value of utilizing transformative learning theory and applaud its entry into the business world in assisting managers with learning and potential behavioral changes. They posit that when “significant learning integrates instrumental and communicative knowledge,” individuals experience “emancipatory learning” wherein their “perspective” about themselves changes, leading to a transformation of self. Denise Armstrong (2011) in her 4-year study of teachers becoming administrators, refers to Mezirow’s (2003, 1990) transformative learning theory to describe some of the stages they experienced in their change. She calls the fourth and final stage in the transition epicycle *transformation-*

restabilization, and suggests that this final stage in the process is consistent with transformational learning theory, representing a transformation and “fundamental shift” of an individual’s “beliefs, values, perspectives, and frame of reference” (p. 103).

Proactive Methods for Transitions

Cocklin and Wilkinson (2011) identify proactive methods for addressing the challenges inherent in transitions. In their two-year longitudinal, qualitative study of an experienced administrator assuming the position of a principal at an elementary and secondary school, they observed some of the leader’s effective strategies for facilitating a smooth transition. The transition at the school was successful with a number of factors obtained: (a) certain traditions were followed, (b) change was carefully and strategically implemented, (c) the context of the situation was carefully analyzed by the new principal, and (d) the transition was planned so as not to occur in the midst of a crisis (Cocklin & Wilkinson, 2011). Similarly, Concelman and Burns (2006) list several concerns to confront during a transition: (a) “relationships and networks,” meaning new assistants, associates, and bosses; (b) understanding the “big picture view,” such as connecting “strategy, values, and culture;” and (c) a structured plan of orientation, whereby the new leader follows a blueprint of explicit and measureable tasks (p. 52).

Theories of transition highlight the experience of first-time presidents, and suggest phases leaders experience as they exchange one role for another, especially when there is a disparity between job expectations and assignments. According to research these phases consist of an end, neutral zone and type of assimilation, and finally, a new beginning (Armstrong, 2011; Bridges, 2009). Theorists have presented studies whereby individuals in transition can be proactive in dealing with the stages of a transition

(Cocklin & Wilkinson, 2011; Concelman & Burns, 2006). And some believe individuals in transition can benefit from embracing the transformative learning model. This study probes how first-time local conference presidents experienced transitioning to a new role, and what impact it had upon their lives, as well as the lives of their families.

Socialization

As individuals begin a new assignment within an organization, especially a managerial or administrative one, or move to a new organization, or into a brand new career, they often confront a major step before meaningful assimilation and role productivity can happen. This socialization is the “process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). For Schein (1968), the extent of socialization includes “the value system, the norms, and the required behavioral patterns of the organization or group.” Not to be minimized, socialization can predict an employee’s “satisfaction, commitment, retention, and performance” (Wanberg, 2012, p. 18).

Person Environment Fit Theory

Because socialization is a learning process, many of the theories on how to maneuver successfully through its various phases are “cognitive,” and utilize a degree of “uncertainty, reduction and desire for control” tactics (Asford & Nurmohamed, 2011, p. 11). Asford and Nurmohamed note that there are a number of popular strategies utilized by researchers studying how newcomers ‘run the gauntlet’ of socialization. They spell out two such theories: (a) “person environment fit theory” purporting that poor job

outcomes result from a “misfit” between person and job; and (b) “social identity theory,” whereby the new employee attempts to “develop a ‘situated identity’” (p. 11).

Saks and Ashforth (1997) claim that “person-environment fit theory” is “a cornerstone of industrial/organizational psychology and human resources management,” and Schneider (2001) concludes that “the concept of person–environment fit is so pervasive as to be one of, if not the, dominant conceptual forces in the field.” Lee, Reiche, and Song (2010) add that it is “one of the most useful frameworks to deal with . . . organizational challenges.” In Ostroff’s (2012) review of person-environment fit (PE) theory, she says that the theoretical framework of fitting an employee to a prescribed job assignment or position has existed since the days of Plato, but surfaced in the early 20th century with terms such as “congruence” and “attributes”—matching an individual’s natural abilities with “vocations” (p. 373). She continues to expound on PE:

Definitions of PE fit in organizational psychology vary but reflect similar components in that individuals whose characteristics are similar to or aligned with those of the environment are deemed to be suitable to, harmonize with, or to be in accordance with the environment. (p. 374)

She is quick to point out that PE is challenged by the complexity of a number of factors such as: (a) the fluidity of situational dynamics, and (b) a person’s qualities and natural abilities. Along with these concerns, Edwards (2008) raises the issue of “ambiguity” with regards to PE fit and “job satisfaction, job stress, vocational choice, recruitment and selection, and organizational climate and culture.” He claims that recent research hasn’t made sizable progress in developing a “strong theory;” however, the article sheds light on ways to ameliorate some issues. Recent studies in the field of PE are attempting to probe this complexity and ambiguity by assigning more specificity to both the person and the fit. In their recent study, Lee et al. (2010), probe the relationship

between “person-job (PJ),” which specifies how a person’s physiognomies fit those of a “specific job,” and that of “person-organization (PO),” which determines the “compatibility between individual and the organization” (p. 154). This study examines PE by considering the effects of “social capital” and its impact on newcomers, with social capital defined as a resource available from a system of association to an individual or group (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). They predict newcomers will leverage social capital to achieve a higher degree of “PJ and PO fit” (Lee et al., 2010, p. 160). While their study and presentation of a conceptual model is helpful and contributes to the PE conversation, it still lacks adequate testing to determine its validity.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT) shows how an individual perceives personal identity by identifying with a particular social group or role (Ashforth, 2001, p. 25). Tajfel (1982) suggests that:

In order to achieve the stage of ‘identification,’ two components are necessary . . . a cognitive one, in the sense of awareness of membership; and an evaluative one, in the sense that this awareness is related to some value connotations. (p. 2)

Individuals utilize a method of self-categorizing whereby they perceive themselves to be in a certain group and actually possess some of the attributes of that particular subset (Ashforth, 2001, p. 24). Ashforth, in his definition of SIT, suggests that through a process of comparing roles and determining the salient points of a certain category or categories, individuals will develop an identity, such as doctors being keener about their roles because of how they think patients view them (p. 24). He continues the discussion by referring to Haslam, Oakes, Turner, and McCarty’s (1996) seminal work in social identity who believe that “because individuals are motivated to hold positive

identities, they tend to accentuate differences between their category/role and other categories/roles that favor their own” (p. 25).

In addition, according to Ashforth (2001), individuals typically begin to identify so fully with a certain role or category that they assimilate into their own person the perceived characteristics of that role. An individual’s “goals, values, beliefs, and normative ways of thinking, acting, and even feeling” are thus determined by our “social memberships” (p. 26).

Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008), in a focused study, drawing mostly from research in “organizational studies, social psychology, and communication” probed the assumptions of SIT on these various disciplines (p. 326). The authors discuss how organizational norms and self-identity converge to create both “identification” and a social identity for the self. Their study amplifies both SIT and its sister “self-categorization theory” (SCT), and credits them with assisting our understanding of how one’s self-concept is influenced by the external factors of organizational group dynamics. But its salient contribution to the identity conversation is in its demonstration of how the “process-oriented model” of identification develops. It centers upon a “cycle” of iteration around “organizational sensebreaking,” where the individual questions his or her own sense of self and, through this process, attempts to develop a definition of “organizational reality” (Ashforth et al., 2008). Their model is best summed up, thusly:

We argue that individuals think, feel, or act their way into identification but that enactment and social validation are required to firmly embed the identity in one’s self-definition and to establish one’s legitimacy as a prototypical holder of the identity. (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 359)

A perceived weakness in the study, recognized by the authors, is the lack of research that utilizes their own particular construct. But it still has merit due to its dependency upon, and reference to, many tested theoretical frameworks.

A more recent study by Coleman Baker (2012) at Tarrant County College describes the global application of SIT and shows how its principles of interpretation can be applied to Biblical characters. He claims SIT insights can be a tool to illuminate numerous “inter- and intragroup dynamics and social identity formation” inherent in the sacred writings of Scripture (p. 136). For example, he cites how one researcher, studying community dynamics in the book of Nahum, believes utilizing SIT can assist in understanding a particular sub-group’s interpretation of ethics if you know how they perceive themselves (p. 134). Another example illustrating the dynamics of social identity cited by Baker (2012) is how God assisted with creating a group identity formation by stipulating His “chosen people, Israel” in the Old Testament (p. 129).

Identity Theory

Ashforth (2001, p. 26) adds another theory to the conversation: a newcomer’s socialization with an organization—identity theory (IT). IT can be termed a self-perception type theory whereby an individual’s idea of self stems from the perceptions he or she believes others have about them (Mead, 1934). Numerous authors who have contributed to this theory posit a twofold event in which “social interactions and the internalization of collective values, meanings, and standards” create in the mind of an individual a sense of self. In essence, people begin to see themselves in terms of how they believe others see them (Ashforth, 2001, p. 26; Burke, 1991; Stryker, 1980). This theory acknowledges the existence of other views of oneself and grants that a person’s identity

will adjust to the particular setting one might be in—parent, child, student, boss, subordinate. In fact, Ashforth (2001, p. 26) calls this “a portfolio of selves.” Stryker (1980) believes there is actually an order to our self-perceptions, with the most prominent ones dictating our strongest identities. Ashforth (2001, p. 26) states that “the greater number of valued relationships that are predicted on the role, the greater the role’s salience.” SIT and IT are very similar in explaining how one’s self-identity is connected to a social setting where meaning is a consequence of occupying particular group categories and/or roles. Yet according to Ashforth they are dissimilar in that “SIT emphasizes situational factors, whereas IT . . . emphasizes personal factors” (p. 29).

Theories of socialization highlight the experience participants in this study had as they transitioned to their new role as conference president. Researchers describe socialization as the skills necessary to operate in the social environment of an organization, and believe it has a direct effect upon an individual’s personal identity. This social effect is so strong, according to researchers, that it can even alter a person’s frame of mind, including their values, opinions, and way of thinking. Three theories of personal social dynamics are reviewed that contribute to the study: personal environment fit, social identity, and identity. This study of first-time conference presidents explored their own personal identity issues as they transitioned into a new role of leadership.

Socialization and Role Change Within the Work of Professionals

Three studies regarding teachers and vice-principals transitioning to the role of principal are included in this review because they are germane to the research of individuals transitioning from parish pastoring or lesser administrative local conference positions to that of the president or chief administrator. Ann Weaver Hart (1993), writing

about succession among local school administrators, discusses how individuals transitioning from a lesser administrative or educational instructional position to that of principal are impacted or affected by numerous factors such as: (a) organization socialization—the differing viewpoints of the individuals transitioning as well as of faculty, staff, and students, (b) implications of leader succession, and (c) insider and newcomer dynamics, (e.g., teachers transitioning and existing principals and staff).

Proactive Methods for Socialization

As the new principal transitions into his or her new role, Hart (1993) suggests five ways in which a principal's supervisor or superintendent can assist them with the socialization process:

1. Facilitate the sharing of “collective experiences” in group settings from other successor principals, focusing upon the “innovations and new behaviors” utilized in their new position.
2. Create opportunities to develop formal and informal mentors who assist specifically with “professional identities” in their new role.
3. Advocate multiple pre-visits to the new assignment prior to assuming formal duties, and substantial conversations with the predecessor for observation and reflection (Weindling & Earley, 1987).
4. Set a specific time frame for the intentional professional socialization—perhaps in the first 6 to 8 months.
5. Introduce “role models,” leaders who have succeeded in their work, to the successor, distinguishing this from a mentor's long-term relationship (Hart, 1993, pp. 273-282).

In her study of 18 individuals considering a potential move to principal, Tricia Browne-Ferrigno (2003) discusses realized, unrealized, expected, and unexpected impacts upon the individual anticipating such a transition. Three points relating to the transitions were: (a) understanding the role of a principal, (b) early socialization in the new position, and (c) “role-identity transformation.” The participant’s perception and understanding of the role of principal was greatly enhanced by the cohort experience. Most significant in their new understanding was a shift in role-identity, the move from their teacher self-concept to that of a principal. Teachers related how their views changed regarding an administrative position and the sense of loneliness and isolation caused by the new role. “I understand the decisions administrators make,” one teacher said, “as well as the reasons why teachers occasionally feel so isolated or even have an ‘us vs. them’ mentality” (p. 489). In addition, it was observed that participants learned more by engaging and observing principal practitioners than by simply gaining theoretical understanding. Finally, as mentioned earlier, role-identity transformation indicated the difficulty teachers had in relinquishing their self-concept as a teacher and moving to that of an administrator.

Denise Armstrong (2011) utilizes a narrative study methodology to track the experience of teachers becoming vice-principals. Building on the work of Hart (1993), she also draws upon socialization and identity development theory to evaluate the unique experience of her participants. She presents a “role transition/identity development model” involving four epicycles:

1. *Entry-Exit*—when the beginning administrator first experiences the transition from the classroom to the office of vice-principal, personally and professionally.

2. *Immersion-Emersion*—when the new administrator starts to become heavily involved in the socialization of his or her new position.

3. *Disintegration-Reintegration*—when the leader relinquishes some identities of the past and begins to form new ones centered upon professional and organizational expectations.

4. *Transformation-Restabilization*—when the administrator, by a process of cognition and emotional adjustment, fully identifies with the new role.

Studies in the educational discipline whereby teachers become principals can be viewed as a parallel to pastors and lower-tiered administrators transitioning to that of conference president. Researchers provide examples of how socialization is managed in the workplace by other similar professions. Suggestions are given by both practitioners and theorists to provide proactive methods in assisting individuals with the nuances of socialization in the workplace. Some scholars believe socialization involves various stages individuals experience as they transition from one work role to another. This study probed the socialization experience of first-time conference presidents as they assumed a new leadership role.

Leader Preparation and Development

A portion of this study focuses upon how leaders were prepared to become a conference president; therefore, a section of this literature highlights some of the theories dealing with leader and leadership development.

Leader Development Versus Leadership Development

A number of scholars distinguish between leader development and leadership development. According to Dragoni (2009), “leader development is defined as the process by which individuals learn and develop leadership skills and abilities necessary for effectiveness in leadership positions,” while McCauley et al. (2010) consider it to be the “expansion of a person’s capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes” (p. 2). Leadership development, on the other hand, deals more with social capital. As described by McCauley, it centers upon interacting and impacting collectives, basically “any group of people who share work,” assisting them to expand their capacity to “produce direction, alignment, and commitment” (DAC) (p. 20). This is a developing view of leadership itself, building upon previous understandings, whereby leadership focuses simply upon influencing others. According to Drath et al. (2008), leadership is better understood as not just a leader assisting followers to accomplish shared goals, but also assisting in increasing a group’s capacity to produce DAC. Briefly summarizing the two definitions: leader development focuses upon the individual leader, while leadership development focuses on the leadership capacity of the collective organization (Riggio, 2008).

While these definitions of leader and leadership development present an attempt to distinguish between two different conceptual ideas of intentionally preparing an individual to lead a given organization, other more broad definitions exist. Referring primarily to leadership development, Brungardt (1997) suggests a need for more clarity with “leadership development,” “leadership education,” and “leadership training” because theorists often group them together, using the terms “interchangeably to explain

the same phenomenon” (p. 83). Referencing Robert’s (1981) seminal work on student learning, Brungardt (1996) claims that “leadership development” spans one’s entire life and draws upon both formal and informal leadership occurrences, suggesting certain leadership events during the life cycle leverage “one’s leadership potential” and development. Therefore, he would include “leadership training” as just another form of the greater theme he called “leadership development.” In attempting to understand how local conference presidents were prepared to lead a conference, this view of leadership development was considered, recognizing a wider experience than just formal training—those lessons gained earlier life.

Leader Development

Reviewing these theorists and researchers, one would conclude leadership development is a broader term than simply “leader development.” To understand how an individual is prepared to lead an organization, knowledge of leader development theory is valuable to this study. Day and Harrision (2007) posit that “individual leader development is the foundation” of any successful leadership development (p. 370). McCauley et al. (2010) suggests four suppositions for developing leaders: (a) most people have engaged in some form of leadership, experiencing it in different roles; (b) context—and not only one, but multiple—is a teacher for a developing leader; (c) individuals can expand their leadership capacities; and (d) leader development results in useful outcomes—namely, the improvement of one’s leadership competence in various roles (p. 3). Machida and Schaubroeck (2011) suggest personal self-efficacy—“leaders’ confidence in their abilities, knowledge, and skills in areas needed to lead others effectively”—to be a critical factor in a leader’s development and learning. This effective self-efficacy is not

an over-confidence in one's leadership acumen, but rather a confidence that through intentional training and growth it is possible to learn the necessary skills to lead successfully (Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011). In fact, Avolio and Hannah (2009) designate this as "leader developmental efficacy" and define it as "the extent to which leaders believe that they can develop a specific ability or skill to fulfill their responsibility in a specific context or leader role." Interesting in this research is that personal leadership-efficacy is enhanced by intentional leadership training and development. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) discovered this in their study of over 500 school principals. It is a cyclical process whereby the leader's self-efficacy regarding leadership increases as the leader expands his or her leadership capacity.

Model for Leader Development

McCauley et al. (2010) propose a model which incorporates three basic elements—assessment, challenge, and support—as necessary in every leadership experience to achieve effective leader development.

1. *Assessment*—formal (structured written performance evaluations, etc.) and informal feedback (family, friends, etc.) that informs a leader where he/she must "learn, improve, or change."

2. *Challenge*—experiences ("novelty, difficult goals, conflict, and dealing with diversity") requiring an individual to vacate his or her comfort zone and develop "new capacities" (this being the most important element for leader development).

3. *Support*—a sense of safety and encouragement provided by numerous people groups in the leader's life ("bosses, coworkers, family, friends") (pp. 6-12).

Day (2001) specifies six strategies organizations can utilize in leader development: “(a) 360-degree feedback; (b) executive coaching; (c) mentoring; (d) networking, which involves broadening individual networks; (e) job assignments that consist of assessment, challenges, and support; and (f) action learning.”

Because the leaders I am researching come from a spiritual context and perspective, I would also mention the work of J. Robert Clinton (2012), who suggests that the most important aspect of leader development is “spiritual formation” (p. 219). By this he means the internal development orchestrated by God in the life of the leader. Center stage in this development is a leader’s character and sense of a God-directed, God-led, God-filled life. Obviously, this presupposes a surrender to the moving of God in one’s life, the belief that one’s own development results from a perception that God is active in the life.

Different models and theories of leadership preparation reflect the experience first-time conference presidents had prior to transitioning to their new position. Theorists make a distinction between two different types of development: leader versus leadership. Leader development focuses upon enriching the personal skills of the leader, while leadership development concentrates on increasing one’s ability to assist others in achieving certain goals through incorporating; direction, alignment, and commitment. A practical model for leader development was discussed suggesting three basic elements: a challenge, assessment, and support. This study of conference presidents explored their level of leader/leadership development prior to assuming their new role, and requested participants to reflect upon those experiences they believed most prepared them to lead a local conference.

Leader Development and Experience

Researchers have established that job-related experience is a significant element in a leader's development and effectiveness (McCall, 2004; Van Velsor et al., 2004, p. 208). This study of leaders who assumed a local conference president position will seek to understand how previous life experiences, primarily work roles, assisted in preparing them to lead. Researcher McCall (2004) claims that the "primary source of learning to lead, to the extent that leadership can be learned, is experience" (p. 127). Yip and Wilson (2010) reported similarly on studies conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership over the past thirty years: leaders learn most from experience and, primarily, experience in a work environment (p. 63). These scholars identify five significant growth producers that stem from experience: "challenging assignments, developmental relationships, adverse situations, course work, and personal experience" (p. 65). Of these, the most salient were "challenging," or "stretch" assignments, and "developmental relationships" (pp. 64, 68). Yip and Wilson's findings are consistent with earlier research reported by McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988), whose seminal work in leader development and experience highlighted challenging assignments and developmental relationships as particularly significant.

Leader Experience and Learning

While experience appears to be a major contributor to leader development, it remains to be shown how to help leaders learn from it (Day 2010). McCall (2010) claims there are two main factors in a leader's willingness/ability to learn from experience: (a) the mindset and practice of the organization, and (b) the attitude of the leader towards learning. Learning can be enhanced if the organization creates the appropriate

environment such as intentionally selecting individuals to engage in challenging situations, providing “appropriate feedback and support,” and making certain that both the developing leader and his or her immediate supervisor are accountable to the “learning objectives” (McCall, 2010).

Yip and Wilson (2010) believe there is a positive effect upon the learning of the developing leader if “elements of assessment . . . and support” are present with the challenging situation and, better yet, if the supervisor provides these informally (p. 76). Along with the developing leader, learning from an experience must be an intentional and desired outcome (McCall, 2010). DeRue and Scott (2009) discovered that leaders who approached a challenging situation desiring to learn from it were better able to manage the challenge and assimilate new knowledge. They basically related to the challenge as an opportunity to grow rather than being overwhelmed by it. McCall (2010) articulates the need for the developing leader to be proactive in learning from experience:

For all that organizations can do to create a climate and context for learning, and despite all the resources and support they may throw at it, it is, in the end, up to the individual to take advantage of the opportunity and grow. (p. 67)

The aforementioned studies on leader development from experience validate earlier research done by such notables in the field as Dewey (1938), Knowles (1975), and Kolb (1984), who found that learning happens when leaders confront challenging situations and contemplate their own involvement in them. In addition, Ausubel’s (1968) seminal work on cognitive theories of learning suggested that an individual’s knowledge construct expands and advances when confronted with new data acquired through experience. The more recent studies, such as Yip and Wilson (2010), are consistent with these earlier seminal works. Though there has been some discussion about the merit of

continuing to research the impact of experience on leader development, implying that perhaps we know enough about its contributions (McCall, 2010), numerous researchers still believe there is value in probing how organizations can implement effective strategies to harness this incredible learning asset (Day 2010; McCall, 2010; Yip & Wilson, 2010). Hezlett (2010) advises future study on: (a) how to “structure reflection,” (b) how “contextual and situational factors enhance or impede experienced-based development,” (c) how “individual differences” affect the learning experience, (d) how to determine a leader’s “readiness” to grow from an experience-based situation, and (e) how different work assignments contribute to a leader’s leadership acumen.

First-time conference presidents’ reflections on how their previous work experiences assisted in preparing them to lead as a new administrator are consistent with theorists who claim most adults learn from experience. In fact, researchers claim experience is the most prominent form of learning for leaders as opposed to reading books or attending seminars. However, theorists also discuss effective methods on how leaders learn from experience, claiming it is dependent upon one factor in both the organization and the individual, and that is their attitude towards learning. When both are committed to learning as a primary objective, leader development becomes a positive outcome for the individual. This study of new conference presidents probed how previous work experiences, or lack thereof, prepared or hindered them in assuming their new leadership position.

Executive Leadership and Expectations

Executive leadership has its own unique expectations, and scholars have attempted to articulate these in various studies. Barnard’s (1938) seminal work, *The*

Functions of the Executive, defined the distinctive nature of executive leadership as being: (a) the “formal coordination” of people and processes necessary to maintain the “vitality and endurance of an organization,” and (b) helping the organization accomplish its purpose through executing the “specialized work of maintaining the organization in operation” (p. 215). Additional scholarship on the function of senior leaders suggested that the role also included interacting with the environment and providing opportunities to their respective organizations (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 532; Gilmore, 1982). Hart and Quinn (1993) found it necessary to include numerous expectations regarding organizational mission from various constituencies. More recent definitions reflect the holistic approach of executive leadership:

That set of activities directed toward the development and management of the organization as a whole, including all of its subcomponents, to reflect long-range policies and purposes that have emerged from the senior leader’s interactions within the organization and his or her interpretations of the organization’s external environment. (Zaccaro, 2001, p. 13)

Some scholars believe this approach is about strategic leadership and posit that an organization’s senior leaders, CEOs, or regional directors have the obligation of “managing the overall enterprise, not just a small unit,” and must be engaged in “substantive decision-making responsibilities” (Finkelstein et al., 2009, p. 4).

The Nature of Executive Leadership

For understanding the character of an executive’s work, Henry Mintzberg’s (1973) book *The Nature of Managerial Work* is a bellwether of knowledge. Mintzberg shadowed five seasoned CEOs for a week, observing their daily activities and minute-by-minute interactions. He summarizes 10 executive roles in three categories:

1. *Interpersonal*—comprising three duties: “figurehead” (the leader has the duty to represent the organization formally), “liaison” (the position enables and expects the leader to engage the organization’s external environment for benefits and information), and “leader” (directing one’s own staff, being responsible for “motivating, staffing, and so on”).

2. *Informational*—comprising three duties: “monitor” (a collector of information that provides insight to the organization), “disseminator” (communicating valuable information to the organization), and “spokesperson” (releasing organization news to its environment).

3. *Decisional*—comprising four duties: “entrepreneur” (change agent) “disturbance handler” (answering threats to the organization), “resource allocator” (determining where the organization is to increase market share), and “negotiator” (deciding when and where to undertake “negotiations on behalf of his organizations”) (pp. 56-57).

More recent studies confirm the nature of the top executive’s role but refine it to include “leader, spokesperson, resource allocator, entrepreneur, environmental monitor, and liaison” (Tsui, 1984). And Kotter (1982) reduces it to three main functions: (a) developing the agenda for the organization which would include “a set of loosely connected goals and plans which addressed their long-, medium-, and short-run responsibilities,” (b) an intentional effort to build a network of relationships both inside and outside the organization to achieve the agenda (this being especially intense at the outset of one’s tenure), and (c) orchestrating support from the network to “implement” the agenda (pp. 60-71).

Finkelstein et al. (2009) describes the functions as seven “dimensions of the job:” (a) external activities, (b) internal activities, (c) strategy formulation, (d) strategy implementation, (e) context creation, (f) substantive decision-making, and (g) symbols utilization whereby the executive uses events and occasions to re-caste vision and mission (p. 19).

Stephen Zaccaro in *The Nature of Executive Leadership* (2001), citing Katz and Kahn (1978), distinguishes between top-level executives and those in lower executive tiers of the organization. Major organizational structural change and the proposal of new policies are the purview and responsibility of the top-executives. Mid-executives involve themselves in the “embellishment and operationalization of formal structural elements.” The lowest executive tier simply utilizes “existing organizational structures to maintain effective organizational operations.” And the unique responsibility of top-executives, according to Katz and Kahn, necessitates leader acumen that includes a “system-wide perspective and high level of personal charisma” (p. 9). Olmstead (2000) suggests that the move from a lower tier executive position to a higher one introduces a level of complexity that requires still other skills (p. 24) and Yip and Wilson (2010) suggest promotional transitions, with its necessary learning, is feasible if the leader is properly supported through the process.

Zaccaro (2001) suggests there are “significant qualitative differences in the nature of junior and senior leadership” (p. 9). He maintains four major concepts: “(a) conceptual complexity model, (b) behavioral complexity models, (c) strategic decision-making models, and (d) visionary or inspirational leadership” (p. 17). Each is briefly explained below:

Conceptual complexity model—this finds the task of the top-executive to be complex and ambiguous because of the multifarious environment and the resulting amount of data processing needed for prudent decision-making. “To thrive, executive leaders require significant conceptual capacities that allow them to make sense of and navigate successfully within such complex environments” (p. 17).

Behavioral complexity models—this focuses on the various roles and appropriate behavior called for if a chief executive is to relate to the requests or demands of numerous stakeholders, the premise of this model being that the executive will have the capacity to adjust behavior to match the situation presented primarily by a constituent.

Strategic decision-making models—these suggest that “organizational effectiveness” is the result of close alignment between an organization and its environment and that the task of the top-executives is “the analysis, creation, and management of this fit” (p. 17). A successful outcome of this alignment would be strategic policies created by executives within the organization requiring “cognitive abilities, functional expertise and knowledge, motivational characteristics such as self-efficacy and need for achievement, and personality characteristics such as locus of control and propensity” (p. 18).

Visionary or inspirational leadership models—these presuppose that the leader, in this case the top-executive, leads by presenting a compelling vision and utilizes some form of transformational or charismatic leadership theory. It assumes that such visionary leadership will motivate followers to achieve collective objectives. Leaders utilizing this model typically possess “cognitive abilities (i.e., creativity, reasoning skills, intelligence,

verbal ability, cognitive complexity), self-confidence, socialized power motives, propensity for risk, and social and nurturance skills” (p. 18).

Two salient points should impact the understanding of an executive’s work. First, the job demands are fraught with many and varied challenges. Munyon et al. (2010) claim that “executives function in extreme environments, under high levels of almost every work characteristic, such as autonomy, skill variety, job complexity, and information processing” (p. 433). Second, there is an expectation to perform that originates from “task challenges,” “performance challenges,” and those personal “performance aspirations” chosen by the executive (Finkelstein et al., 2009).

The nature of executive leadership with its multiple responsibilities and work design varies from organizations depending on the direction of its governing body: (a) executives in a for-profit business organization are accountable to a board of directors, representing shareholders (Munyon et al., 2010), while those in some faith-based organizations, such as the one being studied in this research, are accountable to an executive committee, who represent a constituency (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2010). Though there are differences, similarities exist in that the chief executive officer (CEO), in the for-profit, and the chief administrator officer (CAO), in the non-profit, are accountable to a higher governance body (Munyon et al., 2010; Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2010). Zaccaro (2001) claims the senior leaders in organizations have certain tasks and adds that the respective governing boards dictate such tasks or expectations.

Glick (2011) affirmed much of the suppositions of Zaccaro (2001) regarding the nature of senior executives’ work design in her mixed methods study of over a thousand

executives. “The leader role was the most agreed-on role,” described as the one who demonstrated the “ability to lead and motivate” their respective teams (p. 190). One of the most salient suppositions from Glick’s (2011) study was her discovery of how senior executives viewed their role in light of past perceptions, stating “many of the CEO roles identified in the 20th century still reflect the role of the CEO in the 21st century, even though the business environment has changed significantly” (p. 192).

Hamel (2012) believes there is a move to a different set of expectations for senior leadership and shares some rare examples of where organizations are empowering lesser-tiered levels to engage in it. One of his significant contributions is advancing the values of self-managing organizations, claiming, “you don’t have to be crazy to dream of organizations where managing is no longer the right of a vaunted few but the responsibility of all” (p. 232). Admittedly he questions how some of his models of self-managed companies would succeed in different cultures, fierce “offshore competition,” and economies of scale. “Would it work in a company of 10,000 employees or 100,000?” (p. 232).

Theories regarding the functions of senior executive leadership highlight the experience first-time conference presidents had as they began their new role. Researchers believe there is a marked difference in the expectations of a leader in a junior executive role as opposed to one in a senior position. Some of the more salient responsibilities of senior executives, scholars believe, are: vision casting, strategic decision-making, the art of conceptualizing issues, and being adroit in human relations. In addition, researchers conjecture, senior executives operate in a complex environment with pressure from constituents and employees to perform duties at a high-level of excellence. In exploring

the experience of first-time conference presidents in this study, numerous participants shared how their particular journey into the new role of senior executive leadership mirrored the experts' findings.

Summary

Theories in career transitions, socialization and leader/leadership development highlight the experience first-time presidents experienced as they transitioned into their new role. With career transitions, theorists believe that an individual experiences various stages as they leave a former position and begin a new one, phases which can be anticipated and proactively managed. According to scholars, socialization, exercising social skills and assimilation into a given organization's culture, is unavoidable as one begins a new role. In this process of socialization a leader should be conscious of its various stages as well as its effect upon personal identity. In both career transitions and socialization, first-time conference presidents' experience was probed to ascertain if it aligned with earlier studies done with leaders in the educational and business disciplines. Leader development theories posit enriching the personal skills of the leader, while leadership development concentrates on increasing the capacity of the individual to lead others effectively in the organization. This study sought to determine what type of preparation participants had for their new position.

Additionally, various scholarly models of leader learning and functions of senior executive leadership reflect the experience of first-time conference presidents in this study. Researchers believe adults learn most from experience and, with intentional methodology, can leverage learning from it. The transformative learning theory is one such model leaders from other disciplines have used to increase learning from

experience. Scholars also reported on the differences evident between lower-tiered leader positions to those of a senior executive. Senior executives function, according to research in business, in a very complex and greater level of pressure than those of lesser-tiered positions. This study of first-time conference presidents probed their experience as senior executives, and attempted to determine how previous work-related positions prepared them in becoming a chief administrator.

A local conference president's position may be offered to an unsuspecting candidate due to governance inherent in the Seventh-day Adventist church. According to typical practice, conference presidents are selected based upon the bylaws of the local organization. The only stipulation given to a local conference selection committee (who may nominate or chose depending on whether a constituency is in session) is that the individual be an ordained gospel minister. The selection committee typically creates a candidate profile and it is here that such items as leader/leadership development is considered. It is also the liberty of the selection committee to present any name from among literally thousands who carry ordination credentials. This study attempts to better understand the experience of leaders who have been invited by a selection committee/session to lead a complex church/business organization. A qualitative methodology was applied in order to capture the nuances of participants' transition experiences.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study probes the experience of first-time local conference presidents in the NAD. It constitutes a case study on the experience of these leaders as they transitioned from previous work assignments to that of president. To date there has not been a formal study probing how these leaders experienced the transition from being a pastor of a local church or in a lower-tiered conference office position to that of president. It is unknown how previous experience prepared these leaders for their new role. In a local conference in the NAD, the governance unit (selection committee, or constituents if they are in a session) chooses a new president or re-elects the incumbent every 3-5 years depending upon the bylaws of a given local conference. Those responsible for selecting a new president have only one stipulation according to NAD policy; that the candidate be an ordained minister. This means that a conference attempting to choose a new leader can draw from a list of literally thousands of candidates, hence the reason sometimes a pastor, or principal is chosen. It is the purview of the selecting body to evaluate a candidate's readiness based upon his or her past experience that may have prepared them to be chosen. With no required leadership training events for local conference presidents either prior to or after election to the new office, conferences are dependent upon prior experiences in the life of the candidate to prepare him or her for the leadership of their

organization. No other study exists where an attempt has been made to determine how a first-time conference president's previous experience or training prepared them to lead in a senior executive position.

The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University teaches classes in church administration, but these academic offerings are not made a prerequisite for individuals assuming the role of president. Also, the NAD offers a 2-day orientation for new conference presidents, but here again, attendance is not mandatory. While both of these offerings may be instructive, it is still the prerogative of the first-time conference president whether or not to attend, leaving the local conference solely dependent upon previous leadership experience and training to equip their new leader. This lack of intentional preparation leaves the new president on his own to deal with role ambiguity, senior leadership-level complexity, and inadequate leadership savvy or business acumen.

As Olmstead (2000) warns, the “nature and complexity of the problems change dramatically as the leader moves upward in the chain of command” (p. 24). The responsibilities of local conference presidents can be likened to those of a business executive leading a multi-structured organization or a school principal leading and managing a staff—with both being accountable to multiple constituencies. The nature of organizational leadership, when that organization is synonymous with a non-profit business model, behooves those who select individuals to think carefully about how their new leader has been equipped to lead. Most pastors and some local conference departmental leaders have minimal experience in strategic planning, or dealing with organizational assets such as finances and personnel.

Local conferences in the NAD differ markedly in their range of size and complexity. The largest, Southeastern California, has 70,779 members, 143 churches, 8 secondary schools or academies, and 480 credentialed employees. The smallest conference, Maritime, has 1636 members, 26 churches, 15 credentialed employees, and no secondary schools (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 2013). From my observation, leader development and preparation for key leadership positions, such as a local conference president, is mixed within the NAD. Business and educational communities, recognizing the fact that leaders transitioning to a new role may be confronted with new and challenging demands, create intentional leadership enrichment programs for the newcomers (Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004). Some church leaders and members, though, believe that somewhere in the leader's background, work experience alone is enough preparation for his or her new position. The previous work experience of participants in this study is indicative of most conference presidents in the NAD in that they have held positions which are people-centered and management-type, seeing as how they had been teachers, pastors, or conference departmental directors and/or executive officers.

According to information (Denslow, 2013) gathered for this study, most governance units tasked with electing a president assume that being a conference office leader (e.g., executive secretary, departmental director, assistant to the president) automatically prepares one to become a president. The challenge for many presidents, however, is that one day they are the pastor shepherding a congregation, or a conference executive secretary caring for a multitude of management details, and the next day they find themselves the chief administrator who must recommend to the conference executive

committee the termination of an employee due to maleficence, or oversee a financial budget which demands employment reduction, or chair the board of a secondary academy fraught with financial and personnel challenges. Perhaps this reality is reflected in a recent survey (Brantley, 2014) of conference administrators, pastors and selective lay leaders ($n=1010$) indicating leader/leadership development for local conference administrators becoming a prominent need within the NAD (Appendix B).

As of June 2013, the NAD listed 59 local conference presidents. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the position held by such persons immediately prior to becoming president: 36 conference or union executive officers—35 executive secretaries (33 local conference and 2 union) and one local conference treasurer; 14 non-executive officers—12 departmental directors (11 local conference and one union) and 2 assistants to the president; and 9 local parish pastors (see Appendix A for a complete list).

Table 1

59 NAD Local Conferences Presidents' Previous Position

Executive Officer			Non-Executive Officer			Pastor
Local Conference Executive Secretary	Local Conference Treasurer	Union Conference Executive Secretary	Local Conference Departmental Director	Local Conference Assistant to the President	Union Conference Department Director	Local Church Setting
33	1	2	11*	2**	1	9

* Represents ten who transferred directly from a conference departmental position and one who was a vice-president of an independent ministry but who in the past had served in a local conference role.

** An assistant to the president works closely with the president and though he or she is not an executive officer, their duties are typically quasi-administrative depending on the chief administrator.

Those who hold positions in the local conference serving either as executive officer or non-executive officer typically have an office in the conference's headquarters building and are therefore more acquainted with the work of the president and administration. Table 1 shows this would represent 50 leaders who are more knowledgeable in the work of administration than the nine local pastors. However, it should be noted all local conferences in the NAD have bylaws prescribing that employees, along with non-employees (lay members), serve on the chief governing body, the executive committee. This requirement typically places the parish pastor on this important committee which holds the president and other officers, as well as departmental directors and all employees, accountable to execute the mission of the church. So, in many cases a pastor who becomes a president has had some exposure to the work of administration and the president.

This study probed the experience of a sampling of first-time presidents to better understand their journey from an lower-tiered executive or non-executive officer position in the conference office, or local parish pastor to that of chief administrator in the conference.

Research Design

The following questions were the focus of this research:

1. How do local conference presidents describe their transition to a conference presidency?
2. How did previous leadership experience prepare them for the new position?

Qualitative and Case Study Research

This research is a qualitative case study probing the experience of first-time local conference presidents in the NAD as they transitioned from a lower-tiered position to that of chief administrator. The qualitative approach and case study method are justified herewith: (a) according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), this approach supports “a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (p. 7), and the proposed kind of study “emerges from a perceived problem, . . . unsatisfactory situation, condition, or phenomenon” (p. 34), and (b) case studies utilize “an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon, social unit, or system bounded by time and place” (p. 10). In this study, of course, the presidents are the social unit, and the analysis seeks to understand their experience as they transitioned to their new administrative role and subjected themselves to the leadership expectations placed upon them by their respective constituents.

My research will follow the basic ideals of a qualitative approach described by Merriam (2009) as being “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5).

Data Collection and Management Strategies

This section presents the strategies I used to select the sample, the sources of data utilized, and basic collection.

Purposeful Sampling

This study utilized purposeful sampling process. Merriam (2009) indicates that the method of sampling should lead to a sample “reflecting the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 78). It is purposeful because it involves the selection of “information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 68). In this research I probed the unique experience of individuals chosen to serve as the chief executives or administrators of a local conference within the territory of the NAD.

Size and Type of Sample

To understand the phenomenon being studied, four individuals from each of the three categories (conference officer, departmental director, and parish pastor) were interviewed, for a total of 12. Table 1 reveals that these are the three roles individuals have held prior to being requested to be president. Leaders who hold executive or non-executive officer roles in the local or union conference are typically better acquainted with the work of conference administration than pastors. Listed below is a brief description of their unique responsibilities.

Executive officers—All conferences in the NAD have an executive officer team composed of the president, executive secretary, and treasurer. In some of the smaller conferences, the offices of executive secretary and treasurer are held by one person. In some cases the bylaws of conferences refer to these two roles as vice-president for administration (executive secretary) and vice-president for finance (treasurer). In addition, most treasurers have served in various financial roles (associate or assistant

conference treasurer, business manager for a secondary school) within the organization. And most executive secretaries have been a pastor at some time in their professional career. The three officers are accountable to the executive committee and deal primarily with administrating the conference (NAD Working Policy, 2012-2013, B-3).

Non-executive officers—Departmental directors are responsible for advancing the mission through various disciplines in ministry, and typically do not become involved with administering the conference as do the executives. Listed here is a sampling of some of the ministries found in many conferences and the corresponding title: Pastoring, Ministerial Director; Teaching, Educational Director or Superintendent; Youth and Young Adults, Youth Director.

Assistant to the president is responsible for executing various tasks for the president at his or her discretion. In many cases this leader sits with the executive officers when they convene and carries out objectives that are primarily presidential in nature. Even though this leader is not recognized as an executive officer, he or she does participate and is closely aligned with administration.

Pastor—These leaders are experienced in providing pastoral care for a local church congregation or being a chaplain for an institution such as a hospital or school and, in some cases, a branch of the military. Pastors who lead large churches (800-1000+), referred to as a senior pastor, many times have a staff of associate pastors and hence are required to give some degree of administrative leadership. Some pastors also serve on the conference executive committee and participate in the governance of the organization. However, with this exposure to administrative leadership, pastors still lack

the experience of conference-wide responsibilities as those who work in conference executive and non-executive officer positions.

Conference governance units tasked with selecting a new president choose from these three categories (executive and non-executive officers and pastors) because it is believed that these individuals have the adequate preparation to lead an organization. This study of first-time presidents explored how prior experience prepared leaders to become the chief administrator for a local conference. All interviewees were in their first or second term of a being a president for the first-time; therefore, if they had been a president in a previous conference, they were not included in the study. Table 2 shows the study's intentional diversity of the 12 participants. In addition to choosing four leaders from the three categories representing previous work roles, the attempt was made to capture diversity by various methods choosing leaders from: (a) various regions of the NAD, represented by different union conferences, (b) different nationalities, race, and gender. While more women would have enriched the diversity of this study, this was not feasible due to the fact that at the time of this study there was only one local conference in the NAD which had a woman as president.

Data Sources

Sources utilized in this study will be interviews conducted by the researcher with the twelve participants. Following appropriate academic research protocol for such interviews, participants were invited to share their experience transitioning from their previous work role to that of president and perceived prior preparation to be a chief administrator. Eight of the interviews were conducted in the conference office of the president, with four held in a secluded area during the NAD Administrator's Summit at a

hotel near the Washington Dulles International Airport in May, 2014 (see Appendix D for a complete list of where the interviews were conducted).

Table 2

Diversity of the Twelve Participants in the Study

Participants	Previous Work Role	Union* Conference	Nationality	Race	Gender**
Jim	Executive Secretary	SDA Church in Canada	Canadian	Anglo	Male
Jennifer	Executive Secretary	Pacific	American	Anglo	Female
Tom	Executive Secretary	Southwestern	Native American	Non-Caucasian	Male
Sam	Executive Secretary	North Pacific	American	Anglo	Male
Don	Department Director	North Pacific	American	Anglo	Male
Jack	Department Director	Pacific	American	Anglo	Male
Jonah	Department Director	Mid-America	American	Anglo	Male
Leroy	Department Director	Lake	French American	Anglo	Male
Bob	Pastor	Columbia	African American	Black	Male
George	Pastor	Atlantic	Irish American	Anglo	Male
Joe	Pastor	Columbia	American	Anglo	Male
Mark	Pastor	Pacific	American	Anglo	Male

* There are nine unions currently in the NAD and their territorial description is provided in Appendix G.

** During the time this study was conducted beginning in October 2013-June 2014, there was only one local conference in the NAD which had a woman president.

The interview questions were as follows:

1. Tell us where you serve as president, and how long you have been in the position.
2. Describe a typical week in your work as president.
3. Describe your leadership modus operandi.
4. How would you characterize your leadership style? Please give me an example.
5. Describe your initial reaction on becoming a president.
6. What were some of the initial impressions of your new role?
7. What most excited you about your new role?
8. What unique leadership competencies do you utilize in your new role?
9. What challenges and opportunities did you and your family experience when transitioning to the new role?
10. Upon becoming president did you seek counsel on role clarification?
11. Describe how you view yourself today as compared with your self-image prior to becoming a president.
12. How do you think your employees or peers view you now, as opposed to before?
13. What is your social network now, as president, compared with before you became president?
14. What and/or who prepared you to become a president?
15. Did you intentionally prepare yourself to become a president? And if so, how?
16. Please give me an example of when you felt a degree of confidence in your new role.

17. What do you wish you had known before taking office?

18. How would you advise a new president upon assuming his duties?

Data Gathering Process and Management Procedures

The research questions were answered by gathering data through interviews.

A purposeful sample was taken from the three leadership role governance units in the NAD chosen from in order to fill a vacant local conference presidency during the period of this study (October 2013-June 2014). As indicated in Table 1, these three local conference roles are: (a) executive officer, (b) non-executive officer, and (c) pastor. In this study all participants in the non-executive officer role were departmental directors reasoning that: (a) these positions are more common than an assistant to the president, most local conferences have departmental directors while few have assistants to the president (Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, 2013); and (b) as indicated by Table 1, during the period of the study, only one former union departmental director was chosen.

All presidents in the study were contacted by phone or email to determine their willingness to participate voluntarily in this research. Prior to commencing the interview, all participants signed a release allowing me to record it and use the content for research. After the recording (60-90 minutes in length), each interview was transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Then the data was entered into a software program entitled “DeDoose” to aid the researcher in seeking for themes in each of the interviews. Following the analyses of the interview, data findings were written attempting to tell the narrative experienced by the participant as they transitioned to their new role as a local conference president. In the findings, the names of the participants have been changed and pseudonyms have been used to provide a degree of confidentiality. However, with

only one conference in the NAD having a woman president, it is not difficult to determine by simple inquiry who that person might be. Therefore, she has been provided all the written material reflecting her experience in this research and has given permission to share it.

Data Analysis

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) hold that the nature of qualitative study and reporting is flexible with “no strict guidelines and standards for qualitative analysis” (p. 75). In my study of first-time conference presidents I identified meaningful themes within the data and reported on them in the Findings (Chapter 4). This was done by means of an inductive process, allowing the data to speak, and then creating these various themes from summarizing the re-occurring trends shared by the interviewees. Units of data (material germane to the study) were established in order to “compare one unit of information with the next in looking for recurring regularities in the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). These themes appeared as I read and reread the transcribed interviews, and then proceeded to group the comments and observations. Furthermore, the process followed the four-step procedure outlined by Giorgi (1985): read, reread, reflect, and synthesize. And, following the accepted procedures of qualitative coding, I utilized DeDoose, a computer software, to tabulate my findings and establish a “final coding schema” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 74).

Validity and Reliability

This study followed the advice of Merriam (2009) to maintain “validity and reliability,” and therefore I gave special attention to the manner in which the discovered

themes were “collected, analyzed, interpreted, and . . . presented” (p. 210). Creswell (2007) states that “validation is a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research” (p. 205), and Merriam (2008) adds that it “deals with the question of how research findings match reality,” or how an interviewee constructs reality (p. 213). Reliability, according to Merriam (2008), involves the transferability of the findings, i.e., the extent to which they can be “replicated” (p. 220). I enhanced the validity of the data by employing a professional transcriber and then compared the finished transcriptions with the actual recordings. In addition I followed the counsel of Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) to meet best practice standards of qualitative research regarding “credibility and dependability,” by including the following procedures (p. 77).

1. Presenting one’s self as a researcher and clarifying personal understandings and biases.
2. “Triangulation”—comparing the interviews with one another.
3. “Member checks”—sharing with the participants their own transcribed interviews.
4. “Peer debriefing”—requesting members of my regional group to review my findings.
5. “Audit trail”—explaining how data was collected and analyzed.
6. “Thick description”—providing enough data to create a “holistic and realistic picture” of the phenomenon.

In addition I employed a professional transcriber and then reviewed the finished transcriptions with the actual recordings to establish validity.

Generalizability

Eisner (1991) defines generalizing as the ability to “transfer” learning from one situation to another (p. 198). The findings of this study can inform individuals of other professional disciplines that are either facing a career transition or are actually experiencing it. The knowledge discovered in this study of probing the transitional experience of first-time local conference presidents can provide insights to other professionals regarding the potential challenges one might expect to encounter when changing roles in the workplace. According to Merriam (2009), even if “a case study focuses on a single unit,” new knowledge or understanding can be obtained that is applicable to comparable situations, and can be especially helpful when examining education, social work, and administration” (p. 51). Erickson (1986) claims that a qualitative case study focusing upon a “particular” setting or group can apply to like circumstances. Therefore, readers should be able to relate to the research situation presented in this study and decide if and where the findings may be transferred (Merriam, 2009, p. 51).

Ethical Issues

Experts in the field of qualitative research suggest that the ethical issues of a study depend upon the credibility of the researcher (Merriam, 2008, p. 234). Therefore, I followed a prescribed process in the interest of trustworthiness. First, I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Andrews University (Appendix E). Second, I obtained written, informed consent from each of the interviewees, giving assurance of anonymity with the exception of one participant. As explained previously in this chapter, there is only one local conference in the NAD led by a woman president. A quick perusal

of employees in the organization could easily determine the identity of this leader.

Therefore, an additional release was obtained from her. Finally, I reviewed and followed

Patton's (2002) "Ethical Issues Checklist" as presented by Merriam (2009):

(a) Explaining purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used; (b) Promises and reciprocity; (c) Risk assessment; (d) Confidentiality; (e) Informed consent; (f) Data access and ownership; (g) Interviewer mental health; (h) Advice from the methodologist of this study; and (i) Data collection boundaries, Ethical versus legal conduct. (pp. 233-234)

Summary

A qualitative study was conducted to probe the experience of first time local conference presidents as they transitioned to their new position. A sample of 12 diverse leaders was selected from the pool of 59 local conference presidents in the NAD.

Participants agreed to be interviewed and granted permission to the researcher to record their response to his questions. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common themes. Being a qualitative study this chapter briefly reviewed the rigor and ethics involved in following such a format.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This segment of the study explores the participants' transition experience into the new role of conference president and their sense of preparedness for the job. It presents eight salient themes of their transition and preparation experience: (a) a sense of being overwhelmed, (b) spirituality, (c) the value of relationships, (d) an identity adjustment, (e) the impact upon family, (f) job experience, (g) intentional or desired preparation, and (h) mentors or support.

I interviewed 12 individuals, most of them in their own conference office, in order to gather data regarding their transition experience from their previous job to their new role as a conference president. The participants transitioned from one of three job roles: pastor, departmental director, or executive officer; the findings will acknowledge these three categories as they are presented. Listed below is a brief description of the function of the roles and an abbreviated career sketch on each participant. In both the report of the participants' background and their narrative contained in the various themes, minor identifying details, such as the names of the participants, conference names, and locations have been changed for purposes of anonymity. Any reference to a conference name is purely fictional.

Roles

This study focuses upon how individuals transitioned from one role to another within the context of their work. The research probed the experience of first time local conference presidents assuming their new role and relinquishing that of the previous one. As indicated in Chapter 3 of this study the roles previously held by sample participants was one of three: executive secretary, departmental director, and pastor. And brief review is presented regarding the definition of each of these positions.

Executive Secretary

The NAD local conferences are governed by an executive committee (a representation of the conference constituency) including three executive officers who administrate the organization on their behalf: (a) president, (b) executive secretary, and (c) treasurer (NAD Working Policy, 2013-2014, p. D-25). In some conferences the executive secretary and the treasurer are also referred to as vice-president for administration and vice-president for finance, respectively. The three executive officers are to function as one unit, with the president being the chief among equals. The main duties for each of the executive officers are prescribed by the local conference's bylaws. Typically the executive secretary's responsibilities are: (a) vice-chairperson of the executive committee, (b) recording and keeping the official minutes of the executive committee and constituency meetings, (c) to fulfill duties as outlined by the executive committee, and (d) collaborate with the president and treasurer to advance the mission of the conference (NAD Working Policy, 2013-2014, p. D-26). Ultimately, the administrative role of executive secretary (ES) is to participate with the other two executive officers in recommending to the executive committee how to manage its

resources (personnel, finances, and corporate assets) to advance the mission of the organization.

Departmental Director

Local conferences within the NAD have non-executive officers associated with the local conference headquarters' office who work closely with the president and others to advance the mission of the church (NAD Working Policy, 2013-2014). These leaders typically hold titles such as: director, vice-president, and assistant to the president. In some places they serve with the executive officers on the conference's administrative committee (ADCOM) processing the more pertinent matters of the organization. Their main responsibility is to provide oversight and support for a specific ministry within the conference, such as: youth, ministerial or education to name a few. This position provides an opportunity for an individual to gain knowledge of the inter-workings of a conference office without having to carry the heavy responsibility of executive officer.

Pastor

Pastors in the NAD have multiple responsibilities for the local church or churches with which they pastor, the most salient of these being: (a) spiritual leadership, (b) administrative duties—in most cases chairing the board, (c) an agent of the local conference expected to give oversight in areas of church doctrine, policies, and organizational initiatives (Church Manual, p. 21, 2010). Local churches and districts (multiple churches) vary in size and complexity, from being small rural churches to large institutional and/or urban ones. Large churches (700 or more members) typically have a staff with more than one pastor (depending on conference resources), and in most cases,

include educational facilities (elementary and secondary schools) for which they are responsible in operating. In such settings the lead pastor is referred to as the senior pastor and the subordinates as associates.

Participants

This study gathered data from a sampling of twelve leaders representing three different roles. In order to better understand the background of each of the participants a brief description of their work experience is provided for each of them in this section. All names are pseudonyms.

Transitioned from Being an Executive Secretary

Jim—“consummate administrator,” worked as an executive in numerous disciplines: healthcare, education, and conference leadership. He began his career in secondary education and eventually became principal of a large boarding academy (private secondary school) for 4 years. He pursued a post-graduate degree with the intention of becoming president of a college or university. Following his leadership at the boarding academy, he transitioned to hospital administration and then into pastoring. After leading two large churches as senior pastor, he was asked to serve in a conference office as the executive secretary, which he did for 3 years. About 3 years ago that same conference (approximately 25,000) asked him to become their president. Jim is married and has several adult children.

Jennifer—“woman conference president,” the first in recent times who always wanted to minister ever since she was in the eight-grade. She began as an assistant dean and taught school, and then moved on to become a chaplain at a day academy (private

secondary school). Though an educated and registered dietician, a degree encouraged by her hospital-administrator father who thought that as a woman she would have a difficult time realizing her ministry dream in a male-dominated profession, she still pursued her goal of youth work. After more than 20 years either pastoring in the local church or as a chaplain/Bible teacher in a secondary school, she assumed a youth director role for the largest conference in the NAD (approximately 72,000 members). Following 4 years of service in that role she was asked to serve in the same conference as the executive secretary. After working for 9 years as the executive secretary she was asked to become the president, a position she has now occupied for about 1 year.

Tom—"the reluctant pastor," had dreams of becoming an architect when he was in school. Being a "preacher's kid," he saw ministry first-hand and did not have any desire to follow in his father's footsteps. But 25 years ago, married and with diploma in hand, he began his career as a pastor, working in two different conferences during his pastoral years. Eventually he would receive a call to work in the conference office where he held positions of departmental leadership. Following that he became an executive secretary, serving in that role for a number of years. Five years ago, that same conference (approximately 13,000 members) where he began his conference office leadership roles invited him to serve as their president. He and his wife have several adult children.

Sam—"the engineer," grew up in a military home and pursued a life-long goal of becoming an engineer, but the providence of God altered that dream, and he accepted the call to gospel ministry. He began his pastoral ministry as an associate in a medium-sized church (500-600 members) in an urban center. After spending over 20 years as a pastor in two different conferences, during which time he was a senior pastor with a number of

associates, he became a ministerial director at a conference office. After spending 4 years as a ministerial director, he was asked to serve as the ES, also called vice-president for administration in the same conference (approximately 35,000 members). It was after serving 7 years in this executive officer role that he received the call to become the president of another conference (approximately 25,000 members)—a position he has now held for about 4 years. He is married to a professional who is forging her own career, and they have several adult children.

Transitioned From Being a Departmental Directors

Don—“reluctant departmental director,” whose first love was pastoring, spent 17 years at it in two different conferences in the NAD. He concluded his local parish spiritual leadership role as the senior pastor of the largest church in the conference where he was then working. Following that experience he transitioned, reluctantly, into becoming a departmental director of the conference (approximately 4000 members), which he did for 2 years. After carrying multiple departmental responsibilities, his focus changed and he was the youth and ministerial director for nearly 3 years. From there, he was called to another conference (approximately 15,000 members) several years ago where he is currently serving as president. His wife is a professional in her own career, and they have several adult children.

Jack—“young-people-focused president,” graduated from his undergraduate studies with the ambition of becoming a conference youth director, a dream he would realize later in ministry. He began as a pastor, but after several years transitioned into education where he became the principal of a boarding academy (private secondary school). After serving in that capacity for 5 years, another conference asked him to

become principal of their boarding academy, which he did for 4 years. Following that experience he was finally able to realize his college dream and become a conference youth director in not one, but two different places. In addition to being the youth director, in both locations he also served as the conference education director. Prior to being elected president 6 years ago, he served as the ministerial director for a couple of years in the same conference (approximately 15,000 members) where he had been the youth and education leader. Jack is married and has several adult children.

Jonah—“the achiever,” son of a SDA educator, spent much of his young years moving from place to place working in five different conferences. He had the dream of one day working in a conference as the chief executive. He began as a pastor in a multiple church-district in a rural setting, and then moved to becoming an associate in an institutional church. He would ultimately become a senior pastor in an urban setting. After pastoring a number of years he would add “youth director” to his resume in one conference, and then “ministerial director” in another. It was during his last position as ministerial director that he received the call to become the president of a conference (approximately 15,000 members), which he accepted. His wife is a professional, and they have several adult children.

Leroy—“called administrator,” spent over 20 years pastoring in a number of different-sized churches in three conferences in the NAD, and felt the call many years ago to become a conference leader. In his last pastoral assignment he was in his second of two institutional churches where he was the senior pastor with a multiple staff. Following that position he began his conference office leadership role as the ministerial director, which he held for a number of years. Seven years ago he transitioned to a different

conference (approximately 20,000 members) to become president. His wife is a professional, and they have several adult children.

Transitioned from Being a Pastor

Bob—“kid golfer”, was first imprinted upon to become a conference leader at the tender age of eight while playing golf with seasoned denominational administrators and thereby receiving his initial understandings of church leadership. For a number of years he would teach bible in a secondary school. His pastoral experience included being the senior pastor of a number of large churches over a twenty-year period in a number of different conferences in the NAD. The last church would be in the local conference (approximately 25,000 members) where 5 years ago he was chosen as the president. Earlier in his career he had an interest in becoming a local conference ministerial director, but was never given the chance. His wife is a professional owning her own business, and they have adult children.

George—“the chaplain,” learned most of his leadership skills from his 10 years spent with a branch of the military as a reservist chaplain, and from his pastor-revivalist father. Following seminary he began his more than twenty years of pastoral ministry in a conference where he would spend much of his ministry, pastoring many diverse churches both in size and ethnicity. Prior to becoming the president about a year ago in the same conference (approximately 25,000 members), he was the senior pastor for a number of years in a church near an academy (secondary school) campus. His wife is a professional, and they have several adult children.

Joe—“consummate senior pastor,” has spent the majority of his 25 years pastoring small churches in a rural setting, although for a portion of time he was the

senior pastor in a large institutional church. Being the son of Adventist schoolteachers, he had some idea of what it meant to the family to re-locate them after accepting new positions of service. A couple of years ago he reluctantly accepted the presidency of a conference (approximately 18,000 members). He and his wife have several adult children.

Mark—“reluctant president,” always wanted to just be a pastor, accepted conference administration a few years ago. For over 20 years, Mark worked in different conferences pastoring numerous churches of various sizes, the last few of which were large institutional churches with a number of associates. He finally relented to the call of conference leadership after a prolonged struggle, accepting the presidency in a conference (approximately 15,000 members). He and his wife, a professional, have had a team ministry together for a number of years. They have adult children.

Themes

The transcribed interviews were analyzed for common themes to better understand the participants’ transition experience into the new role of conference president and their sense of preparedness for the job. Eight themes surfaced from the exploration. Leaders experiences the transition from overwhelming, challenging their spirituality, involving new constellations of relationship, and a shifting identity. Other themes dealt with the leaders’ prior experience, intentional leadership preparation, and mentors

Overwhelmed

In response to questions regarding first impressions with the new position, the majority spoke about a sense of being overwhelmed. This perception, which obviously is an emotional response, stemmed from various factors, such as workload, new expectations, and the high degree of responsibility. Not always, but frequently, the participants would touch upon the theme of spirituality in discussing how they depended on their faith in God to help them cope with the pressures of being overwhelmed.

Former Executive Secretaries

Even though all of the individuals promoted from executive secretary to president had already been serving in a position of leadership within a conference office, most of them experienced moments of feeling overwhelmed as they began their role as president. Some of them attributed their feelings of being overwhelmed to the extraordinary workload or to the fact that they could no longer pass concerns brought to them on to a higher authority, as they had done in past roles. In addition, having already served in an administrative position at the conference level, they were somewhat acquainted with the unique challenges and responsibilities inherent in such a role.

Tom had to agree when one of his fellow-president friends told him that “the first few months on the job, because of all you have to deal with, you will feel like you’ve just crawled into a washing machine and someone turned it on at high speed and you go thump, thump, thump, thump.” But his friend assured him that in time, the “thumps” would come a little slower until finally he would be able to manage things. Tom related that this is exactly what happened to him, sharing:

When I started, it just seemed so overwhelming—the volume of phone calls, the

volume of committees, the responsibilities at the union [next level of church governance], the pull from the churches, the pastors. That whole thing was so intense that I felt like, you know, not catching up with what I needed to catch up with. But then as three months went by, as 6 months went by, as 9 months, you feel the rhythm, you feel like you are easing into the rhythm. And it's not that the rhythm is lessened. It's that you are learning to manage these things.

In time, with experience, Tom found he was able to prioritize the items he had to deal with, executing them according to their level of importance.

When Tom was the executive secretary, he felt that he could “punt” issues to the president, but this was no longer true. “When you are the conference secretary, you’ve got an escape valve,” he said, “but the moment you sit in this chair, there is no one else you can pass the buck along to.” For example, “You can’t say, ‘Well, you’ve got to go talk to the [executive] secretary, or the treasurer [another executive officer].’ People expect the conference president to give them an answer. And that pressure that sometimes exists can be overwhelming.”

Tom expressed a level of discomfort over now being in the lead role as opposed to the previous position, where there wasn’t quite as much pressure and expectation. He remembers working from his executive secretary’s office for several weeks after being elected as the new president and not wanting to move physically into that office, stating: “I was hesitant to move . . . for fear of what could happen . . . because I felt like the moment that I sat in that chair, everything would change. And it did. Everything did change.” Now he would be the one to lead.

However, Tom was quick to point out that new administrators need to put everything in perspective, realizing that the work they do as president is strengthened and empowered by their faith in God. He stated with confidence: “If you understand you’re representing God, as you sit in that chair, you have the assurance . . . God is with you.

And you consult Him on a regular basis; it kind of takes the pressure out of that situation.” Without that perspective, though, according to Tom, “the first few days you sit in the chair can be overwhelming and rather scary.”

Sam likewise noted an increase in the amount of pressure and expectation he felt as president compared to when he was the executive secretary. A few months after working in his new role, he talked with the individual who had served as president of the conference while Sam was the executive secretary. Sam told him: “I want to apologize to you, ’cause I never knew, I never realized how difficult it was for you to be the president. For anyone to be the president.”

Sam related how he had experienced more freedom and much less pressure as a subordinate. Back in the days when he had served as a pastor, Sam always had the conference office for support; when he was a departmental director, he had relied on the executive officers; and when he was the executive secretary, the president had been there to carry the heavy responsibilities. But now, as a new president, he was alone at the top. He was the person shouldering the heaviest burdens. And he felt the pressure, a sense of being overwhelmed.

In his apology, Sam told his former president: “I always had the freedom of knowing ‘I’m not the president, you are. This is easy, because I know I’ve got you there. And you’re covering my back.’ But now, everyone is looking to me.”

Jim, who had broad experience as an administrator in different disciplines, talked about the awesome responsibility he sensed as a conference president. He said it was the only position he ever held where he felt he was unworthy to do the job. According to Jim, the responsibility of being the spiritual leader for not just a church, but for the entire

conference, is what caused him to be overwhelmed by this sense of unworthiness. He stated:

I've never been more humbled. . . . It scares the living day lights out of me. Even when I was pastoring, I was just one among many. . . . But in a conference, you are it. . . . And you think twice about everything that you do. I never had to re-examine myself more often, about everything that I do, as I do in this role.

Jennifer, elected conference president after having served as the executive secretary for 9 years prior, had an experience different from some of her colleagues. She said regarding her transition: "I really wasn't too stressed about it. I haven't been too stressed, yet. I'm sure there's a lot ahead of me, but so far it hasn't overwhelmed me yet." Jennifer attributed her ability to be somewhat at ease with her new challenge to three factors: (a) her faith in God, confessing, "I felt very confident that God was at work and was going to lead"; (b) her years working in the conference as a youth director and then as an executive secretary, for she admitted, "Somebody coming from pastoring [then going directly] into presidency . . . [is] going to have a different learning curve than someone who has been a secretary;" and (c) her knowledge of the conference where she has served in various roles over a number of years. Jennifer admits that without that vital understanding, her transition would have been different and rather challenging. She stated:

I can't imagine what it would be like coming into this role when I don't know the conference. That would terrify me. Maybe that's a conversation that would need to happen. How do you go to a place where you don't know the people, and all of a sudden you have to lead these people? I can't imagine that.

Former Departmental Directors

Transitioning from working as a conference departmental director to fulfilling the role of president was also an overwhelming experience for this group of leaders, for a

number of different reasons. Some actually used the word “scary” to describe how a fear of the unknown combined with the newness of the job made their new position seem altogether daunting. For others, the biggest difficulty was chairing the conference executive committee (the organization’s chief governing body between constituency sessions) or dealing with the increased volume of work and responsibility now resting upon their shoulders.

Don told how he was physiologically affected by his first invitation to be a conference president. When he received the call, Don told an associate that he was going to “sleep on it” before making a decision. The next morning when his colleague asked him how he had slept the night before, he confessed, “I hardly got any sleep; I was awake most of the night.” As Don was considering the job offer, two things concerned him: (a) it would be his first presidency, and (b) it would be a conference where he had never worked before. After accepting the position, Don said that his sleep improved for a time, until he actually began in his new role, and then it diminished again for a while. “I felt overwhelmed,” he recounted. “I felt, ‘Oh man. Wow. That is a lot of responsibility. Can I do this?’”

Several demands, including some he created for himself, caused Don to feel overwhelmed: (a) his desire to “get up to speed” in understanding the most salient issues within his conference, (b) the need he felt to become acquainted with his new employees, and (c) the pace of the workloads. He shared:

It was much like what I might imagined drinking from a fire hydrant [would be like]. It was overwhelming. There were times, as I look back, that I felt like a deer in the headlights . . . because I wanted to get to know the conference, I wanted to get to know the office staff, I wanted to get to know the pastors.

Don recalled that right at the beginning of his transition experience, he felt so inundated by his new responsibilities that he would pray: “Lord, I’m not really the president here; You’re the president of the Wyoming Conference. I’m just your undershepherd down here, doing the best I can to follow in Your footsteps.” In fact, Don acknowledged that it was this dependence upon God that helped him to cope with all of the stress of his new position. Like others who have sensed the heavy burden of leadership, Don relied on his faith in God to carry him when he felt overwhelmed.

Leroy, who had spent more than twenty years as a pastor before working at the conference level as a departmental leader for eight years, compared his new post as a conference president to his previous role as a pastor. He said, “You take the pressures and responsibilities of a pastor and multiply that by a hundred, and then you understand the pressures and responsibilities of a president.” Leroy then elaborated on the expectations people have of him and the duties that he says weigh heavily upon his shoulders. He believes he is ultimately responsible for: (a) influencing and inspiring members and employees; (b) attracting new and talented employees to serve in the churches and schools as pastors and teachers, respectively; (c) dealing with legal challenges involving the conference; (d) managing the conference finances; and (e) anything of major importance to keep the conference focused on executing its mission.

Using two different metaphors to describe his new challenge, Leroy likened becoming a conference president to driving a car and to swimming. He said that the transition is like driving in that “before you are the president, you have all the answers, but after you become one you have few. And the best drivers are those sitting in the back seat—at least, that is what they think.” Leroy also used the driving metaphor to describe

his need to not be distracted but to concentrate on leading. He said, “I just need to keep both my hands on the wheel and drive.” In addition, Leroy pointed out that one doesn’t learn to swim by standing on the shore or by simply reading how it’s done; “at some point you need to dive in.” Then he admitted, “I know I have thrashed around a lot, trying to keep my head above water, but ultimately I love the challenge.”

As a matter of fact, Leroy said that the challenging aspects of being a conference president were what made him reach for a Power greater than his own. “At times it can be overwhelming,” he conceded. “But you always have to depend on God and His grace and His mercy. And I like that. I like having to be on my knees.”

Former Pastors

Conference presidents who came straight from the parish, having never led at the conference level—and, in some cases, having never even served on a governing board other than at the local church level—shared apprehension over becoming the chief administrator. As compared to the former executive secretaries and departmental directors, they had a greater tendency to describe themselves as “not equipped” to administrate at the conference level. Others said they felt overwhelmed due to the newness of the position, lacking familiarity with the job expectations.

Eight years ago, fresh from being a pastor at a local church, Mark judged himself as ill-equipped in his new position as a conference president. Even though he grew up in a church administrator’s home, he felt he didn’t have much professional exposure on how to lead a conference. Mark was therefore apprehensive—or, to use his description, “scared”—as he began his new job. And perhaps the most fear-inspiring aspect of the presidency was the change of pace he experienced in leading a conference as opposed to

leading a church. He recalled: “It was relentless, ’cause stuff comes at you so fast and furious, and by the time it gets to you it’s usually a crisis and you can’t put it off. You can’t delay it; you can’t punt.” In spite of his shortfall, Mark had confidence he could do the job because of his faith and dependence on God. “I had peace and courage,” he declared, “because there was no question in my mind that God had called; and once that was clear to me, I knew He would see me through.”

Today Mark has a different sense about his challenges as a conference president than he did at the beginning of his leadership experience. While recalling his early days as a conference administrator, he exclaimed, “It was, it was overwhelming, it was overwhelming!” But now, 8 years later, after being re-elected at two conference constituency sessions, Mark is much more confident and at ease. He said: “Years and experience do help make a difference. I feel a bit more comfortable at what I’m doing now, because I’ve gone through the fire and come through on the other end of it.”

Bob, who was a senior pastor in several large churches for a number of years before being elected a conference president, still experienced a sense of uneasiness and lack of confidence as he began his new duties. He confessed, “I was immediately knocked off my high horse, because now I walked into the office not having the same level of confidence that I knew and understood [before] in how to resolve problems.” Two things that triggered Bob’s sense of uneasiness were his new responsibility as the “boss” over so many employees, and the fact that he was not always able to tell people why he did what he did. “At the pastorate one must lead,” remarked Bob, “but it doesn’t have the intensity [that] a conference administrator’s position has, especially the president.” He continued, “I am limited in information that I can share, based upon ethics,

to support a position, to defend a position, to give reason and rationale of why certain things are being done that way.”

To illustrate, Bob related a story from when he and his wife were just beginning ministry as a young pastoral couple. In one of their first assignments, Bob asked the conference president if they could “put roots down.” The leader assured him that they could and so, based upon that information, Bob and his wife scraped together most of their savings and purchased their first home. But then everything changed. Within a matter of months, the conference president told Bob that he was being reassigned and that he would need to move. He said, “I can still hear the president telling us it was ‘for the good of the work that we are moving you.’” At the time, Bob felt he was given the “standard company line” and that the president did not offer any substantial reason for the move. But as loyal workers they made the sacrifice, moved as they were requested to do, and in the process lost the house. The irony of his story is that Bob now finds himself in the same situation as that conference president who long ago told him he had to move “for the good of the work.” To avoid collateral damage, he feels that sometimes he must be less than transparent when making difficult decisions. Bob confides that he feels a level of intensity and pressure that he didn’t have as a local pastor, and it makes him uncomfortable.

When George took up his responsibilities as a new conference president, the sense of being overwhelmed produced an observable physiological effect. He stated that his first full day at the office, which he described as a “surreal experience,” left him literally dizzy. After being immersed in meeting after meeting, he rushed off near the end of the workday to attend yet another meeting (of the academy operating board) that evening.

George recalled: “So I’m walking out of the office about four o’clock to get there on time for the meeting, and I literally got dizzy. . . . It was overwhelming at first.”

George, who loves hockey, said that assuming his new role as president felt much like being a goalie, with all of the issues coming directly at *him*. He related his initial reaction when people started coming at him with all the “stuff:” “I felt I was playing goalie. Shot coming from here, shot coming from there, kick save here. I just said, ‘This is bigger than I can be.’” But in retrospect, acknowledging that the job was bigger than one person was ultimately the way George coped with the sense of being overwhelmed and “dizzy” in his new duties. He compared it to how he had felt as a senior pastor who was responsible for nearly 700 hundred members and two churches. At times he felt overburdened in his previous role, but he would comfort himself by calmly admitting, “I can only do what I can do.” And as a result, George said that he didn’t generally lose sleep over his many responsibilities.

Summary

Participants from all three categories acknowledged feeling overwhelmed as they began their work as a conference president. They attributed this sense to numerous factors, such as a new level of responsibility and pressure from a more demanding job. Those who had previously worked as executive secretaries bemoaned their loss of the ability to “punt” difficult issues to a superior. One former departmental director felt so overcome by the thought of being the chief executive that he contemplated whether or not he could actually do the job. Several who had moved directly from a pastorate to the president’s office felt ill-equipped to effectively lead and manage as the top conference administrator. In one notable exception, a study participant who had moved from

executive secretary to president within the same conference, where she was already familiar with personnel and church members, said she was not overwhelmed by the job change. She confessed, however, that a transition to a different, unfamiliar setting would have been a significant challenge.

Presidents from all three previous-job categories claimed they managed the sense of being overwhelmed by depending upon their faith. Their trust in God to sustain them in their new role is discussed further in the theme *Spirituality*.

Spirituality

As the study participants reflected upon their transition to the job of conference president, they shared how their relationship with God influenced their decision to accept the new position. Realizing to some degree the magnitude of the responsibility they were being asked to accept, they shared how they sought divine counsel through prayer, and in some cases fasting, in an attempt to discern God's direction for their lives. A few of the presidents related a portion of their spiritual journey, and how they believed God was active in their lives, molding and shaping them into who they had become—both as a person and, most of all, as a leader. Some also declared that they could not accomplish what they did unless God was guiding and sustaining them. Finally, a few talked about maintaining an intentional, meaningful devotional life despite being a busy administrator with the demands of the position.

Former Executive Secretaries

Former executive secretaries sensed God's direction not only in preparing them for the role of a local conference president, but also in calling them to the task. In

addition, they articulated the need to trust God while carrying a heavy administrative responsibility and the desire to be open to His leadership in fulfilling their duties. According to these individuals, commitment to Christ is the first prerequisite for effectively advancing the mission of God within a conference. They explained that a president can sustain the required level of dedication only by nurturing a vital connection to God, through the disciplines of a meaningful devotional life (i.e., prayer and Bible study). They viewed this divine connection as extremely important, since the president serves as an acknowledged spiritual leader for the entire conference.

As a Christian leader, Jennifer believes in a God-centered life, knowing that she would not be where she is—or effective at what she does—without His guidance and strength in her life. She is confident that the Lord is with her and has been instrumental in preparing her to be a conference president. However, Jennifer said that she would have been equally content if God had chosen a different path for her to follow. She recalled that when the conference nominating committee was deliberating on who should fill the then-vacant position of president, she was submissive to the will of God. “I felt very confident that God was at work and was going to lead,” she stated. “And I was quite open about that with people. I’m happy to go back to pastoring or to serve in administration.”

A God-centeredness preceded leadership experience for Jennifer, who has been a committed Christian since her formative teenage years. “I always wanted to do ministry—from when I was in the eighth grade,” she said when asked to describe her early thoughts about serving God. “I was passionate about youth ministry. But I didn’t see a lot of options as a woman in the Adventist church.” Taking a rather “zig-zag” approach to employment in her quest to do youth ministry, Jennifer was an assistant girl’s

dean, academy Bible teacher, chaplain, and pastor. She even earned a degree in dietetics, encouraged to do so by her parents who were concerned that she, as a woman in a male-dominated workforce, might have a difficult time finding a youth-ministry position. Referencing Reggie McNeal's book *A Work of Heart* (2011), Jennifer said she could relate to the author's depiction of how God molded and shaped various biblical leaders through life's events and challenges. Believing that the Lord utilized many circumstances from her own life to make her the leader she is today, Jennifer confessed, "My roles through life have been so different, but now, I just feel that all of those things have converged into this job."

"Leadership is tough work," Jennifer emphasized, "and the only way to be effective as a leader is to begin with a strong spiritual commitment; you must 'be' before you 'do.'" She quoted a popular aphorism of her conference leadership team: "We have to be the people of God before we do the work of God." But keeping this focus both personally and corporately is challenging for a leader. She confessed, "You have to be intentional about being spiritual if you are going to lead spiritually, but having said that, I struggle in the rhythm of my week, in the rhythm of my life, to do the spiritual disciplines."

Maintaining a divine connection, according to Jennifer, is a daily priority that enables her to take a God-centered approach to her work as a conference president, watching to see where He is active and then participating in it. She stated, "When I get up in the morning, I am confident He is already at work, and I just need to enter into what He is doing and have fun with it, hopefully making a contribution."

Tom, like Jennifer, declared that having a God-centeredness in all decisions is a primary element in his relationship with God. The other important component is a trust in the Lord, which Tom said was evident in the prayer he uttered when first elected president:

I said, “Lord, I have enjoyed being a pastor, I’ve enjoyed being the youth director, I’ve enjoyed being vice president, and I’ve enjoyed being the executive secretary.” The key word there is that—although all of ministry has its challenges—I’ve always *enjoyed* it. And I said to the Lord, “if, in accepting to be president, it’s not going to be enjoyable, then don’t give it to me.” And I felt like I heard Him clearly say to me, “Tom, you do this for Me, and I will protect you.” He didn’t say, “I’m going to take the stress out of it.” But He said, “I’ll be with you, and I’ll keep it enjoyable for you.”

It took many years to establish a trust experience with God, admitted Tom, who has sensed divine leadership numerous times in his life. Early on Tom didn’t know if he would ever be a worker for Christ, claiming he didn’t deserve to be a pastor, teacher, or serve in any leadership role for Him. After finishing his college degree in theology and getting married, he had some very “close calls” and almost lost his life. During these life-threatening experiences, Tom told the Lord, “if You’ll just allow me to get into the ministry, I promise You, I’ll serve you for the rest of my life—with whatever You want me to do.” Thinking he would be very fortunate to be a pastor, Tom never dreamed that one day he’d be asked to be the president and spiritual leader for an entire conference. He expressed his deep appreciation and gratitude to God for allowing him to be in ministry and for His grace that saved him:

God has done so much for me! He’s done so much in my life. There is no way in the world that I deserve even to be in ministry, much less a president of a conference.

[There's] no way that can be legitimized. So, I say my debt to Him is so great that I could work a million years and not come close to repaying Him for what He has done for me.

Noting that a leader's commitment needs to be genuine and deep, Tom said he believes that God must be central for a conference president, both personally and corporately. On a personal level, the spiritual leader develops a close connection to Christ by spending quality time with Him through the spiritual disciplines. Tom's understanding is that a leader can neither fake nor hide such a connection, for spending time with God will produce such a "God-ness in our lives" that He will "rub off on us," and people will notice. On a corporate level, Tom suggested that conference presidents put God at the center of what they do by caring for the church's mission. His *modus operandi* is to be accountable to the mission of the church, basing important decisions on a biblical "thus saith the LORD," along with the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (2010).

Tom added that a focus on church mission sometimes requires leaders to exclude emotional ties with individuals who might jeopardize it. He shared: "We always have to protect the church above all things. In other words, my friendships mean nothing. There is no one who is so good of a friend that I sacrifice the church for that friend." Tom avoids the "good ole' boy" system, in which people give or do favors for personal gain; he believes that such emotionally laden decisions cannot be tolerated. A leader who executes by principle and not by emotions is on "solid ground," he emphasized. In times when a president must stand alone in making a difficult decision, said Tom, he or she must be in agreement with God's will. "Though no one stands with you," he explained, "you lay your head on the pillow at night knowing that you have done what God asked you to do . . . and there is nothing more important than that."

Jim described with transparency how, during the past few years, he has been more effective as a leader due to a new sense of his own brokenness to the will of God in his life. Just prior to becoming a conference president, he was invited to speak at a spiritual convocation and, in order to sense God's voice to him, he secluded himself in a wilderness cabin for almost two weeks while he prepared his presentations. Jim shared how self-revealing the experience was. "I remember sitting in my room looking out over the valley," he said. "And I asked the Lord to help me see myself as I really am."

According to Jim, God did just that. He recalled:

It was a prayer that, after a few moments, I almost wished I hadn't prayed. But, boy, did I go through a soul-searching moment there. I just broke into tears [as I] saw myself—how selfish, how egotistical I am, how arrogant, etc. It was a major humbling experience.

Reflecting upon his many years of leadership in the church, he reviewed in his mind the successes and failures. It was a painful experience, according to Jim, to relive some of his past and to admit that, for a portion of his life, he had been motivated solely by selfish ambition. But he also saw how all of that began to change when he was confronted with some major personal and professional trials—challenges that put him on his back both literally and figuratively. Jim conceded that while sequestered in that little cabin, working on his talks for the convocation, he experienced a paradigm shift in his understanding about what really mattered in life and his relationship with God. He said: "I think I am where I am today because of my connection with Him. I learned, a few years ago, three principles that have made a major impact on my life and leadership." In order to remind himself of his realization during that cabin experience, Jim created an acrostic, FAT, that outlines the three principles. "F" stands for *faithfulness*. Jim explained: "No matter what happens, no matter what cards you get dealt or what

circumstance you face, you've got to remain faithful to God. That's number one." The "A" stands for making yourself *available* to God's leadership in your life. He said: "You have to be available, wherever God puts you. If it's back into a classroom (Jim had once been an administrator for an educational institution) or wherever, the door that opens is the one you've got to walk through." The "T" stands for being *teachable*, and Jim stressed that this is very critical to a leader's success. He summarized his spiritual leadership principles with the comment: "I think if any presidents are going to be successful, they've got to be faithful, available, and teachable."

As a result of being broken before God and then realizing that the spiritual leader of a conference has a unique need for Him, Jim changed the manner in which he starts each day. He explained: "I made a decision, . . . I would get up and spend at least 1 to 2 hours in Scripture. I don't read any other material, just Scripture. And then I have prayer time." During his prayer time, Jim walks for approximately 45 minutes to pursue his goal of being connected to God.

Former Departmental Directors

Like the other participants in this study, the former departmental leaders spoke about how prayer and trust in God affected their decision to accept the call to become a conference chief executive. These individuals also placed a high value on a meaningful devotional life, believing they could not do the work of administration effectively without it. They agreed with the former executive secretaries that one of the most important responsibilities of the president is to be the spiritual leader of the conference.

Leroy is one of two former departmental directors who openly discussed their belief that God had instilled within their hearts a desire to one day become a conference

president. For a number of years, he had sensed God's call to become an administrator (specifically, a president), and even though he had prayed to be released from it, the conviction wouldn't go away. Prior to Leroy's election to his current post, his name had surfaced on the lists of numerous presidential search committees. Each time he learned that someone else had been invited to fill the position, he would question God's call. But Leroy explained that, throughout his years of serving as a pastor and conference departmental leader, he had developed a trust in God and learned to allow Him to lead his life. So he remained steadfast, trusting God and simply waiting to see what He would do. Eventually he did receive the invitation to become a conference president, and today Leroy is convinced that he is serving where the Lord placed him. He stated: "I believe with all of my heart that God called me to this position, and I'm glad to serve in it as long as He wants me here. If He doesn't want me here, I'm the first one to want to be out of it."

Maintaining a meaningful relationship with God is the most important item on a spiritual leader's personal agenda, declared Leroy; nothing should be allowed to interfere with it. "Your relationship with the Lord is paramount," he added. "Your team, your pastors, your constituents—they can tell if you do or don't have that relationship." Leroy also voiced his belief that a vital connection with God is what supports his strong commitment to advance the mission of the church in his conference. He referenced Henry and Richard Blackaby's book *Spiritual Leadership* (2011), in which the authors suggest that true spiritual leaders are intentional about discovering the will of God and then aligning their personal and corporate agendas with it. Leroy strongly believes that God's agenda is given in the Great Commission to "go and make disciples" (Matt 28:19); in

fact, he referred to this scripture as the “marching orders” for Christians. “It’s actually a command,” he said, “because in the Greek New Testament the word ‘go’ is stated in the imperative case.” And as a spiritual leader, Leroy listed advancing the mission of the church as his most significant contribution. He stated:

Do we want to move the church forward in its mission? Do we want to really make a difference to hasten Jesus’ coming? Do we really want to take seriously our role, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, to prepare the world for Jesus’ soon coming? Or do we just want to manage? You know, I don’t want to waste my time rearranging the chairs on the deck of the Titanic.

Like Leroy, Jonah was transparent in sharing how, early in his career, he had aspired to someday serve the church as a conference president. He said that years ago, when Bruce Wilkinson’s book *The Prayer of Jabez* (2000) became popular among Christian leaders, he had followed the biblical model of this leader who prayed for God to enlarge his territory of responsibility. Jonah recalled, “I was thinking . . . instead of being a local pastor, it would be neat someday to be a president, where you are over a larger section, where you can make more of a difference in the Lord’s work.” Jonah began to purposely position himself in order to advance toward one day becoming a president. He gave the example of leaving his job as senior pastor in a large urban church in order to accept a departmental director position at the conference level, where he felt he would be more likely to receive a call to be a president. He explained:

I . . . always wanted to take calls that . . . in a sense were going up the ladder, [to] bigger responsibilities . . . and I thought, “There is no way I’m going to be jumping from pastor to president.” . . . I knew I needed to get back into the office if that was going to happen.

As he shared these aspirations, Jonah wondered aloud about being too ambitious, too self-directed, and not totally submitted to God’s will. He confided, “I hope that it wasn’t part of my carnal nature.” For various reasons, Jonah viewed his call from the

pastorate to a departmental directorship in a conference office as coming from the Lord. One of the most significant indicators for Jonah was the fact that changing dynamics in his family would allow him to travel more, which was a requirement for the conference position. He explained, “The call came just at the time our youngest was heading off to college, so I sensed this was the Lord’s leading.”

As the former departmental leaders discussed their trust relationship with God, they spoke about being submissive to His will. Jack shared how he and his spouse earnestly prayed for direction once he received the invitation to become a conference president. He did not want to accept such a position; in fact, he had just written a letter of acceptance for another job when the call came. Yet Jack sensed that God was saying “no” to the other job and “yes” to the call to become president. He reflected, “I believe it was God telling me [that] if I went to the first place, where I was intending to go, I could have done it, but it would have been me and not Him.” And then he confessed, “Becoming a president was such a stretch for me, for I didn’t know anything about doing the job, and I would really need to depend upon Him.” But Jack said he knew that he needed to surrender to God’s direction, and he felt God was telling him: “‘You’re going to have to lean on Me totally for this job. And trust Me. You’re going to need it.’ And so I looked at that and I said, ‘Okay, God, I get it. Work with my talents’... And that was the difference.”

Don, like the others in this leadership group, spoke about his need to have a meaningful relationship with the Lord in order to be effective as a conference president. But he added a caution for his colleagues, suggesting that the longer one occupies the post of conference chief executive, the more he or she is prone to losing the element of

spiritual dependency. Don recalled that when he began as a president 3 years ago, he prayed, “I’m just your undershepherd down here, doing the best I can to follow in Your footsteps, for I can’t do this by myself.” However, Don admitted that due to the fact that the work of president is so consuming and because he is now more comfortable with the position, he has sensed a drift in his dependence upon God. He confided, “Just last evening, either on the way to get my wife or while waiting for her, I got to thinking, ‘You know what? It’s been a while since I prayed that prayer of dependency.’”

Don echoed the sentiments of his fellow president Jim, who was formerly an executive secretary, when he described being the spiritual leader of the conference as one of the most important responsibilities of a president. While some leaders might see their most important role as vision casting, communicating, or “cheerleading,” to name a few, for Don it is spirituality. He stated:

I believe that a president needs to be a spiritual leader and, if nothing else, needs to be an example of spiritual leading. . . . [In the same way that] a congregation will rarely rise above their pastor spiritually, I believe that a conference will rarely rise above the spiritual leadership, and the president is . . . the key spiritual leader.

Former Pastors

The former pastors in this study shared a conviction, as did the former executive secretaries and departmental directors, that serving as the spiritual leader for a conference necessitates a meaningful devotional life. However, those who transitioned into the presidency directly from a pastorate differed significantly from those who had previously served as departmental directors in that the pastors were not aspiring to become a local conference president. In fact, as a couple of them shared, the call was so unexpected that they were compelled to seek the Lord’s will through prayer. And they said that the very

manner in which they received the invitation motivated them to consider its divine authenticity.

For Mark, a passion for pastoring and a distinct sense of being called to it served as strong deterrents against trading his pastorate for a position at the conference office. In addition, because both his father and grandfather had served in administration within the Seventh-day Adventist church, he'd had many opportunities to directly observe the challenges involved with conference-level leadership. He remarked: "I had seen the price and the sacrifice that they paid to do administration, and I just had no interest in it. And I didn't sense it being my calling."

Obviously Mark experienced a change of heart, because about eight years ago he accepted the invitation to become a local conference president. He said that a key motivating factor in his decision to finally consider a position in administration was the unforeseen nature of the call. Mark observed, "It's one of those dynamics where it comes [from] so far out of the blue, and so unexpectedly, that you've got to give pause to it, asking 'Is this really a God thing?'" He described his reaction when the president of his conference contacted him regarding the official call, which was about to be presented by the union president who had chaired the executive committee in the conference where Mark had been elected. Laughingly he recalled that he had asked his local conference president: "Can't they find anyone else? Why in the world are they coming to me?" When the union president contacted Mark with the news he had been voted the president of Connecticut Conference, his answer was, "I don't even know what to say." In reply, the union president told him, "Take a week and consider it." So Mark and his wife made

the invitation a matter of sincere prayer as they attempted to discover God's will for them.

Mark pointed out that the call to administration was especially challenging at that particular time, because he loved what he was doing as the senior pastor for his local church, and things were going well there under his leadership. He shared how he and his wife wrestled with the decision for over a month before reaching a conclusion. Each week the union president would contact him to determine if he had reached a decision, telling Mark that he needed to let the hiring conference know his answer. The epiphany was subtle, according to Mark: "I remember I was in prayer time. I didn't hear an audible voice from God. But there was, there was just this deep sense and impression where God impressed my heart. In essence He was saying, 'Mark, I gave you the gift of being raised as a missionary kid in the mission field. I need you to come to the mission field of the Connecticut Conference.'"

After that prayer, he got off his knees and called to tell the union president that he would accept. Looking back to that moment with the benefit of hindsight, Mark recognized that God was teaching him to be open to His plan for him. He understood that if he was going to be faithful to his calling and to the experiences God had placed in his life, then he would need to acknowledge that "whatever gifts, talents, abilities, and skills" God had provided were not his, but rather the Lord's. And he realized that, because the conference Mark now leads is demographically very multicultural, God had prepared him in unique ways to be its president. "My growing up and formative years were in a very cross-cultural setting," he noted, and as a result of experiences he felt God had given him during his growing-up years, Mark sees multicultural ministry as part of his DNA; it's his

heritage and his identity. In a remarkable attitude reversal that perhaps only God could effect, Mark added that he feels more at home where he is currently serving than he had as pastor of the church he and his wife were so loathe to leave. After nearly 8 years as president of his conference, Mark reflected: “I will sit in the context of a multicultural setting, and my eyes will tear up, and I will say to myself, ‘This is beautiful. I love it.’ Because I’m just a part of my people.”

Joe shared Mark’s reluctance to serve in conference administration, and for years he rejected any invitation to do so. Approximately two decades ago, Joe received invitations to interview for the position of conference president, but he declined to participate. At that time he preferred to focus on ministry at the local-church level rather than leadership at the conference level, because he enjoyed speaking to the same congregation week after week and felt that the work of administration involved too much bureaucracy.

According to Joe, he had been intentional about avoiding the position of conference president earlier in his ministry, and when confronted with another invitation less than a year ago, his attitude had not changed. In fact, Joe said he had additional reasons for not looking favorably toward an executive post: (a) he and his wife were looking forward to moving closer to family, and (b) he believed it would be difficult for his wife to find meaningful work if he were to become a conference president. Freely sharing how he felt when the formal call arrived, Joe confessed, “We had our hearts set on getting closer to family; humanly speaking, that is what we wanted.” But prayer influenced Joe and his wife to forego their human wishes and take a position far from family, in a role he never seriously imagined he would ever accept. He said: “I thought I

would pastor another church, preferably near family. But instead, after a prayer journey, I ended up being a president [in a conference] farther away from family.” Joe added that “after prayer, we both believed that this is where God sent us and what we are supposed to do.”

Joe explained that submitting to God’s will in this instance fueled an amazing spiritual journey for him and his wife. He said that his wife is a person of great faith and devotion, and while he’d already had a meaningful devotional life, this experience took him to a new level. “I’ve had a journey of deepening my Bible study and prayer life that is really serious and is constant,” he stated. The end result of practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study, according to Joe, is that he and his wife are leaning more upon God and trusting Him by faith to lead and guide them.

Bob, on the other hand, felt that his devotional life had suffered during his transition from pastor to conference president. Like Don, a former departmental director, Bob reported that his new position made it much more difficult to maintain a spiritual dependency on God. Unless a president is intentional about reserving time to maintain a healthy devotional life, he said, the pressures of the new role will crowd out such an exercise. As a result of the extra travel and heavy workload expected of a conference president, Bob found it challenging to prepare new sermons and to practice the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study. He stated:

You’re now getting calls early in the morning. You’re on the road, and your routine varies. Your eating habits have changed, and the burdens that you carry don’t automatically go away. This is just a whole new arena now—more people grabbing at you, so your time is not your own. And unless you’re very intentional about maintaining that kind of relationship with God, it’s easy try to rely on what you had before, and there’s not a refreshing feeling on a day-to-day basis.

Bob sensed he was becoming lax in his study habits, due partly to poor time management and also to the fact that he was traveling to different churches each weekend. He had learned that he could use the same sermon repeatedly because he was always preaching to a different group, and although it was a rerun for him, those to whom he was preaching would be hearing for the first time. “I’m not required [to write a new sermon each week],” he explained. “I hate to say it that way, but it’s true. That’s the reality. I can preach the same message over and over again, because I’m in different locations.” Bob found he could even validate this practice by saying that he wanted to “stay on message” and be consistent in sharing the same thoughts at each congregation around the conference. But he confessed that in doing this, he is not being a faithful student of the Bible—not growing and being renewed by its changing power. Bob sadly admitted, “It sort of makes me lazy, and I don’t like that.”

Like the individuals who became a conference president immediately after serving as an executive secretary or as a departmental director, those who advanced directly from the pastorate emphasized the spiritual-leadership responsibility that is inherent in their new role. All of the former pastors either implied or explicitly expressed the conviction that this was one of the most important aspects of their new job. Mark summed up in this way:

You may see yourself as a CEO or a president, or whatever the case may be. He [God] is the Shepherd, but you are the lead shepherd of that local conference, as far as your people are concerned, so you need to lead from a very spiritual perspective. . . . You are looked upon as a spiritual leader of your organization, so you are first and foremost a spiritual leader. You can never forget that.

Summary

The study participants discussed how prayer and trust in God aided them not only in making the decision to become a conference president, but also in executing their duties as an administrator. They agreed that being submissive to God's will was a necessary prerequisite to accepting the new position. Several individuals who moved to their new post directly from a pastorate said they had not desired the duties or the sacrifice involved in becoming a conference president. By contrast, several who advanced to the presidency from a departmental director position had sensed God calling them to the post since early in their careers.

Presidents from each of the three categories of prior jobs discussed the necessity of maintaining a meaningful devotional life in order to effectively execute the duties of their position. They considered serving as the spiritual leader for the conference to be one of their most significant and difficult responsibilities. Those who had previously worked as pastors found it especially tough to deal with an increased workload, including travel expectations, and yet maintain the Bible study habits of a responsible preacher. One former departmental director believed that the longer a president stays in office, the greater would be his or her risk of moving from a reliance upon God to a human dependency.

Relationships

Transitioning conference presidents in this study also reported that their social network changed as a result of their new position. They talked about experiencing a sense of aloneness and a lack of close friends in their new role.

Former Executive Secretaries

Those who transitioned from serving as an executive secretary indicated that they did not have close friends among their employees, yet they valued healthy relationships with all. Some of the study participants shared how being the chief administrator was a lonely position and that on numerous occasions they felt there was no one, humanly speaking, in whom they could confide. Jennifer, the only female president in the study, perceived a change in the way some of her male associates related to her after she assumed her new position.

The experiences of new presidents Tom and Jim provide good examples of how loneliness impacts a chief administrator. Although these men had previously served in various other leadership roles, they considered the position of conference president to be the loneliest they had ever held. One primary cause of this loneliness was that they believed it necessary to avoid close relationships with their employees in order to remain objective when making personnel decisions. Remarking on this intentional social separation, Tom said, “You can have friends [and] you can have co-workers, acquaintances, but you can’t have close friends, because the closer the friend, the more it skews the decision that you have to make when it’s in relationship with that individual.”

Jim, who has had various leadership responsibilities both within and without formal church organizations or institutions, said his social network drastically changed when he became the president of a conference. But he added that this didn’t surprise him, stating, “Wherever I’ve been in leadership, I have found it to be kind of a lonely place.” Jim shared that he and his wife have close friends, located in different places, with whom they enjoy connecting sometimes, even vacationing together. But he doesn’t connect

locally with anyone in that manner, exclaiming, “As president of the conference, to say that I have friends I go out to eat with or do activity together with, no, no!”

An introvert by nature, Jim is not bothered by the aloneness he sometimes feels. In fact, he actually welcomes it, preferring a certain degree of social isolation. He explained how being around people all of the time “sucked the life out” of him. To further facilitate his solitude, Jim has even asked his wife to stay in bed an extra hour in the morning to allow him some seclusion while he’s taking his daily walk.

Tom likewise experienced changing dynamics in his relationship with people after his election to conference president. He said: “Two funny things happened: first, overnight I had many more friends—that is, ‘friends’ in quotes—but secondly, I had more enemies as well.” Some people, he feels, want favors from the president; therefore, their motives for pursuing a friendship with him are conflicted. Tom indicated that as a conference president leads and makes difficult decisions, people become polarized into two groups. “Every decision you make as a president,” he explained, “will cause half of the people to be happy with you and half to be upset with you.” Feeling that a certain degree of loneliness is the natural result of making tough decisions, Tom remarked, “When you have taken an unpopular stance because of some decision or something that has happened, very few people are willing to stand with you.” As clarification, he quickly added that this was true only in human terms, because he believes that God stands with a leader even if no one else does.

The irony, according to Tom, is that a president’s loneliness is sometimes the result of following a mandate from God. He shared, “Though no one stands with you, you lay your head on the pillow at night knowing that you have done what God asked you to

do.” If a Christian leader has a clear conscience, Tom believes that sensing God’s approval by itself will sustain him or her during moments of loneliness caused by taking a difficult stand. He stated: “And in that sense, you know, the burden of not having close friends—the burden of not having people who stick it out with you through thick and thin—is not a burden, because there’s nothing more important than knowing that you are doing what God asked you to do.”

Tom said that although giving up being close to his colleagues and workers was not an easy thing to do, he felt that God had earlier prepared him for it. He explained: “I’m in a situation where the easiest thing to do is to get close to the pastors, get close to those you work with, become very close so that you can feel the comfort of the closeness.” But he refrains, believing that leaders aren’t able to forge close-knit bonds with employees and remain objective. In his case, Tom felt that during his formative years God prepared him to be able to maintain a certain degree of social distance from colleagues. “I’ve often wondered,” he reflected, “why God ordained it to be so—that I was not close to my father, and not close to my brother. And now I understand that it was purposed that way to help me now.” Something in the lack of closeness with his family members assisted Tom in understanding how he could maintain a meaningful professional relationship with his employees and yet not become “close” with any of them.

Jennifer, as a female working in a position that had previously been held only by males within her denomination, offered a unique perspective on how becoming a president affected her work relationships. She reported that while gender issues had never surfaced while she served as a conference executive secretary, she did notice a change in

how some of her male associates related to her after she was elected president. Jennifer surmised they were adjusting to differences in the way a female administrator addresses and communicates issues, as opposed to a male administrator. For instance, she stated:

“There’s been a couple of times where I’ve felt there has been a little projection. Two or three of my male colleagues said to me in meetings in the office, ‘You said it to me just like my wife would have said it to me.’ (And I replied) ‘I’m not your wife. Let’s talk about this.’”

Noting differences in the way she and her close work associates tend to approach certain decisions, Jennifer explained: “I’m a little more touchy feely, and . . . I want to be a little more vulnerable. . . . I think some of the guys are uncomfortable at times with deeper vulnerability.’ . . . But we are getting there as a team. We are getting real with each other, however pacing those conversations in a way that is comfortable, I’m learning that.”

Former Departmental Directors

For various reasons, individuals who transitioned from a departmental position to the post of conference president experienced a sense of loneliness similar to what the former executive secretaries described. Some accepted this loneliness as a typical consequence of being the chief administrator and/or attributed it to the self-prescribed, intentional social distancing from work associates that a leader often does in order to maintain objectivity. A few reported an additional element of aloneness due to relocating from a different conference and leaving behind friends and long-established relationships. Some spoke of the need to have close friends or confidants “outside” of their employing organization.

Leroy cited two factors that made loneliness a reality for him in his new role:

- (a) purposely creating a social distance between himself and his work associates, and
- (b) relocating to a different conference where he and his wife didn't know many people.

Recalling his ministerial education at the Seventh-day Adventist seminary, Leroy said that his seminary professors had discouraged pastors from developing close friends within their congregations, on the grounds that some church members might claim a show of favoritism. But Leroy and his wife took a different approach in regard to friendships during the time he served at the pastoral level. He declared: "We never bought into that. Susie and I always had really deep, rich relationships with people in our churches."

However, Leroy said that he operated differently after being elected to lead at the conference level. "I am hesitant to really make friends with people in the office, because of my position," he admitted. While he spoke of making the members of his conference headquarters office team his friendship circle and desiring a healthy relationship with each worker, Leroy said that he is careful not to become so "close" to one of them that others might perceive favoritism.

When asked if he had noticed a change in his social network since becoming a conference president, Leroy responded: "Yes. Very, very much so. I know this sounds a little 'cliquish,' but it is very, very lonely." Two dynamics of the transition made it especially difficult for Leroy and his wife: (a) the challenge of relocating to a new conference and separating from close friends they had known for over a decade, and (b) the beginnings of "empty nest syndrome," since it was the first move they had made without their children. With Leroy's new demanding travel schedule often taking him

away from home, his wife was consequently left in an empty house with no children and in a place where she no longer had her close friends. He was emphatic, stating, “The transition was very difficult for her. Very, very difficult for her, yet she clearly recognized that God was calling us.”

As Jonah reflected upon the various leadership positions he has held through the years, he saw a couple of reasons why, for him, the role of conference president is lonelier than any other. First of all, like Leroy, Jonah had ignored the counsel of his ministerial professors and developed close relationships in the churches where he pastored. In hindsight, he felt that this decision had made his transition to a conference office, prior to becoming president, a difficult one. He explained, “I think one of the toughest things for me in going into the conference office . . . is that you miss having a church family, and you don’t make a network of friends, like you did when you were a pastor.” Jonah’s demanding travel schedule did not allow him time to invest in building new relationships, as he did when pastoring. “We certainly had some friends on the staff,” he said, “but everyone’s time is so restricted [that] you are not able to spend a lot of time doing things.”

Jonah added that a second (and perhaps more salient) reason why the position of conference president involves an aspect of aloneness is the inability to discern a colleague’s motive for initiating a friendship. He shared: “The office can be a lonely place—I think probably more for a president than for anyone else. Because you always wonder, are people wanting to get close to you because of the position or because of you?”

Consequently, Jonah believes that having friends outside of the local work environment is necessary in order to maintain a healthy social life. He stated, “To me, it’s neat having good personal friends where you can be real, be you, and not have to be what people think you ought to be all the time.”

Jack likewise experienced a change in his social network when he became a conference president, acknowledging it to be the loneliest of all his professional roles. As he ascended into leadership positions throughout his career, Jack found that each one was unique in its social environment. He claimed that even though he had been careful not to develop close relationships at work, he’d had more friends as a pastor than he did as a conference departmental director. And after becoming president, he’d had even fewer friends, stating, “Whenever you have the authority, . . . it’s very difficult to have a close relationship.”

Challenged by the inherent sense of aloneness in his new role, Jack wondered where (or with whom) he could be vulnerable and transparent, as one is with a close friend. He asked: “Where is going to be your circle [of support]? Everything you do is wrapped up in the church. Everything you do is wrapped up there. And so where do you go for normalcy? Who do you talk to?” Jack then proceeded to answer his rhetorical question by suggesting three different groups from which he could draw in developing close relationships: (a) “outside friends” who do not work in his conference, (b) other presidents who attend the NAD’s annual Local Conference Presidents’ Retreat, (c) his own union’s Presidents Council. Jack identified “outside friends” as the most meaningful of the three groups, and he related an anecdote that illustrates how encouraging it is to have such social interaction. He stated:

I'm really glad I have Arnie, 'cause every once in a while he'll call up or I'll call him and say, "Man, we haven't been out to eat for a while." So we'll just go, and we'll laugh and we'll talk, do all kinds of stuff. Because we can, okay. We're close, so we do that. So we just have a good time. We remember overflowing toilets, and this and that, you understand.

Former Pastors

Former pastors who became conference presidents agreed that the job brings a sense of aloneness and a change in their relations with former peers. Some spoke about how they had lost the sense of community upon leaving their local church and then had rediscovered it among their conference leadership team. But unlike the presidents I interviewed who had previously worked as executive secretaries and departmental directors, one of the presidents in this former-pastor category developed a "close" friendship with one of his local work associates.

Mark experienced changes in his relationships with various groups and individuals when he moved from pastoring a local church to becoming the president of a conference. He had been reticent to transition from pastoring to administration because, first of all, he had expected a loss of camaraderie with other pastors. He recalled:

I wasn't that anxious to become an administrator. . . . I knew that my relationship with the pastors would change. Because, you know, as a pastor I'm hanging out with pastors. We're ragging on the officers and conference—"those guys don't know what they're doing," etc., etc. Well, now I'm one of those guys.

Secondly, Mark anticipated that he would lose his sense of fellowship with his local church and spoke of the grieving he experienced when he lost the kinship he'd had with his church members because his life had been so entwined with theirs.

Consequently, Mark decided that he would need to create a new community within his

conference office team. He stated, “When you become an administrator, your community really becomes who you work with in the office.”

Unlike presidents from the other categories (former executive secretaries and departmental directors), who avoided establishing “close” relationships with work associates, Mark developed a firm friendship with an older, experienced colleague in his office. This leader was a fellow administrator and not someone considered a subordinate of the president, for the three executives officers in a conference are deemed to be equals. Reflecting upon his close relationship with this fellow officer, Mark said: “Ultimately he became my best friend and . . . has had as much or more [of a role] in helping to shape and mold me into who I am today than anybody. Than anybody!”

Mark added that he felt he had a good, solid relationship with the pastors in his conference due to the fact that he had been a pastor just prior to becoming a president. He said, “I think [that] because I came straight from the pastorate, I’ve had pastors open up and share with me [things] that I would never [have dreamed] of sharing with my conference president when I was a pastor, ever.”

For Bob, the job-induced change he experienced in his relationships with former peers (fellow pastors) was a challenge he did not anticipate. Its level of difficulty and resulting trauma even caused Bob to wonder if he should continue in his new role as conference president. He explained:

I literally had to, to go back through relationships and identify the benefits and the shortfalls of that relationship and then make a conscious decision of whether or not this is something I can really do at this stage of my life in terms of relationships. That has been very difficult. That blindsided me. I didn’t see that coming.

Bob determined that he found the transition to his new position difficult for the following reasons: (a) the high value he places on relationships, (b) his new inability to

discern motive in a friendship, and (c) the loss of camaraderie with pastors. “I value relationships so much,” he emphasized, and discovered how “the presidency really puts a strain on them.” Bob found himself suddenly troubled about why people wanted to become his friend, wondering if they really desired a meaningful relationship with him or were simply after some benefit or perquisite he could give. Furthermore, when it has been necessary for him to make difficult decisions that negatively affect his former peers and friends, he has sensed a shift in their relations. Bob claimed: “Before I was president, we would go out and play golf, laugh, . . . talk, and there were no inhibitions. Now that things haven’t gone the way that they felt that they ought to go, it becomes a hindrance to the relationship.”

Joe acknowledged that he too noticed a change in his social network as a direct result of the transition from working as a pastor to serving as a conference president. Throughout his years of pastoring churches of different sizes, Joe had noticed that the larger the church, the more lonely the position. And now that he has become a president, he said, “I think that . . . it’s even more so.” As lonely as it had been for Joe while pastoring large churches, he still had developed some close friends among his coworkers, claiming, “My pastoral team became very close spiritually, very close, and that was a strength and support for me.” But in his new role as president, Joe sensed a difference in how close he would become with his leadership team and work associates, as a result of the authority vested in the chief administrator’s position. He explained, “I don’t think the relationship will ever be quite the same as when it was a group of us pastors in similar roles, sharing [our] hearts and needs, working through the same thing with the same people.”

Now Joe covets a close personal relationship with at least one other leader, stating, “I do think I need to have spiritual friends.” For reasons already mentioned regarding intentional social distancing, Joe believes that such a person (or persons) should not be affiliated with his local conference. So, in order to have social support, he has already begun to build mutually supportive relationships with peers outside of his conference.

Summary

While transitioning into the role of president, participants from all three of the study categories experienced a change in their relationships with fellow conference employees. Most spoke of how they purposely kept from establishing close friendships with their employees in order to avoid the appearance of favoritism and to maintain a level of objectivity. The lone exception was a former pastor who had established a friendship with a current work associate and now considered that co-worker to be his closest friend.

In addition to the aforementioned relationship-avoidance tactic, the new presidents cited the following factors as contributing to a sense of isolation in their leadership role: (a) being the person to make final decisions, (b) having limited time to develop meaningful relationships, (c) adjusting to a new social stature as a result of a more authoritative role, and (d) grieving the loss of a “community” (i.e., support group). Furthermore, presidents who had relocated from a different conference found that unfamiliar surroundings added to their burden of aloneness.

Former pastors were unique in stating that they missed the camaraderie they had previously enjoyed with their peers and felt uncomfortable being the boss instead of “one of the guys.”

In order to manage their feelings of isolation, the conference presidents utilized some or all of the following coping strategies: (a) designating their conference office leadership group as their new “community,” (b) believing that God would sustain them in following their convictions as they made certain unpopular decisions, (c) cultivating friends from “outside” of the conference, and even (d) enjoying the imposed solitude.

Identity

After becoming a conference president, the participants of this study perceived a change in how some lay constituents, employees, and peers behaved toward them. They said they noticed that in some situations, their subordinates treated them with increased deference, respect, and even a sense of adulation. As a result of this phenomenon, some of the new presidents acknowledged a change in their own self-identity. Others said that while their new job did not alter how they perceived themselves, they did observe a shift in the perceptions of their peers.

Former Executive Secretaries

While transitioning from the position of executive secretary to that of president, some leaders acknowledged a difference in the way individuals related to them. They said that even though they had tried to discourage any change in the way coworkers and lay constituents treated them, they still received deference and special respect. When asked how being a president affects a leader’s self-identity, one of the executives recognized in

himself a new tendency to identify with his position of power, while the other study participants claimed to have witnessed such a change only in the personal identity of their peers.

Both Tom and Jennifer had spent the majority of their ministerial careers within the conference they now lead, and each had previously served as a pastor, conference departmental director, and then executive secretary before advancing to president. Both claimed that they were unpretentious in their new role and did not encourage people to treat them any differently. In fact, they actually discouraged coworkers from altering their behavior toward them and recognized that any deference given to them was purely ceremonial, out of respect for the office of president. Tom's reflection was insightful:

I think if you ask . . . people in the office, they'll tell you that I haven't changed from the day I got here. With me, what you see is what you get. I don't know how to pretend. I don't consider myself to be a politician. I had a former president tell me, "You'll learn how to play the game." And I've said to myself, "No, I don't think I will, because I'm not in the game."

While neither Jennifer nor Tom perceived any change in their own self-identity, both commented that they had observed this phenomenon in other presidents. Reflecting upon her numerous years in ministry Jennifer commented regarding this occurrence, "I have watched administrators allow their identities to be so wrapped in their role that the loss of that role brought about a grieving process. One former president told me, "I feel like I just lost a country."

Tom, who viewed himself as a pastor doing the chief administrator's job, said he had observed how individuals can begin to change their attitudes—from feeling initially honored that they had been elected president to a sense of entitlement by the time they faced re-election. He was aware of one president whose self-perception had changed

from simply being a gospel minister doing the will of God to that of a president always expecting to lead as the chief administrator and never seeming content to serve in a lesser position. Tom recoiled from the thought of experiencing such an identity shift, acknowledging that it could happen to him but praying that it never would. In fact, he said that he has told his wife, “If you ever see this happening in me, please take me out back and shoot me, because I don’t deserve to be president.”

Length of tenure is what Tom considered a primary contributing factor to an administrator’s change in self-perception; the longer a leader served in the capacity of president, the more his or her identity would become imprinted as a chief administrator. It seemed to Tom that an attitude of entitlement—whereby the incumbent president standing for re-election would say, “I’m a president and deserve to be re-elected”—is undesirable, because it indicates that the carnal rather than the spiritual nature is ruling in that leader’s life.

Jim, like Jennifer and Tom, did not acknowledge any change in his personal identity, even though he noticed that some individuals had begun to treat him differently. Specifically, he observed a much greater change in the way conference employees (such as pastors and educators) and lay members from outside of the conference office team treated him, as opposed to employees at the conference headquarters. “In the office,” Jim said, “I sense that people are not afraid to say whatever they want to say . . . there is an openness; however, I sense a different feeling out in the field [conference territory].” Jim also noted an interesting difference in the way individuals among the various churches within his conference deferred to him: the members of churches composed primarily of

immigrants did it out of respect for the presidential office, while the members of non-immigrant churches gave him deference only after he had earned it.

Sam did not discuss how others treated him in his new role. However, he (unlike his colleagues in this particular category) did acknowledge a shift in his own identity and was clearly not comfortable with the result. When asked if he viewed himself differently as a result of being the conference president, Sam replied: “I’m afraid of that, and I think at times I do that—and I don’t like that. It’s a denial . . . of who God created me to be.” Then he shared a poignant anecdote: “Sometimes I get peed off with somebody, and I just tell them, ‘Well, tough. Get over it. I’m the president. And when you are, you can do what you want.’ I never really feel good about that, and will typically go back and apologize.”

Former Departmental Directors

Like the study participants who were former executive secretaries, those who transferred to the position of president from a departmental role also noticed a difference in the way people treated them. However, they spoke more poignantly about how the increased deference and respect they received from various people groups powerfully affected their own self-identity.

Don recalled that many people had suddenly placed him on a pedestal when he became a conference president, which made him uncomfortable. Nevertheless, he also recognized that the perceptions of others had played a decisive role in creating his new identity as a conference leader. “I believe there is an identity shift happening in me,” he admitted. Two years into his new job, Don was transparent in sharing his personal struggle with these complex issues:

Maybe when we are in a role . . . there needs to be some boundaries. Where I am first Don Smith, I am [also] a father, and I am a husband, and I am a friend, and I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church, I am a son of God. And . . . yet God has called me to fill this role—of a departmental director or a president of a conference, or whatever the role might be. I don't know. Maybe there is a sense where our identity and the role we fill gets blurred. . . . Perhaps if you were to ask, "Who are you?" Oh, I'm the president of the Delaware conference. "No, who are you?"

Additionally, Don noticed that the longer he served as president, the more he began to view himself as one, an adjustment he didn't particularly appreciate. He explained that when he began in his new role, he simply viewed himself as a pastor doing the work of a president, but over time that perspective had changed. He stated, "Over the past few months, I think I've lost sight of that a little bit, and I need to get back to that focus that I am a pastor first, and I'm a pastor in the role as president."

Leroy talked about how, when visiting churches in his conference, members show a great deal of respect for his position. For example, at Sabbath lunch (which is typically a potluck meal), Leroy noticed a big difference in the way he was treated after becoming the president. When he was a pastor, he would always eat last, but now he is placed at the front of the line, so as to be able to eat first. He reflected, "You must constantly tell yourself [that] this position is about servant leadership and not the opposite." Leroy suggested that leaders in his position need to be cognizant about how the deference and special treatment they receive might influence their own identity. He urged conference presidents to occasionally reflect upon its effect because, he insisted, "You are treated differently."

Jonah agreed that the esteem a leader receives can contribute to a struggle with identity issues. He suggested that becoming a local conference president can easily lead to a feeling of conceit and a type of superiority complex. Believing that he has seen this

capitulation in others who have become chief administrators, Jonah hastily added, “I pray it doesn’t happen to me.” In fact, when introducing himself, Jonah purposely tries to avoid telling individuals what he does, because he doesn’t want to convey that he is “somebody” due to his new position.

Former Pastors

As with the former executive secretaries and former departmental directors, the study participants who became conference presidents immediately after serving as pastors experienced a noted distinct difference in the way people treated them, based on their new position. However, the transitioning pastors were like the former executive secretaries, with most claiming that they didn’t perceive themselves differently as a result of how others now treated them.

Most in this category claimed they carried with them the identity of a pastor doing the president’s job. One said: “I am so far along in my career and have been a pastor for so long, my identity is quite well set, for good or for bad. And I’m not finding a lot of identity crisis.” However, a couple of the former pastors shared anecdotes indicating a modified self-perception. Mark and George both reported that coworkers and church members treated them differently after they became conference presidents. Mark said:

They would defer to me as president. They would ask me questions such as, you know, “Well, Mr. President, how would you handle this? Where do we go from here? What do we do?” And it took awhile, Dave, I will tell you. It’s not as if I’m really completely comfortable in that role, but I realize that’s how people view me now. It took a good year.

George found it amusing that his new job title had prompted many people in his conference to alter their behavior toward him. He recalled: “As I’m out in the churches, I kind of laugh at it, because if I had come here 10 months ago as a visiting pastor, they

would have said, 'Nice sermon, pastor.' But now, 'Wow, Mr. president, what a wonderful sermon.' And I laugh at that, 'cause I'm not any different, [and it's the] same sermon I would have delivered 10 months ago."

Despite receiving such preferential treatment, Mark, like the other former pastors, claimed it did not alter his self-identity as a "pastor president." He said, "I see myself as a pastor, doing the presidency and administration," bluntly adding, "My identity is as a pastor."

George likewise believed that his new role as a conference president did not impact the way he viewed himself. However, in an anecdote from his years as a pastor, he revealed a distinct change of identity. As George recalled an NAD year-end meeting he had attended several years before, he described how uncomfortable he had felt because, as a pastor among so many administrators, he had not fit in. Then George related that after he became a conference president, he attended another NAD year-end meeting. He said that it was different the second time; he hadn't felt uncomfortable, and he'd had a sense of "belonging." When asked to explain the change of feeling, George couldn't state a reason but just said it was different now.

Bob reported a similar experience, claiming that there had been little change in his self-identity during the transition from conference pastor to boss. He maintained that one of the best compliments he had received from his employees in his new position was that he hadn't changed; he was still the same person as before. However, later in our conversation, Bob described how he was attempting to hold the pastors of his conference to a new level of accountability, thereby indicating a change from a pastor persona to one of boss or chief administrator. He explained, "I've had to go through a transitional

process to saying more forcefully to the guys that ‘You’re working for this organization, and you’re going to be held accountable.’”

Summary

All of the study participants reported a difference in the way they were treated by conference employees, church members, and peers after they assumed the title of president. Some detected increased deference, respect, and even adulation. They attributed such changes in the behavior of coworkers, lay members, and colleagues to a show of respect for the office of president and an acknowledgement of the authority vested in the position. The executives acknowledged that an increase in deference shown by constituents and peers does affect a conference president’s personal identity. While some recognized a change in their own self-perception, others declared that they had not experienced it personally but had observed such a shift in their peers.

Individuals who had worked as an executive secretary or departmental director experienced an identity adjustment in their new role, with the latter being the most poignant in describing how constituent behavior affected them. Those who had previously served as pastors claimed they had not experienced such a phenomenon; however, two of them shared anecdotes that revealed a change in the way they viewed themselves.

Impact on Family

Making the adjustments necessary in order to become a local conference president is a process that significantly impacts the entire family, according to study participants. Many described the experience as a “challenge,” while a few called it an “opportunity.”

Former Executive Secretaries

While several of the presidents who had formerly served as executive secretaries viewed their job transition as producing extra hardships for their families, one saw the process as beneficial. Chief among the negative effects reported was the amount of time that conference presidents must spend away from family due to business travel. And presidents who had to move in order to accept the new position cited relocation issues as difficult for their families. On the positive side, two presidents who regarded the transition as a benefit to their families related how their children expressed pride and a sense of awe for them in the new position.

Jim confided that, for his family, the amount of time he must spend on work-related travel is the worst aspect of his job as a conference president. He shared: “The one thing that I feel has been a real frustration for me and the family is my time away from home. I’m always gone.” Jim said that his wife had previous experience with a loved one being often away from home, because her father had served as a president in several local conferences and in one union conference while she was growing up. Nevertheless, according to Jim, it was a major adjustment for the two of them to deal with all of the time they must now spend apart.

Tom had the opposite experience, because his spouse was able to travel with him after he became a local conference president. However, he was quick to acknowledge how difficult it would be if she could not. He stated:

I think it would be much more difficult, if she were not willing to travel with me on weekends and we were separated more. I think that would be more of a challenge. But ever since I went into pastoral ministry 32 years ago, she has always been right by my side. [She] worked with me in the churches, and when I became a departmental director she worked right by my side. We have always worked together.

That has been something very special I thank the Lord for—that she has always been right there.

Sam revealed that the transition phase of his new job as president had a negative impact on him and his family. They faced many relocation issues when he accepted the chief administrator post in a conference located thousands of miles from where he had been serving. The major issues they faced were: (a) Sam’s wife leaving behind a well-established job and attempting to find meaningful new employment, (b) trying to sell their house during a recession, (c) adjusting to living many miles from their adult children, and (d) finding a new facility for Sam’s father, who needed an assisted-living arrangement.

On the positive side, both Jim and Tom spoke about how their children were proud of them in their new position. Jim shared how his daughter posted on Facebook, “Dad, I am so proud of you and what you’re doing.” Tom described his children’s pride as a sacred “awe” they had for what God had asked their dad to do:

When I became president, I noticed that both of them had this, almost a sense of awe, you know, that God had asked their dad to be a president of a conference. And it was almost something that they were afraid to talk about with me. As [if] . . . that’s between dad and God, you know?

Former Departmental Directors

Presidents who were formerly conference departmental directors likewise spoke about how their work transition affected their family members. Like those who had previously served as executive secretaries, some of these administrators and their families disliked the extra travel associated with the new position. Some said they had significantly less time with their spouse due to the president’s demanding itinerary; however, one study participant remarked that his new position actually created more

opportunities for his wife to accompany him on business trips. Another president, as reported in the Relationships theme of this study, mentioned the difficulty he and his spouse faced in leaving close friends and family when they relocated. In addition, one conference president shared how his job change precipitated a move that forced his wife to seek new employment, resulting in a loss of her seniority and vacation time. Finally, a couple of study participants revealed that their spouses suffered from anxiety over how to meet the expectations others might have of a conference president's wife.

Leroy, who relocated from another conference when he became a president, emphasized that his job change had a negative impact on his spouse, Susie. She found it very difficult to leave behind all of the friends she had cultivated during the 10 years they had lived at that location. In addition, just prior to their move they had begun to experience "empty nest syndrome," because all of their children were now gone from their home. Since this was the first move in many years that they had made without children, Susie found it especially challenging to establish new relationships. Leroy explained, "It was a very, very difficult transition ... moving to an empty house, and me being gone so much."

Jonah asserted that his job transition affected his wife, Mary, in the following two ways: (a) she, like the spouses of several other study participants, needed to secure new employment and consequently lost her accrued seniority as well as vacation benefits, and (b) she felt apprehensive about meeting people's expectations of a president's wife. According to Jonah, Mary's fears centered upon being "put in the spotlight." He shared: "She was fearful. She was like, 'I didn't mind being a pastor's wife, but being the president's wife is different because everyone's going to be looking at me.'"

Jack agreed with the other executives and their families who found the presidential travel schedule a real challenge, and then he added a new concern. He said he worried that decisions he would make as president—some of which could evoke criticism and recrimination from conference employees and constituents—would impact his wife, Judy. Jack learned through experience that church members who are upset sometimes direct their disapproval or concerns to an administrator’s spouse; consequently, he made it his policy to share difficult situations with Judy and to keep her informed of his decisions.

Don’s reaction to the extra travel that accompanied his new duties was atypical of the conference presidents in this study. While he acknowledged that a busy travel schedule often took him away from his spouse, Jane, he said they were able to deal with it successfully for two reasons: (a) since she worked full-time as a nurse, Jane wasn’t always at home wishing she had someone to be with, and (b) Don’s work-related travel provided opportunities for both of them to “see the world more often, together.”

Former Pastors

As with those who had previously worked as executive secretaries or departmental directors, the conference presidents who most recently had worked as pastors stated that their job transfer had affected their families. And in the same way that administrators in the other two study groups gave mixed reactions to the additional travel required by their new position, those who come to the job straight from a pastorate reported both positive and negative effects on their families. Some complained that their new travel schedules left them with much less time to spend with family members, while others viewed the work-related travel as a benefit, giving them more time to enjoy with

their spouse. This group of presidents also mentioned that the job transition had impacted their spouse in the following other ways: (a) the spouse grieved the loss of meaningful relationships within their previous church and found it difficult to develop new friendships, (b) the spouse had trouble finding a ministry niche at the conference level, and (c) the spouse felt apprehensive about fulfilling her new role as a conference president's wife.

Bob was among the presidents who said that extra travel requirements had made a negative impact on their family life. Claiming that he and his spouse rarely saw each other due to conflicting work schedules, Bob lamented, "We have become ships passing in the night." Mark and Joe, on the other hand, viewed their additional travel as a perk. Both commented on how they were able to spend more time with their spouses since becoming a conference president, even though in Mark's case, his spouse still worked full-time.

Joe described his move from a local church pastorate to a conference presidency as fraught with challenges, but one advantage of his new job is that he and his wife, Rose, get to spend more time together. Of all the former pastors who participated in this study, Joe was the only one whose conference had hired his spouse to work with him in a team ministry. This arrangement enabled Rose to accompany Joe on trips. He commented: "We are traveling a lot together, praying while we drive. So one of the bright sides . . . [is that] we are able to be together and in each other's presence a lot more right now than we were in the church level."

Despite this positive result of their move, Joe had two lingering concerns about how the transition would affect his spouse: (a) how Rose would find meaning in her new

role as a conference president's wife, and (b) how she would fulfill her need to have close and meaningful friends locally, which she lost in the process of relocation. Joe remarked: "I'm more concerned for Rose in that . . . we men tend to be a little more independent maybe. [It] takes a long time for a woman to gain that close friendship where you really know people." With regard to his wife finding a meaningful new ministry, Joe described how Rose had made a significant contribution in youth ministries when she served with him at the local church level. He said she grieved the loss of this work and wondered if she could find a similar ministry opportunity at the conference level, since both her education and skillset lent itself to working with youth. Voicing his concern with poignancy, Joe shared: "She is so good, not only in doing seminars, but in the work one-on-one, or one with two, and one with a family. And it's hard to do that, in this setting. So she said to me last night that this was her alabaster box for the Lord."

George confided that his spouse, Karen, suffered anxiety over fulfilling her new role as wife of the conference president. Her dread of the spotlight mirrored the apprehension that Jonah, a former departmental director, ascribed to his wife, Mary. George claimed that Karen became very nervous right after he was elected as president, because many people from their church were telling her how different her life would be as wife of the chief conference administrator. He recalled: "They told her, 'Oh, as president's wife, you are going to have to do this, and that.' And she said, 'Oh, no!' and got all nervous, I mean *real* nervous!" Karen attempted to consult with the wife of his predecessor but, according to George, that only made matters worse. When Karen asked the woman, "What do you do?" in an attempt to gain a better understanding of role expectations, the outgoing president's wife responded, "Oh don't worry, you'll be fine"

and that sort of thing. The vague answers Karen received “made her even more nervous,” George declared, “and I just kept trying to calm her down, [saying] ‘Don’t worry, don’t worry.’” He summarized the unpleasant experience by saying, “Yeah, it was just plain nerve-racking for her.”

Summary

The study participants described how their transition to president created both challenges and benefits for their families. Some of the stated difficulties were common to presidents from all three prior-job categories, while others were unique to one particular group. Individuals in all three groups reported the following challenges: (a) less time to spend with family due to the president’s travel commitments, and (b) relocation issues that affected a spouse’s employment and personal relationships. The more unique hardships included: (a) anxiety of a spouse who was unsure how to fulfill the new role of a conference president’s wife, as described by former departmental directors and pastors; and (b) loss of a spouse’s unique ministry that had flourished in a local church setting, as reported by a president who had moved to the conference level from a pastorate.

At least one president in each of the three groups considered travel to be a job benefit that provided the privilege and enjoyment of traveling more often with his or her spouse. In one case, a study participant said that his family life improved when he became a president because the employing conference hired his wife to work with him in a team-ministry arrangement. A positive result of the new position that was mentioned only by former executive secretaries was that their children expressed pride that their parent had been chosen as the chief administrator of a conference.

Job Experience

All of the study participants mentioned previous work experience that helped to equip them to lead a local conference as its president. Former executive secretaries and departmental directors viewed their work in prior conference-office positions as integral preparation for their new role, whereas former pastors cited leadership skills and knowledge they had gained while pastoring as essential. All participants believed that God was operative as well, priming them in His own unique way.

Former Executive Secretaries

Those who became a president after serving in other conference leadership positions, particularly as an executive officer, set a high value on their prior work experience. They claimed it gave them a more informed view of the job and its requirements. These administrators, without exception, recalled the learning curve they had faced when taking the job of executive secretary and couldn't imagine trying to lead a conference without the benefit of that experience.

In addition, some of the former executive secretaries shared how they had profited in their professional development by working in various positions that were church-related but outside of the conference office, as well as in jobs considered non-ecclesiastical or unrelated to church work. Finally, they spoke about a convergence of job experience, indicating a belief that God had groomed them for their new responsibilities.

After assuming the position of president, Sam was able to say, "There wasn't a lot that surprised me." He credited his 12 years of service as a ministerial (departmental) director and then an executive secretary with giving him an inside view of a conference president's duties. During Sam's tenure in those earlier roles, he had been exposed to a

number of challenging decisions and felt he had participated with his fellow administrators in leading the conference. He remarked:

There is just something about the experience of going through everything: confronting an issue; resolving an issue; taking a board through a process; hiring a person and firing a person; accepting a resignation; confronting someone who is lying, stealing, committing multiple adulteries. I mean, all of those things.

Tom likewise believed that his experience as a conference departmental director for a number of years before becoming an executive secretary had provided excellent preparation for his current duties as a conference president. He stated:

When you manage a summer camp staff, when you manage a Pathfinder and Adventurer leadership, it gives you an edge, I think, coming into administration, because you learn how to deal with all types of personalities. You learn how to make decisions, administrative decisions. You learn how to be decisive. And you learn how to be fair and equal with people.

Both Jennifer and Jim acknowledged that having a background in a number of different disciplines, including the medical field, had broadened their skill set. For example, Jim had worked for approximately 5 years as a nursing home administrator, and Jennifer had pursued an education in dietetics in addition to her ministerial degree. They said they had benefited professionally from working in a wide variety of prior leadership roles, including some that were non-ecclesiastical in nature. Their previous work experience included positions within a local church conference, as well as outside it. Both Jennifer and Jim felt their varied leadership experiences had converged in a unique way, aided by the Lord, to equip them for the tasks performed by conference presidents. And although both had pastored, worked in an educational institution, and held a conference departmental post before becoming an administrator, they agreed that the job of executive secretary was most helpful in preparing them to lead as a president.

Jennifer spoke of how her nine years as an executive secretary “helped shape and form” her understanding of leadership at a conference level and proved “very important” to her professional development. In addition, because her transition took place within the same conference where she had been serving as an executive officer, she acknowledged that she already “kind of had an idea of some of the things I needed to really concentrate on and really work on, and focus on, and we just dove in.”

Former Departmental Directors

Like their colleagues who had previously served as executive secretaries, the presidents who took office after working as departmental directors appreciated the preparatory value of their prior experience at the conference office and in other church-related positions. They spoke of having been privy to the process of making major decisions and having learned by observing the president in action. One recognized that working closely with two different chief executives during his tenure in the same departmental position had enhanced his understanding of how to execute the duties of president. All of the leaders in this study category echoed the sentiments of the former executive secretaries, who questioned the wisdom of attempting to perform the job of president without any prior conference-level administrative experience.

Jonah was candid in his comments on the value of his conference-office positions in preparing him to be the chief administrator. He remarked, “I’ve often thought, ‘There really isn’t anything that you can do to prepare you to be president, other than the time in working in the office.’” Jonah expressed concern for a friend who had transitioned directly from pastoring a local church to leading a conference. “I think of Randy going from the pastoral position to president,” he stated. “That is a big, big change. . . . To me,

going from pastor to ministerial was a nice stepping stone to president; it just gave me a chance to see how things were done.” He added that his experience of working as a departmental director in more than one conference, being able to “closely watch” a president “in action,” had aided him significantly in understanding how to do his new job.

In a similar way, Jack placed high value on his prior job experience within the denomination. He had worked as a conference youth director and as an academy principal. Jack recounted his youth ministry experience:

Having been in departmental work doing youth ministry also was one of the things that really helped me. Running summer camps—because you are dealing with the same thing. You are hiring all the time, your staff, you are working with kids, advertising, you’re doing this, you’re doing PR, you’re preaching out on the weekends. All that kind of thing. So being in youth ministry really helped.

Recalling his duties as principal of a secondary school, Jack shared how he had dealt with the heavy responsibility of making sure the academy was effective in executing its purpose and that he was maintaining a positive relationship with its constituents. He said that he could see a number of similarities between the jobs of principal and president and considered leading an academy to be good training for future conference administrators.

Don listed two specific ways in which working as a departmental director had increased his understanding of leadership at the conference level. First, as a ministerial director Don had served on the in-house administrative committee (ADCOM), which allowed him to work closely with the president and his fellow officers and to observe how personnel decisions were implemented. Second, his position at the conference office had expanded his overall understanding of the work of the church, which enlarged his perspective and further prepared him to lead at that level. Don explained:

When I was a pastor, I had my little world of my church. When I became a departmental director, all of sudden my church grew from 400 members to 4,000 members, and there wasn't just one church, there [were] . . . 45 churches. And so I saw a much bigger world, a much bigger picture.

Former Pastors

Unlike those who were elected as a conference president after working as an executive secretary or departmental director, the study participants who transitioned directly from a pastorate relied primarily on experience garnered during their years of leading local churches. One former pastor added that his service as a military chaplain had provided him with additional insight regarding leadership principles and praxis.

Pastors acquired their leadership experience while acting as a senior pastor in three different types of churches: (a) large congregations in both urban and suburban settings; (b) institutional churches, primarily on college or university campuses; and (c) multicultural congregations. Some of the former pastors described their lack of conference-office experience as a disadvantage, and their comments will be discussed in the theme Intentional or Desired Preparation. However, one pastor believed that his lack of experience within a conference office prior to becoming president worked to his advantage.

Joe is one example of a pastor who gained administrative training within a pastoral setting. He said he obtained his most valuable leadership experience as the senior pastor of a large institutional church. While there, he became knowledgeable about church governance and how to operate a larger organization. He also served as a member of the local conference executive committee, which gave him further insight into

conference administration. Joe claimed that if he had transitioned from a small or even a medium-sized church, he would have been greatly disadvantaged regarding how to relate to all of the challenges confronting him as a conference administrator. It would have made, in his words, “a huge world of difference.” Having served for less than a year as a conference president, he sees a number of similarities between his current leadership challenge and what he experienced as senior pastor in a large institutional church. Joe remarked:

So this stuff is not so intimidating, like I think it would have been if I had jumped into that earlier. The difference is, they are a little different waters and the boat’s a little different. So I’ve got a learning curve. But the people skills, the working through problems—those sorts of things are something you would have to do a lot in those settings I was in.

Another facet of Joe’s preparation was growing up in a home where his father held various significant roles in the church: senior pastor, revivalist, and union departmental director. Joe said that he learned a great deal from his father, whose dynamic ministry had a direct bearing on his eventual leadership acumen. He also recognized that God was at work in his heart, adding, “I was being trained in ways before I ever knew I was being trained.”

Mark likewise acknowledged God’s unique work in his life, which has prepared him to lead through every new challenge. But unlike Joe, Mark prized his experience in both large suburban and small rural churches as the training ground for his future conference leadership. Referring to his entire pastoral experience, he stated, “I can assure you unequivocally, I could never do what I am doing now if it wasn’t for those 25 to 26 years in the trenches as a pastor.”

Mark recalled how, from the time he began pastoring a small church in a remote little Midwestern town, he was repeatedly confronted with sordid, complicated issues within his congregation that actually made the headlines of their local newspaper. He said, “Within the first 6 months, we had attempted rape, attempted suicide, . . . incest, the first attempted armed robbery in 25 years in town”—and the offenders all came from his little church! Mark remembered his conversations with God; he asked why He had placed him there and how he would survive all the challenges. But he said that God got him through it all and prepared him for the next set of trials at his next church district. Mark recalled that in his next assignment he was hit with “all kinds of stuff”; however, God pulled him through the overwhelming challenges, just as he had in his first district. So Mark concluded:

Every step of the way, God is preparing you for what is coming next. For only He sees what is coming down the line. And I see a parallel with Joseph. Joseph had no clue what was coming next. He is happy, with his coat on, and he is thrown in the pit. Sold into slavery. And the next thing you know, he’s in prison, etc. But God had a plan for his life all along. All I can say, Dave, is I’ve pastored seven different churches, and I’ve looked back. Every place I’ve been, God has prepared me for the next assignment. I never knew what that assignment was at all. So I got to the point where I stopped arguing with God, “Why am I going through this?” And I just accepted the fact: Because, Mark, God is shaping and molding you for whatever He has next in your life. Your ministry, your life, your leadership, whatever it might be. God is just preparing you.

George was unique among the presidents who had most recently served as pastors in that he referred to military service in addition to pastoral work as having contributed significantly to his leadership preparation. In fact, George alleged that his background as an Air Force chaplain had given him the greater understanding of the praxis of administration. Regarding his military experience, he stated emphatically: “I learned leadership from the Air Force. Yeah. Because I don’t think we teach leadership in our

church. We talk about it. We give a class at the seminary on how to run a board meeting. I don't think we teach true leadership. I've said that for years."

While his Air Force training provided an excellent understanding of administration, George acknowledged that his years of successfully pastoring diverse congregations are what gave him confidence to lead at the conference level. He described the church where he pastored just before becoming president as a microcosm of the entire conference, exhibiting a mixture of many different cultures. Leading in such a diverse multicultural setting, according to George, taught him to think outside of his own culture and upbringing, which he believes is a good thing. He remarked: "The pastorate has expanded me. So I see the conference work doing that. I don't see anything that is really surprising me. It's all stuff I've experienced before."

In direct contrast to the study participants who could not imagine becoming a president without first serving at the conference level, George considered his lack of conference-office experience to be an advantage. He deemed it a benefit because, as he said: "People don't have a bunch of preconceived ideas about me, nor do I have, from an administrative point of view, preconceived ideas about them. I'm still looking at people the way I did as a pastor." However, George did concede that it probably worked for him because he had spent most of his ministerial career in the conference where he was elected, and therefore he already knew the constituents and salient issues. He admitted that a lack of conference-level leadership experience would be a disadvantage if a candidate were elected to be president in a different conference, forced to deal with a new and unfamiliar setting.

Summary

All of the study participants who had worked as an executive secretary or departmental director asserted that participating in conference-level administration prior to becoming president provided knowledge they considered extremely helpful in their new position. Recalling the huge learning curve they had encountered upon entering conference administration, they stressed the value of observing another president perform his role. In addition, these executives listed the following previous job experiences as valuable preparation for their current post: (a) church-related positions, such as pastor and/or academy principal, and (b) healthcare training and/or work experience.

In contrast to the individuals elected president after working as an executive secretary or departmental director, one group of study participants developed their primary understanding of the presidential responsibilities not through conference administration, but during years of pastoral leadership experience. They described the process of acquiring people skills and learning leadership principles as they dealt with a wide variety of personalities, church types, and congregational issues. In addition, one former pastor claimed that he earned his most valuable leadership training while serving as a military chaplain. Last but not least, this group believed that God had been at work in their lives, preparing them in His own special way to eventually carry the burdens of a conference president.

Intentional or Desired Preparation

Few of the study participants reported making any intentional preparation for becoming a local conference president. One former executive secretary bluntly declared, “No one ever plans to be president.” This informal statement appears to reflect an

accepted rule among numerous leaders within Seventh-day Adventist church work: that, basically, it is inappropriate to aspire to become a conference president and, therefore, leaders should not intentionally prepare for the job.

Perhaps as a result of this unwritten rule, the majority of the presidents who participated in this study said they wished they'd had more leadership preparation before serving as a local conference president. Several mentioned a significant "learning curve" and identified specific areas in which they had felt deficient as they tackled their new duties. For example, one administrator who had been an executive secretary described how his insufficient understanding of key financial concepts created a very difficult transition period. Among the presidents who had previously served as departmental directors, several acknowledged that they had already aspired to one day serve as a conference president and, therefore, had deliberately sought advance preparation. But even within this group, some declared that the Seventh-day Adventist Church should do more to train their future conference leaders.

Former Executive Secretaries

Former executive secretaries shared specific methods they utilized for enriching their knowledge of leadership concepts and praxis. They also regretted that they had not obtained more training in organizational management prior to being asked to serve as a president.

For Tom, a lack of technical business skills and an inadequate understanding of corporate financial management made it difficult for him to execute all of his new duties as a local conference president. He said, "If there were two things I wish I could have done before becoming president, one would have been to take some business courses . . .

[and] the other thing . . . [would have been to learn] how to prioritize the business of the conference.” Tom shared how, at the outset of his term as president, he struggled to understand accounting reports that were vital prerequisites to participating in a budget process and having an overall grasp of the conference finances. Comparing the unfamiliar terms to a different language, he described almost all of the financial reports as “Chinese” to him. Tom noted that taking some summer classes in accounting and other business subjects would have greatly benefited him.

Tom expressed his initial need to learn “how to prioritize the business of a conference” and discussed the types of information a new president might ideally receive during an orientation process. Stating that he felt there would be value in giving “rookie” administrators an opportunity to hear from seasoned conference presidents, he added: “And it would be interesting to hear from presidents who have spent years in conference administration . . . how different people see different priorities in conference leadership.”

Jennifer recounted that she had strengthened her leadership knowledge by attending leadership workshops and networking with her peers. She said that for a few years she attended an annual workshop that was tailor-made for individuals who wanted to enrich their administrative expertise. They had reminded her of a significant leadership truism: “Your management skills got you to where you are now, but you will need more than that to get you into the future. You now need to be a leader.” In addition, Jennifer said she had benefitted from developing a network of friends and peers who were committed to administrative excellence. She placed high value on interacting with other individuals who were motivated not only to learn about leadership, but also to seek feedback and counsel in order to improve.

Former Departmental Directors

Unlike their colleagues who had been executive secretaries, some of the former departmental directors intentionally prepared and positioned themselves to be eligible for the job of a local conference president. Transparent in sharing their early career aspirations, they told how they had prepared themselves for their current position by studying management concepts. Some wished the Seventh-day Adventist organization would be more intentional in preparing presidential candidates for leadership at the local conference level.

Jonah was frank in articulating his prior intention to become a chief administrator. He said, “I have always been one who—and I hope that it wasn’t part of a carnal nature—always wanted to take calls that . . . in a sense were going up the ladder, to bigger responsibilities.” His musing that such determination could result from a “carnal” desire illustrates a perceived norm within Adventism that links any aspiration to top leadership positions with selfish ambition. Jonah confessed, “And to me it’s always been a little bit awkward, because some have thought that if you have the desire, that it’s wrong.”

As reported in the Spirituality theme, Jonah described how years ago he had adopted the biblical prayer of Jabez, asking God to expand his territory. In his heart he had wished he could someday have the privilege of being a president with a conference-size responsibility, making more of a difference in the work of God than he believed he could as a district pastor.

Jonah identified several individuals who had fueled his aspirations to become a conference president by helping to cast that vision in his heart. For example, early in his ministry as a young pastor, he distinctly remembers an elderly female church member

saying to him, “Someday you are going to be a conference president.” And then, while serving in his first post as a conference departmental director, Jonah’s president at the time gave his name to a presidential search committee in a neighboring conference. Although he was subsequently interviewed for the vacant position, he was not invited to fill it. As time went by, other conferences seeking a president had also considered him; however, Jonah found this troubling rather than encouraging. The experience of being repeatedly “passed over” caused him to wonder if his aspiration would ever be realized.

Not wanting to deny what he considered a God-given call to administrative leadership, Jonah took steps to purposely position himself to be more attractive to presidential search committees. He did this by moving from a local church, where he was serving as a pastor, back to a conference departmental role. He said: “I thought, ‘There is no way I’m going to be jumping from pastor to president.’ And so, to me, I knew I needed to get back into the office if that was going to happen.”

Leroy is another example of a conference leader who had intentionally prepared himself to one day be a president. As reported in the Spirituality theme, he had sensed God’s call to become a conference administrator and could not shake the conviction, even after praying to be released from it. So, in submission to his perception of divine will, Leroy was deliberate about seeking leadership training. He equipped himself with administrative skills by: (a) closely observing the two conference presidents he worked under as a departmental director, (b) earning a doctor of ministry degree, and (c) reading about leadership concepts. In reference to his self-imposed education, he said: “I don’t know how much more you can do. I mean, I read a lot, I observed a lot. I tried to do

whatever I was doing—whatever I was responsible to do, I tried to do it—to the best of my ability.”

And yet, according to Leroy, his training wasn’t adequate. He remarked, “Looking back, I certainly didn’t do enough.”

While analyzing the deficiencies of his preparation, Leroy candidly stated a belief that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination could and should do more to train individuals who show aptitude for church administration. He said, “I wish there’d been more intentionality in developing people as leaders for future responsibilities.”

Former Pastors

The conference presidents whose prior job had been in a church pastorate joined their colleagues in citing various sources of enrichment that had provided them with leadership knowledge and praxis. However, like the study participants who had been executive secretaries, the former pastors said they had not intentionally trained to be a conference president. Consequently, they felt ill-prepared for certain responsibilities that are inherent in conference administration and experienced a huge learning curve at their new position. They also pointed out a need for someone to assist new presidents in understanding certain aspects of conference leadership responsibilities.

Early in his career as a pastor, Mark had selected leadership as one of the disciplines he wanted to study further in order to become more effective in his ministry. He remarked, “I wanted to grow in my understanding of leadership, taking it to new level.” Therefore, a number of years ago, Mark signed up for John C. Maxwell’s Tape of Month Club and eventually listened to hundreds of Maxwell’s leadership lectures, read his books, and attended many of his seminars. “I went through college and seminary,”

said Mark. “There were no specific classes on leadership, . . . the nuts and bolts of it. So I owe a lot of just pure leadership to Maxwell.”

And yet even after so much exposure to Maxwell’s leadership theory and praxis, Mark still felt challenged when he became the conference chief executive. He admitted: “I know how to pastor. I’ve got a track record for that. I have no track record for being a president.” Mark shared an extensive account of his initial experience in his new position, which exposed his apprehension:

I had never done anything within the context of a conference-office environment, so no departmental staff, no officer’s stuff. I had never even sat on a conference executive committee. . . . So all of a sudden, now, I find myself looking at the faces of a conference executive committee and I’ve, I’ve never had a front-row seat to see how this is done. So if I had come from a conference where I had served as a department secretary or secretary treasurer, I would have at least had the context of watching and observing somebody else doing it. So you know how to put together an agenda. You know their chairing style. You can watch and observe how they deal with issues that come up. I had none of that. I mean, I literally came in and, the next thing I know, within four weeks of saying yes, I’m chairing basically the first executive committee with people I don’t even know. And had never done it before. So there was, for me, Dave, there was a huge, huge learning curve.

Joe, whose experience was typical of those who had transitioned from a pastor to president, said that he felt confident executing some of his new duties but sensed that he was lacking in the skills required for others. While pastoring large institutional churches, Joe had exercised many leadership skills, such as vision casting, communicating, and spiritual formation; but in his new role, he felt unprepared to deal with certain management issues. While describing one such issue, Joe expressed obvious concern as he asked: “What’s the right way to do that? Because it gets complicated!”

As he shared, Joe articulated three specific areas of administrative management in which he judged himself deficient: (a) personnel, (b) policies, and (c) financial management. First, he felt he needed to better understand how to manage employees

(especially pastors transferring in or relocating out of the conference) and retirement issues. Second, Joe desired a fuller knowledge and better understanding of how to apply policies at the conference level. Third, he sought knowledge of how to guide a conference through difficult financial times. The problem for Joe wasn't so much of a lack of understanding financial reports, but rather how to deal with limited resources and its impact on hiring and/or reducing personnel.

Concluding that it would have been very helpful to counsel with someone who had experience in presidential leadership of a conference, Joe lamented that he did not know a single seasoned veteran who could serve as a resource. Referring particularly to managing personnel, he stated: "It would help me to know how others have done that. . . . I'm lacking in knowledge from anyone I'm close to on how to avoid the pitfalls. I know what they are in the churches, but the conference is different."

Summary

Participants in all three of the study categories spoke of strategies they had utilized to improve their leadership competence prior to serving as a conference president. Most were motivated simply by a desire to increase their knowledge and praxis in order to be more effective in the position they held at the time. Only the former conference departmental directors indicated that a desire to eventually serve as president had prompted them to improve their leadership and management skills. They spoke about purposely accepting calls to conference-office leadership roles in order to position themselves favorably for the chief administrator's job. The other two groups claimed they had not been intentional in preparing themselves to become a president.

Some of the executives described a steep learning curve in their transition to the job of conference president. Former pastors were the most explicit in revealing perceived deficiencies in their understanding of certain management practices that are necessary to lead effectively as president.

A former departmental director wished for more intentional leader development from other levels of the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization. A former pastor likewise indicated a desire to have as a resource someone with experience in conference administration, preferably a president, who could guide him through unfamiliar tasks and decisions related to leading and managing a conference.

Mentors

Participants shared how various individuals gave them professional assistance and encouragement, both before and during their transition to the job of a local conference president. This support system consisted primarily of one or more of the following: mentors, peers, friends, consultants, and conference or union administrators. Former executive secretaries and departmental directors were the two groups who spoke about mentors being a part of their preparation prior to becoming a president. Former pastors and departmental directors talked about support they received in their new position from seasoned administrators, their own union presidents' council, and the annual NAD gatherings for conference presidents: specifically, the Local Conference Presidents' Retreat and/or the Black Caucus. Some of them also reflected upon a deficiency in the mentorship of leaders within the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization.

Former Executive Secretaries

Former executive secretaries related how they had received support from mentors, professional consultants, executive coaches, and peers regarding leader development and knowledge of how to execute the role of president. Some described how they had been mentored by their former president in their previous job. Others credited peers and consultants in providing them with insight on how to better execute their new duties. One president in this study category shared how the church organization could be more intentional in using mentors to create a web of support for new conference administrators.

Tom related how his former conference president, with whom he had worked closely prior to being elected to the presidency, had mentored him. He spoke of the many hours his former president spent sharing with him what it was like to be the chief administrator. Tom said: “He would come sit in my office and tell me about challenges that he had as president. So I felt like it was almost living part of it with him.” He went on to say that it was a valuable learning experience and he had felt mentored by this man, who had imparted to him the knowledge of what it meant to be an administrator.

Tom also gained support from peers soon after being elected to the presidency. He reached out to a couple of close friends who were serving elsewhere as conference presidents, seeking counsel from them on how to execute the duties of his new position. He said the advice they provided was invaluable; one even flew out and spent the entire day with him, talking him through various aspects of the job from his perspective.

Jim likewise credited his former conference president as being an excellent mentor prior to his own election, claiming that during the three years they worked together, he learned more from him how to execute the position than from anyone else.

According to Jim, his mentor was intentional and transparent, taking him into his confidence, explaining his reasons for certain decisions he made and providing a type of laboratory around how to handle various issues one might face as president. He recalled, “[For] every tough situation, he would evaluate all of the options with me and even give me an opportunity, at times, to say which one of these three would you choose, Jim?”

Jim also talked about the support he received early on in his new role (and continues to sense) from the quarterly union presidents’ council. Some of the supportive benefits he mentioned included: (a) a mutual sharing of challenges each president is facing, (b) an opportunity to gain counsel from other leaders, and (c) a chance to draw strength from each other’s fellowship.

Jennifer found professional leadership consultants and fellow colleagues to be a useful resource for her administrative development. She said the consultants gave her insights into not just leadership but *spiritual leadership*, aiding her in better understanding how she could facilitate a Christ-centered culture within her conference. Jennifer also used trusted friends, office associates, and pastors from some of the conference’s larger churches as a “sounding board” for certain issues she confronted early on in her new job.

Sam reported that while serving in his previous conference, prior to his election as a president, individuals on two separate levels of conference leadership had impacted his administrative development. First, he related that two different ministerial vice presidents had introduced him to the internal work of a conference office. Second, the conference president had become his quasi-mentor, giving Sam an opportunity to explore the job-

specific challenges of a president and providing him with valuable insights for future applications.

In his previous position as a conference executive secretary, Sam had also benefited from hiring an executive coach, a form of support not mentioned by either of the other presidents in this category. This trained professional had provided more emotional support than administrative instruction, according to Sam, but he described the time they spent together as very helpful and appreciated. He related how he would telephone his coach on a monthly basis and process with him whatever he was dealing with at the time. He stated:

Whatever it is, I can talk to him. . . . And I lead the conversation, and he, as a coach . . . helps me process and gives me tools, or even steps. He doesn't do it for me; I develop steps on how to move through an issue, knowing that during the next phone call he is going to say, "So hey, how did that go?" and then process that. That was immensely helpful.

Sam also shared what he observed as a deficiency in leader development and support. He suggested that at some level of church organization, whether it is at the union or the division, an intentional mentorship program should be created for new presidents. Sam claimed that there are many retired conference presidents who, if willing, could serve as mentors to new presidents. He related how helpful it would have been when he first began as a president, to professionally interface with someone occasionally. Reflecting upon his experience, Sam noted, "I would have thought that there would be a more intentional process—an hour-a-month phone call, or a nose-to-nose conversation—where (union leadership) and I would talk about whatever I wanted to talk about." He added that in order to be successful, this process would need to be self-selective so that each new administrator could decide if he or she wanted to participate.

Former Departmental Directors

Former departmental directors also mentioned mentors who had enhanced their professional development prior to becoming a chief administrator. And like the former executive secretaries, they considered their former conference presidents—with whom they had worked while serving in a previous leadership role—as among their valued advisors. In addition, some of the former departmental directors spoke about peers and administrators, other than presidents, who assisted them in their new position. Occasionally they developed a support network at certain gatherings of local conference presidents facilitated by the union or division. One of the administrators within this study category shared a recommendation for how the Seventh-day Adventist Church could provide better professional development and support to its conference presidents.

Leroy and Jonah listed the conference presidents with whom they had worked while serving as a departmental director as being among their mentors. They both attested to the fact that they learned a great deal about being president from these leaders. Jonah, who had worked with three different presidents, did not claim all as mentors but noted that he had learned a lot from them about what to do and what not to do as president. He labeled one of his former bosses as arbitrary and autocratic but described the other as much the opposite—an administrator who cast a vision and could lead by consensus with an easygoing, personable style. The experience of working with such contrasting individuals left a huge impression on Jonah about how to execute the role of president.

Don felt mentored by multiple administrators, as had Leroy and Jonah; however, in Don's case one mentor had been his former conference president but the other was an administrative vice president in the conference where he moved after being elected. The

vice president, who had worked in the conference for a number of years, took time to help Don understand the history and culture of his new conference. As the two worked closely together, this colleague also became a source of valuable counsel and a trusted confidant. Don confessed, “I couldn’t imagine coming on board without him.”

Don’s other mentor, his former local conference president, is someone he has known for more than 12 years. He said that they have an “awesome” mentor-mentee relationship and expressed appreciation for the time and effort this leader put into developing him to someday becoming a president. In fact, because this man had transferred to union-level administration, he was the person who invited Don to become a conference president. At that time, he assured Don, “You know, if you need, I’ll be there for you as somebody to consult with, as mentor.” And because he occasionally takes him up on his offer, Don still feels supported by him. He related: “I call him from time to time and say, ‘Hey, Doug, I need somebody to talk to. Can you?’ And so I will share with him, and sometimes he will share advice. And sometimes we just talk through it. Sometimes I just need somebody to listen.”

Both Jack and Jonah reflected upon the support they have received, since becoming a conference president, from their new peers. They spoke of two regularly scheduled gatherings for local conference presidents: (a) a quarterly union presidents’ council, and (b) the annual NAD presidents’ retreat. Jack affirmed the importance of such gatherings, especially the annual retreat for local conference presidents. He recounted a recent conversation he had there:

I had a president tell me, “I’m going through the worst time.” It was just last week. “I’m going through the worst time that I’ve ever had in ministry, on a personal level or on a professional level as president. I’m going through the absolutely worst thing ever. And I’m having the hardest time. I’m just struggling.” Now he can say that to

me, but he can't say that to one of his pastors. He can't say that, probably, to the other officers.

Jonah confirmed that attending the annual retreat provided an opportunity to “shop talk,” seek counsel and fellowship with other conference administrators.

Reiterating its supportive value, he declared, “It has probably been one of the most beneficial things in my time as president.”

Having sensed a deficiency in the current practice of leader development within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, Jonah joined one of the former executive secretaries in suggesting that mentors could be selected from the ranks of experienced and successful retired conference presidents in order to create an intentional mentorship program for new presidents.

Former Pastors

In contrast to participants from the other two study categories, a majority of the administrators who had served as a pastor before becoming a conference president had not experienced a significant mentor relationship before assuming their current post. Most of them indicated an absence of potential mentors to assist them early in their careers and said they developed a professional support network only after their election as president. Yet, this group of administrators was most explicit in describing how they would personally benefit from mentors in their current position.

In the same way that they valued advice from mentors, former pastors also voiced appreciation for the guidance they received from other conference presidents, their new peers. Like the former executive secretaries and departmental directors, presidents who had transitioned from a pastorate reported obtaining helpful leadership guidance from the

following sources: (a) their local union presidents' council, (b) the NAD's annual presidents' retreat, and (c) the NAD Black Caucus.

Bob was the only former pastor in this study who mentioned having a mentor prior to his election to the conference presidency. He talked about two leaders at different levels of the church organization who had taken an interest in him through the years. Although they had differed widely in their approach to administration, both became his counselors and confidants, mentoring him toward a better understanding of leadership execution. In addition, he related how executives from the NAD Black Caucus, in an effort to groom future administrators, had invited promising young pastors to attend their meetings. Reflecting upon the value of being with seasoned administrators, Bob said he considered it a benefit "just to be in the presence of great men and leaders in the church—and they appeared to be uninhibited in terms of just talking about matters—and to be able to glean from that. As a matter of fact, that becomes a source of information that has benefited me."

Mark likewise mentioned two church leaders who provided him with helpful professional guidance and support. In Mark's case, however, these individuals became his mentors *after* he was elected to the presidency. The first to offer valuable counsel was the union president who facilitated Mark's call to his new position. He described this union president as a source of wisdom, who had helped him better understand not only the role of president, but also some of the current challenges and opportunities within his new conference. Mark identified as his second mentor the current conference vice president, who had spent decades working in that conference and also had broad experience serving on the denomination's governance committees at different levels. The

vice president became his resident historian and expert on the organization's culture, as well as his confidant and friend. Acknowledging the impact this experienced colleague and mentor had upon his administrative development, Mark declared:

Paul could have gone to any level in this denomination. Any level. . . . I'm forever indebted to Paul for the way that he helped shape, mold, and lead me into being who I am today. . . . He was able to help guide me through some real landmines. He understood the culture; he understood the history. He just got it.

Both Joe and George stated that they had not experienced any type of mentor-mentee relationship prior to being elected a conference president. However, Joe said that his union president took him under his wing soon after he assumed his new duties. This was a great relief to Joe, who felt deficient in various aspects of presidential leadership and believed he needed a mentor. Although he was well-acquainted with leading a local church, he realized that managing a conference was different in many ways. Joe concluded, "What I'm lacking in it is any knowledge from anyone I'm close to (or a mentor) on the pitfalls of administrating at the conference level."

Joe also mentioned the support value of the union presidents' council, which gave him the ability to connect with other conference leaders and gain their counsel on various issues. Mark agreed, adding that both his union's presidents' council and the annual NAD presidents' retreat provided opportunities to connect with colleagues and peers and to draw strength from each other. He described the wealth of knowledge and experience among his colleagues at the presidents' council as invaluable in enhancing his understanding of how to execute his new duties. Regarding the high points of his experience at the meeting, Mark summarized: "just watching, observing, listening to the discussions. Seeing how they handled different issues. Asking specific questions. Invaluable. Absolutely invaluable. And that helped with the transition." Of the first few

retreats he attended, Mark recalled: “I was like a sponge. I would talk to my colleagues and just ask, ‘How do you deal with this?’ ‘How do you deal with that?’” He said that the atmosphere of open communication is what made these two events so meaningful to him in his professional administrative development. “Unless you are president, nobody else really understands what you are going through,” he observed.

Summary

The study participants agreed that mentors play a vital role in preparing and supporting a new conference president. Their support system consisted primarily of one or more of the following: mentors, peers, family, friends, consultants, and conference or union administrators. Former executive secretaries and departmental directors spoke about mentors being an important part of their preparation prior to becoming a president. However, former pastors reported a lack of mentors in their professional development and did not develop a support network until after being elected a conference president. Former pastors and departmental directors mentioned the value of obtaining insight and advice from seasoned church administrators during meetings such as the union presidents’ council and the annual NAD gatherings for conference presidents: specifically, the presidents’ retreat and/or the Black Caucus.

Finally, participants in all three groups noted a deficiency in the leader development program for conference presidents within the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization. Both former executive secretaries and departmental directors recommended a more formal mentoring system for new presidents, and former pastors provided explicit descriptions of how they would personally benefit from having a mentor in their current position.

Summary

In this chapter I presented the results of the interviews with the 12 local conference presidents. Eight themes surfaced from the exploration. Leaders experienced the transition as overwhelming, challenging their spirituality, involving new constellations of relationships, and a shifting of personal identity. They also noted its impact on their family. Other themes dealt with the leaders' prior job experience, intentional leadership preparation, and mentors. In Chapter, I present the summary, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Successful organizations are intentional about leadership development and create opportunities for their future leaders to obtain the necessary training to function effectively in new leadership roles (Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004). Leader development is a process whereby individuals learn skills (Dragoni, Tesluk, Russell, & Oh, 2009; McCauley, Kanago, & Lafferty 2010) and develop the character necessary to lead (Clinton, 2012; Moxley, 2000; North, 2007). Effective leader development strategies often use the way leaders learn from experience (McCall, 2010; Yip & Wilson, 2010). The transformative learning theory, incorporating the value of reflection, has been an effective tool in assisting leaders as they learn from their work experience (Closs & Antonello, 2011).

Within the North American Division (NAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist church local conferences provide support and oversight for a given region of churches and schools. Each conference has an executive officer team and committee, of which the president is the primary leader. Conferences are vested by their constituents to manage various assets, and to support the mission of the organization.

Being the leader of a local conference within the Adventist organization equates to a senior executive leadership position (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2010).

Such a role is fraught with its own unique set of responsibilities that are greater and more complex than those of lesser-tiered positions (Olmstead, 2000; Zaccaro, 2001). Several authors claim that executives operate in extreme environments and are expected to meet certain performance and task challenges set by their organization and/or, in some cases, by themselves as well (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009; Munyon, Summers, Buckley, Ranft, & Ferris, 2010). First-time local conference presidents in the NAD occupy their new roles without any leadership-equipping programs mandated by administrative levels of the organization. How do they manage the transition? Is it possible for them to make the transition based on past experiences? Can they readily learn on the job? While research has addressed pastors and leadership training, no research to date has explored the experience of first-time presidents in positions for which intentional leadership development does not exist. Sparkman (2012) researched the “lessons of experience” as he explored the leadership development experiences of church executives within one African-American denomination in the United States.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership preparation for, and transition experience of, first-time local conference presidents in the NAD. A qualitative research design was chosen because, as Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) point out, the explorative and probing nature of a qualitative study provides a better understanding “of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (p. 7).

Twelve first-time conference presidents, meaning none had ever served as a president in another field, were interviewed from eight of the nine union conferences

within the NAD (union conferences are governing bodies within the organization that support and provide oversight for the 59 local conferences). Local presidents normally transition from one of three different conference roles: pastor, department director and executive officer. For this study, four presidents from each category were interviewed, exploring their transitional experience from one of the previous three roles. Race and gender diversity were as follows: 10 were Caucasian, one was Black, and one was non-Caucasian with all the participants being male except for one female who is the only female conference president in the NAD. The study participants represented a cross-section of experience in terms of year(s) in office: four had 1 year or less, five had 2 to 3 years, two had 5 to 6 years, and one had more than 8 years. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study. All participants gave permission to use their experience to enrich the understanding of transitions.

Conceptual Framework

Researchers have identified various issues which confront individuals who change roles in the work place. This study draws upon certain studies that highlight what could be considered challenges and adjustments for leaders transitioning to a new position—the experience itself, and the level of preparation he or she had prior to filling the leadership role.

Transitions

Studies indicate career transitions have numerous phases or stages (Bridges 2009, p. 5; Elsnor & Ferrands, p. 44). According to Bridges (2009), the inability of both the individual and the employing organization to recognize the various phases of the

transition process is a significant reason for failure in the process (p. 8). As practitioners move to administrative positions there is a “disengagement from the past work-role,” from its “comfort and confidence,” to experiencing discomfort and uncertainty of a new, unknown role” (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Niessen, Binnewies, & Rank, 2010). Brown-Ferrigno (2003) saw the need for a role-identity transformation and the relinquishing one’s self-concept. Ashforth (2001) posits that role transitions are associated with some degree of a “cognitive change of gears,” and that the larger transitions create more feelings of change for the participant than the smaller transitions (p. 51).

Socialization and Identity

Social skills and knowledge are necessary traits for an individual to possess in order to assume an organizational role (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). Numerous theories attempt to describe dynamics experienced by individuals transitioning to a new role in an organization and how such affects one’s self-concept. The social identity theory (SIT) shows how an individual perceives personal identity by identifying with a particular social group or role (Ashforth, 2001; Tajfel, 1982). In his definition of SIT Ashforth’s (2001) suggests that through a process of comparing roles and determining the salient points of a certain category or categories, individuals will develop an identity—doctors are keener about their roles because of how they think patients view doctors (p. 24). People begin to see themselves in terms of how they believe others see them (Ashforth, 2001, p. 26; Burke, 1991; Stryker, 1980). Tricia Browne-Ferrigno (2003) posits three points relating to role transitions: (a) understanding them, (b) early socialization with them, and (c) “role-identity transformation.” Practitioners contemplating moving to an administrative role were enriched in their understanding of

the more global position by spending time interfacing and observing the leader executing the position, gaining further insight into how such a locus has a sense of loneliness and isolation (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). An adjustment to self-identity is necessary for job-execution in a new role (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003) and leader development (Day & Harrison, 2007).

Preparation

Being the leader of a local conference equates to a senior executive leadership position (*GC Working Policy*, 2012-2013). Such a role is fraught with its own unique set of responsibilities, greater and more complex than those of lesser-tiered positions (Olmstead, 2000, p. 24; Zaccaro, 2001, p. 9). Munyon et al. (2010) and Finkelstein et al. (2005) claim “executives function in extreme environments, under high levels of almost every work characteristic” and engage in “task” and “performance challenges” respectively. Numerous organizations are knowledgeable about the complexity of senior leadership and are intentional about developing their leaders (Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004, p. 224). Leader development is a process where individuals learn the skills and abilities necessary to be effective in various “leadership positions” (Dragoni, 2009; McCauley et al., 2010, p. 2).

Local conference presidents in the Seventh-day Adventist church organization are expected to lead as shepherds committed to serving the spiritual needs of their constituents. (Church Manual, 2010, p. 32). Therefore, intentionally aiding in the expansion of a spiritual leader’s acumen will also include providing a platform for spiritual formation; in this particular context it would refer to “the transformation process whereby a leader’s inner character is developed.” (Clinton, 2012, p. 218). Effective

leader development strategies will incorporate leveraging how leaders learn from experience (McCall, 2004, p. 127; Yip & Wilson, 2010, p. 63). The transformative learning theory, incorporating the value of reflection, has been an effective tool in assisting leaders to learn from their work experience (Closs & Antonello, 2011).

Findings

Twelve first-time conference presidents were interviewed from eight of the nine unions within the NAD. There was some gender and racial diversity with 11 men and one woman, and of those, 10 were Caucasian, one Black, and one non-Caucasian. The participants transitioned from one of three job roles: pastor, department director, and executive officer; the findings presented here acknowledge these three categories.

This section highlights the key findings about the participants' transition experience into the new role of conference president and their sense of preparation for it. In answer to the two research questions it presents eight salient themes of their transition and preparation experience: (a) a sense of being overwhelmed, (b) spirituality, (c) the value of relationships, (d) an identity adjustment, (e) the impact upon family, (f) job experience, (g) intentional or desired preparation, and (h) mentors or support.

Research Question #1

How do local conference presidents describe their transition into a conference president?

Overwhelmed

Participants from all three categories acknowledged feeling a sense of being overwhelmed as they began their work as president. Former executive secretaries

attributed their sense of being overwhelmed to: (a) the new intensity of the work, (b) no longer being able to “punt” difficult issues, and (c) the new level of responsibility. There was an exception with one of the former executive secretaries in that she did not feel the same level of being overwhelmed as the others, crediting the fact that she was familiar with the conference, having worked in it for over 20 years. She was quick to qualify such an absence of being overwhelmed confessing that if she had to begin in an unfamiliar place she would be challenged and her comments regarding such a situation were much like what the others had shared about their apprehension.

Former departmental directors spoke about their sense of being overwhelmed due to the added responsibilities and pressures, particularly chairing the conference executive committee and tasked with leading and managing an entire conference. One felt so overcome by the thought of being the chief administrator that he mused to himself whether he could actually do the job and even lost sleep over it. This group used various metaphors to describe their current situation which included: drinking from a fire hydrant, dealing with answers from backseat drivers, and sinking or swimming.

Former pastors attributed their sense of being overwhelmed to a number of the same reasons given by participants from the other two categories, but added others not mentioned by them. It was the sense of feeling ill-equipped to do the job of president which created a lack of confidence in some of them. This particular phenomenon is discussed further in the theme *Intentional or Desired Preparation*, causing one to describe his experience as a baptism of fire facing so many unknowns. Any degree of confidence they did have in attempting to lead in their new position stemmed, they claimed, from experience in pastoring various types of churches, which is further

discussed in the theme *Job Experience*. Additionally, former pastors felt a sense of uneasiness moving from the persona of pastor to boss.

A number of the study participants explained how they coped with the new experience, sharing that they depended upon their faith in God to assist them. And this trust in God to sustain them in their new role is discussed further in the theme, *Spirituality*.

Spirituality

The study participants discussed how prayer and trust in God aided them not only in making the decision to become a conference president, but also in executing their duties as an administrator. They agreed that being submissive to God's will was a necessary prerequisite to accepting the new position. Several individuals who moved to their new post directly from a pastorate said they had not desired the duties or the sacrifice involved in being a conference president. By contrast, several who advanced to the presidency from a departmental director position had sensed God calling them to the post since early in their careers.

Presidents from each of the three categories of prior jobs discussed the necessity of maintaining a meaningful devotional life in order to effectively execute the duties of their position. They advocated this discipline in order for the Lord in His own way to be instrumental in the life of the leader and, as one shared, "His 'God-ness' rubs off on us." They considered serving as the spiritual leader for the conference to be one of their most significant and difficult responsibilities. Those who had previously worked as pastors found it especially tough to deal with an increased workload, including travel expectations, and yet maintain the Bible study habits of a responsible preacher. One

former departmental director believed that the longer a president stayed in office, the greater would be his or her risk of moving from a reliance upon God to a human dependency.

Relationships

Leaders transitioning into the role of president experienced a change in relationships with their fellow conference workers. Some spoke of how they now had more “friends” (employees desiring favors) and yet would eventually create new “enemies” (coworkers who were impacted negatively by certain decisions). In the new role, most spoke of how they purposely kept from establishing close friendships with their employees in order to avoid the appearance of favoritism and to maintain a level of objectivity.

In addition to this avoidance tactic, the following factors also contributed to a sense of aloneness in their new leadership role: (a) the need to assume sole responsibility for making final decisions, (b) a demanding travel schedule which restricted time for building meaningful relationships, (c) a change in their social stature because of new authority vested in them, and (d) the loss experienced from leaving a previous position in which they had enjoyed a sense of “community,” i.e., a support group.

Even though in their seminary training they were taught not to, former departmental directors formed close friendships with individuals while pastoring prior to working in a conference leadership position. However, when these same leaders began to lead as a president they changed their practice and chose not to establish close ties with co-workers or lay members in their conference, as reported later in these Findings. Those transitioning from pastoring especially missed the camaraderie they’d had with fellow

pastors; being the boss instead of “one of the guys” challenged their rapport with them and required an adjustment period. Those who relocated to a different conference in their transition to the role of president experienced an added burden of loneliness as a result of leaving close friends and having to lead in an unfamiliar setting.

The recently elected conference presidents used various strategies to manage the sense of aloneness that accompanied their new job. Those who considered themselves introverts welcomed some solitude, which gave them time to be “alone” and recharge; one study participant admitted, “being around people all of the time drains me.” Most of the new presidents utilized all or some of the following methods to offset their sense of aloneness: (a) designating their conference office leadership group as their new “community,” (b) believing that God would sustain them in following their convictions as they made certain unpopular decisions, and (c) depending on “outside” friends.

One study participant, who had been a pastor before transitioning to conference president, broke the norm of avoiding close relationships with coworkers and established a close friendship with one of his fellow executive officers. And Jennifer, a former executive secretary and the only woman president, claimed that some of her work associates were unaccustomed to the manner in which a female administrator communicates and deliberates upon decisions versus how a male administrator might approach such issues.

Identity

Individuals from all three categories in this study (former executive secretaries, former departmental directors, and former pastors) sensed a difference in the way they were treated by employees, lay members, and peers when they transitioned to become a

local conference president. Some of the differences consisted of deference, respect, and a sense of adulation. According to the study participants, possible causes for the change in behavior of coworkers, lay members, and colleagues included perceptions such as respect for the office of president and an acknowledgement of the authority vested in the position. Though the authority, according to policy, lies with the conference executive committee, the first-time presidents' perception in this study felt the added burden of being the most influential leader with regards to conference governance impacting the lives and careers of the organization's personnel.

Participants acknowledged that an increase in deference shown by constituents and peers does affect the personal identity of conference presidents. While some recognized that they had experienced a change of self-identity, others declared that they personally had not but had instead observed such a shift in their peers. Both the former executive secretaries and former departmental directors experienced an identity adjustment in their new role, with the latter being the most poignant in describing how constituent behavior affected them. Former pastors claimed that they had not experienced such a phenomenon; however, some shared anecdotes that revealed a distinct change in their personal identity.

Impact on Family

As the study participants described how their families were affected by their transition to president, they shared how the changes created both challenges and benefits. Some of the stated difficulties were common to presidents from all three prior-job categories, while a few hardships were unique to one particular category. Individuals in all three groups reported the following challenges: (a) less time to spend with family due

to the president's travel commitments, and (b) relocation issues that affected a spouse's employment and personal relationships.

Challenges unique to a particular group included: (a) anxiety of a spouse who was unsure how to fulfill the new role of a conference president's wife, as described by former departmental directors and pastors, and (b) loss of a spouse's unique ministry that had flourished in a local church setting, as reported by a president who had moved to the conference level from a pastorate.

At least one president in each of the three groups considered travel to be a job benefit that provided the privilege and enjoyment of traveling more often with his or her spouse. In one case, a study participant said that his family life improved when he became a president because the employing conference hired his wife to work with him in a team-ministry arrangement. A positive result of the new position that was mentioned only by former executive secretaries was that their children expressed pride that their parent had been chosen as the chief administrator of a conference.

Research Question #2

How did previous leadership experience prepare them to serve as a local conference president in the North American Division?

Job Experience

All of the study participants who had worked as an executive secretary or departmental director asserted that participating in conference-level administration prior to becoming president provided knowledge they considered indispensable in their new position. Recalling the huge learning curve they had encountered upon entering

conference administration, they stressed the value of observing another president perform his role. In addition, these executives listed the following previous job experiences as valuable preparation for their current post: (a) church-related positions, such as pastor and/or academy principal, and (b) healthcare training and/or work experience.

In contrast to the individuals elected president after working as an executive secretary or departmental director, one group of study participants developed their primary understanding of the presidential responsibilities not through conference administration, but during years of pastoral leadership experience. They described the process of acquiring people skills and learning leadership principles as they dealt with a wide variety of personalities, church types, and congregational issues. In addition, one former pastor claimed that he earned his most valuable leadership training while serving as a military chaplain. Last but not least, this group believed that God had been at work in their lives, preparing them in His own special way to eventually carry the burdens of a conference president.

Intentional or Desired Preparation

Participants in all three of the study categories spoke of strategies they had utilized to improve their leadership competency prior to serving as a conference president. Most were motivated simply by a desire to increase their knowledge and praxis in order to be more effective in the position they held at the time. Only the former conference departmental directors indicated that a desire to eventually serve as president had prompted them to improve their management skills. They spoke about purposely accepting calls to conference-office leadership roles in order to position themselves favorably for the chief administrator's job. The other two groups claimed they had not

been intentional in preparing themselves to become a president and resonated with a common understanding expressed by a number of participants, specifically; one doesn't prepare to be a president for fear others would interpret such intentionality as being motivated by selfish ambition.

Some of the former executives described a steep learning curve in their transition to the job of conference president and expressed a desire for more training and education in organizational leadership, specifically technical business skills and financial management. Former pastors were the most explicit in revealing perceived deficiencies in their understanding of certain management practices necessary to lead effectively as president.

A former departmental director wished for more intentional leader development from other levels of the Seventh-day Adventist church organization. A former pastor also indicated a desire to have as a resource someone with experience in conference administration, preferably a president, who could guide him through unfamiliar tasks and decisions related to leading and managing a conference.

Mentors

The study participants agreed that mentors play a vital role in preparing and supporting a new conference president. Their support system consisted primarily of one or more of the following: mentors, peers, friends, consultants, and conference or union administrators. Former executive secretaries and departmental directors spoke about mentors being an important part of their preparation prior to becoming a president with the former group specifically identifying the conference president, who they worked closely with, as the one who mentored them. However, former pastors reported a lack of

mentors in their professional development and did not develop a support network until after being elected a conference president. Former pastors and departmental directors mentioned the value of obtaining insight and advice from seasoned church administrators during meetings such as the union presidents' council and the annual NAD gatherings for conference presidents: specifically, the presidents' retreat and/or the Black Caucus.

Finally, participants in all three groups noted a deficiency in the leader development program for conference presidents within the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization. Both former executive secretaries and departmental directors recommended a more formal mentoring system for new presidents, and former pastors provided explicit descriptions of how they would personally benefit from having a mentor in their current position.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of this study, examining the experience participants from the various groups had as they transitioned into becoming a local conference president. This discussion focuses upon the eight themes presented in Findings, and considers their experience in light of theoretical and personal knowledge to better understand their transitional journey. I observed seven salient points that traversed a number of themes in the *Findings* regarding how first-time conference presidents dealt with: (a) the new responsibility of executive leadership; (b) aloneness and relationships; (c) the change in personal identity; (d) the intensity of change; (e) learning and preparation; (f) support; and (g) support, spirituality, and leader development. While numerous studies have examined the transition experience of other professions (i.e., teacher to principal, frontline to manager) there has not been one investigating the same

for a conference president. An exception is Sparkman's (2012) research of the "lessons of experience" and leadership development of church executives within an African American denomination.

The New Responsibility of Executive Leadership

Participants from all three categories, former executive secretaries, departmental directors, and pastors disclosed their initial reaction as being overwhelmed with their new position. This particular response is not surprising given the level of responsibility senior executives in organizations are required to carry (Olmstead, 2000; Zaccaro, 2001). DeRue et al. (2009) identified five work-related responsibilities considered to be "developmentally challenging," all of which are a part of a conference president's new experience leading a conference: "unfamiliar responsibilities, high levels of responsibilities, creating change, working across boundaries, and managing diversity" (p. 4).

One former departmental director wondered if he could even do the job of president. This type of musing would not be considered atypical for the research. Again, Munyon et al. (2010) suggests such leaders work in "extreme environments, under high levels of almost every work characteristic" (p. 433). Research indicates some executives believe transitioning into a new leadership role to be one of the more stressful times in life, almost equal to a divorce in marriage (Levin, 2010). In addition, not feeling fully equipped to do the job of president can create anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed (DeRue & Wellman, 2009), as was the case with former pastors who had not previously worked in a conference office setting. DeRue et al. (2009) and Dweck (1986) discovered how leaders who are confronted with unfamiliar tasks and responsibilities could

surmount these challenges and actually transfer them into a developmental experience if they have a mindset to learn from them. However, there is a point of diminishing returns on learning and development if the challenge is perceived as too great and overwhelms the leader, a situation created by “deploying” an individual in a position for which they have not been adequately prepared (DeRue et al., 2009).

Aloneness and Relationships

Leaders from all three categories of leaders experienced a sense of aloneness as they began their new role and discovered this phenomenon was not just an issue at the outset of leading as president, but a constant with the new position. Executive leaders in various disciplines experience loneliness in their respective roles (George, 2007; Pratt, 2001; Sarros & Sarros, 2007). Individuals invested with positional authority tend to be less intimate with those who possess less authority. Research has demonstrated a “high-power person” views self-disclosure of personal information to individuals of unequal status as a losing proposition (Earle et al., 1983; Slobin et al., 1968).

Numerous participants from the three different categories purposely distanced themselves from co-workers in order to remain objective in decision-making processes. Such practice is consistent with literature regarding how executives actually create social distance with co-workers (Magee & Smith, 2013; Pratt, 2001). Though some researchers believe this norm should and can be broken, a leader should be cognizant that such behavior does have its risk (Pratt, 2001). Mark, a former pastor was an outlier in this particular practice by establishing a very close relationship with a co-worker; in fact he claimed the individual was his best friend.

Positional power along with its sometimes-perceived major influencer role on personnel decisions created aloneness for a number of the participants, which surprised them. Even though the policy governance structure for local conferences in the NAD places final authority for major decisions in the hands of the constituents either through an executive committee or the delegates at a duly called constituency session, presidents still feel the weight of being its leader. Van Loon (2001) documents that it is the leader, in the context of organizational change, who plays the most significant role in being the mover to facilitate and define a new reality.

My research exposed a perception held by a number of the study's participants who, when referring to this phenomenon, used the phrase "the buck stops with me." Participants shared how John Maxwell's (2007) teaching on leadership had made a significant difference in their understanding of it. John Maxwell (2007) suggests "leadership is influence," attributing success of high-achieving organizations and companies to the leader claiming that within a successful organization an effective leader will be found because "everything rises and falls on leadership" (p. 267). He posits that influential leaders know how to maneuver effectively in their positional authority sharing the adage, "it's not the position that make the leader; it's the leader who makes the position" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 15).

From my own experience of over 18 years in presidential leadership (nine as a local president in two different, large conferences), chronic negative issues relating to asset management or broad-based positive advancement initiatives for the organization were not addressed unless I, as the president and chair of the executive committee, confronted them (for designation of small and large conferences see Appendix D). It

appears from my own and participants' experience that this "burden of leadership" creates its own isolation—and hence the aloneness. A salient point in this discussion of aloneness sensed by some participants as a result of being an authority figure is that one doesn't experience such until they assume the role of president. As Sam, a former executive secretary shared, he actually returned to his previous conference and apologized to his former president telling him he did not know the aloneness his colleague felt because of this "burden of leadership"—being the one to influence a committee towards a certain action.

Another phenomenon reported in this study by Jennifer, the only woman president, was the new awareness she and her close work associates had regarding the gender differences between how women and men leaders communicate and process decisions. Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) report that various authors claim a female leader tends to be "less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more orientated to enhancing others' self-worth" (p. 782). Eagly et al. (2000) even references how women in leadership can be elective in choosing how they process decisions, as was the case with Jennifer and some of her male colleagues in this study.

The Change in Personal Identity

Participants remarked how people treated them differently as a president than they did in their previous role. This phenomenon has a direct bearing upon one's identity with which some participants could identify, while others were uncertain about its affect upon them. Literature is rich with examples and social experimentation showing that a person's identity is affected by how others relate to them (Ashforth, 2001; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Burke, 1991; Stryker, 1980). Former executive secretaries and departmental directors

acknowledged a change in their identity while pastors claimed they had not experienced such; however, two of them shared anecdotes that indicated some type of an altered self-perception. Actually researchers posit individuals transitioning from a frontline position to one of administration need to be intentional about recognizing and preparing for a shift in personal identity (Brown-Ferrigno, 2003). Brody, Vissa, and Weathers (2010) found “the transition from the role of teacher, with its particular norms and expectations, to the role of a principal is marked by a complex role and identity change involving considerable challenge and dissonance” (p. 614). Therefore, concluding such a transition requires “forming a professional identity comprised of a set of personal norms and expectations” (Brody et al., 2010, p. 614).

However, it shouldn't be surprising that some participants didn't acknowledge such a transformation. In her study of 18 transitioning educators becoming principals, Brown-Ferrigno (2003) discovered the phenomenon of how individuals struggled to relinquish their identity from their previous role, which in this case was that of a teacher. Another explanation as to why some of the first-time conference presidents did not acknowledge a shift in their personal identity may be due to their length of time in the position. According to Anderson et al. (2012), transitional experience is dynamic and may take at least two years for a person to adjust to its effects, which especially deals with a new personal identity. This would be consistent with the response I received from Joe, Jennifer, George, and Bob, all of whom had not yet completed 2 years in office.

Pastors becoming administrators (conference presidents) is somewhat comparable to teachers becoming principals, and while there has been little study regarding the former, there is extensive research with the latter. Though it should be noted there are

distinctive differences between a local conference and a school, one of the most salient is that a school is typically in one locale (Payzant & Gardner, 1994), while a local conference is a collection of churches (*NAD Working Policy*, 2008-2009). Even though differences exist between the two positions, research can still inform us that a transitioning leader, moving from the frontline to administration, needs to undergo a role-identity transformation; in fact it is necessary if one is to succeed in the leadership position (Crow & Glascock, 1995; Ortiz, 1982). Furthermore, according to Day et al. (2007), even leader development itself is enhanced if one views him or herself in that manner, stating, “thinking of oneself as leader is an important motivator for acting as a leader and further developing leadership skills” (p. 366).

The Intensity of Change

The findings of this study reveal participants who transitioned from their previous work roles underwent an incredible amount of change at a rapid pace, further illustrated by some of them utilizing metaphoric expressions like “drinking from a fire hydrant.” Participants were confronted by change in numerous areas of their lives as they transitioned; responsibilities, relationships, personal identity, and family issues. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) indicate transitions have a way of impacting “relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” and, in fact claim, “sometimes a transition changes everything” (p. 39). The intensity of this change was even greater for those who also relocated when accepting the new leader position, and most found their spouse to be negatively impacted both socially and vocationally.

This intensity of change experienced by participants as they transitioned to their new role caused them to adjust and adapt to new realities. William Bridges (2009), noted

professor on the many facets of transitions, suggests there is a method one can utilize to assist in understanding the impact of change and how to manage it (p. 4). He outlines a three-step process to managing a transition:

1. “Letting go of the old ways and the old identity people had” (Bridges, 2009, p. 4). It is a step where individuals must acknowledge and recognize an end to what they had known before and face a realistic loss. Some of the former pastors were poignant in describing the loss and grief they experienced leaving their supportive church community behind. And one of the former departmental directors still remembered how difficult it was for him to transition from the local church to a conference office position for the very same reason.

2. “Going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn’t fully operational,” referring to it as the “neutral zone” where critical “psychological realignments” and “repatternings” happen (Bridges, 2009, p. 5). A former departmental director lost sleep over contemplating the magnitude of the job and also became concerned regarding how his identity was affected by becoming the individual in a conference governance setting where he now possessed significant positional authority.

3. “Coming out of the transition and making a new beginning” by actually creating a “new identity,” sensing a “new energy,” and “purpose” in the new position (Bridges, 2009, p. 5). Though recognizing a new identity was difficult for some for various reasons, numerous participants related how they believed God had placed them in their current position and this very fact energized them with a sense of purpose. Bridges advocates discerning the subtle difference between change and transition because, according to him, they are not the same for “change focuses on the outcome that the

change produces” (p. 7), while transition is different because the starting point for dealing with it is not the outcome but rather “the ending” one must make in order “to leave the old situation behind,” primarily delving into psychologically letting go of the old reality and identity (p. 7).

A former pastor sharing his lack of confidence in this new role would be consistent with Bridges' model of transition because, according to him, new leaders may “give up the feeling of competence” in their new role as they relinquish their hold onto that which was familiar, accepting the uncertainties of the new (p. 7). Therefore, according to Bridges (2009), one of the greatest causes for failed or difficult transitions, whether misunderstood or ignored, is the “failure to identify and get ready for endings and losses” (p. 8). Pastors appeared to struggle most with their previous role-identity by claiming they did not sense any change in their identity while leading in the president position. While a president may lead with a pastor’s heart, he or she, according to the literature, must undergo a fundamental identity change in order to execute the role of the chief executive officer of the conference.

Learning and Preparation

Former executive secretaries and departmental directors learned by observing an acting president lead a conference over a period of time. Experienced-based learning is the primary method leaders utilize to increase their understanding regarding how to perform a certain job or task (McCall, 2004; Van Velsor et al., 2004, p. 210). Research has revealed that “field-based learning,” where apprentices are able to observe a leader perform their duties, is a rich experience in “developing skills and professional behaviors” necessary to effectively execute a given leadership position (Brown-Ferrigno,

2003, p. 495). Former pastors who had not experienced this learning expressed a deficiency in their preparation prior to leading a conference. Former pastors claimed much of their leader development and preparation in becoming a president was dependent upon on-the-job learning while still a pastor, which is consistent with the aforementioned literature claiming the greatest source of learning comes from experience (Van Velsor et al., 2004, p. 210), though some former pastors did seek to enhance their understanding of leadership principles from other sources than just their pastoral experience.

Intentional learning about leadership and developing oneself to become a conference president was not the norm with the participants; only the former departmental directors confessed they had done so. Though participants from the other two categories sought to improve their own leadership knowledge and praxis by being a student and continual learner of it, they did not intentionally learn and develop their knowledge with the same purpose some of the former departmental directors did. Reasons for not intentionally preparing to become a president would be speculative, though one phenomenon did surface among all categories of participants which was the understanding that one doesn't really prepare to become a president. Both the former executive secretaries and departmental directors commented how some might interpret such preparation as driven by selfish ambition, even though a couple in the latter group dismissed such concerns and admitted they intentionally prepared. Perhaps one of the reasons former executive secretaries did not mention any intentional preparation was because of this phenomenon and not wanting to admit they had done so.

Given this issue exists within the leadership ranks of the organization, should some level of the organization consider how to deal with this perception in light of the

body of knowledge supporting intentional leader development? Leadership skills can be taught, and successful organizations are deliberate in preparing individuals to effectively lead (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004, p. 224). Therefore, is there an opportunity for some level of the organization to be intentional in creating a leader-development model given the fact that the findings indicate all categories of participants had a passion to grow in leadership knowledge and praxis prior to becoming a conference president? Technically, according to policy, it is not just the NAD who bears the responsibility to develop leaders in their geographic region of governance but also that of the unions—“union conferences . . . shall be responsible to arrange for appropriate executive training for newly elected officers of conferences” (*NAD Working Policy*, 2012, p. B-22).

This passion to intentionally participate in personal leader development aligns with the “self-efficacy” construct which, according to Machida and Schaubroeck (2011), is a leader’s personal commitment to confidently grow and improve in leadership skills through intentional training. Avolio and Hannah (2008) call this “leader developmental efficacy” and define it as “the extent to which leaders believe that they can develop a specific ability or skill to fulfill their responsibility in a specific context or leader role” (p. 337). The amazing irony is that as a leader increases in intentional leadership training and development, his or her self-efficacy is actually enhanced and so becomes a powerful cyclical process of growth (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005).

Another motivator to encourage local conferences and unions to be intentional about leader development would be a recent study done by the NAD (Administrator’s Summit Survey, 2014). The results of surveying union and local conference

administrators along with pastors ($n=320$) indicated the group of leaders within the NAD that was most needful of leadership development was that of local conference administrators—in essence identifying one of the positions under study in this research (Appendix C).

A final thought on learning and preparation is that none of the participants referred to leveraging their experiential field-based learning with any resemblance to Mezirow's (2003) Transformation Learning Theory (TLT) with its critical thinking and reflection. Many of them might be unaware of the TLT, though they practice some form of critical reflection in analyzing various data when attempting to solve complex conference issues. Here is another opportunity for organizations tasked with creating a leadership enrichment program for first-time conference presidents to incorporate high points of the TLT in order to teach them how to leverage experiential field-based learning through critical reflection. Closs and Antonello (2011) believe the TLT provides the tools through "critical reflectivity, examining taken-for-granted assumptions, norms, and values," a leader needs when attempting to administer a complex organization (p. 65).

Support

Support is a major element in two distinct areas for a leader: (a) in their own leader development plan prior to shouldering the heavy load of executive leadership, and (b) after being installed in the new role, especially the first couple of years. Both former executive secretaries and departmental directors had support from administrators and others while serving in their previous role prior to becoming a conference president. Much of this support, though not all, was in the form of a mentor relationship, as was the case with former executive secretaries who were the recipients of such with their former

conference president. Research has found that learning is enhanced when the developing leader is supported, especially by their immediate supervisor (McCall, 2010; Yip & Wilson, 2010, p. 76). This was evident in the participant's experience prior to becoming a president; however, after assuming the new role it was lacking. Former pastors were most poignant in expressing the need for support in the form of a mentor/coach relationship with a seasoned administrator. McCauley et al. (2010) claim leaders develop best when three elements exist: (a) a stretch assignment, (b) assessment, and (c) support, and when this is linked together over a period of time with “multiple developmental experiences” (Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker 2004, p. 207).

Former pastors and departmental directors found support networking with peers and friends, especially at various professional meetings held by the organization. Day (2001) believes such support, along with mentoring and assessment (360-degree), to be beneficial in leader development. All categories of participants resonate with Day's counsel believing conference presidents would benefit by a more intentional leader development plan, which included establishing mentor/coach relationships. Reflecting upon his study of executives in other denominations, Sparkman (2012) advocates for the use of mentors as support in a leader's development and work.

Support, Spirituality, and Leader Development

Being spiritual leaders, all participants found support in their faith-relationship with God. Findings indicated this relationship assisted them in processing the invitation to assume the role of president and to effectively lead as the spiritual leader of the conference. J. Robert Clinton (2012) of Fuller Seminary believes God is active and

supportive in developing a leader, providing valuable guidance when he or she transitions to new challenges or roles orchestrated by Him.

The first theme mentioned in the *Findings, Overwhelmed*, revealed how the participants felt emotionally in their new role as conference president. However, numerous times in the interviews when they mentioned their new responsibilities, they spoke of the support they received from their faith in God. It was this trust relationship with God that enabled them as a new president to manage and carry all the new responsibilities and expectations placed upon them. Goodman et al. (2006) points out that seeking support is a natural and necessary outcome for those impacted by transition.

Support found in God was a double-edged sword for first-time conference presidents—one that they needed to keep sharp. Participants shared how they perceived themselves as the spiritual leader of the conference, a role they could not perform unless they were vitally connected to His Holy Spirit. Seventh-day Adventist pioneer, Ellen White, in her 19th century book first published in 1898 on the life of Christ, *Desire of Ages* (1940), counsels individuals who desire to be effective in advancing the mission of Christ to “wait humbly upon God” and “watch for His guidance and grace” for this is the only way the Spirit is given (p. 672). Cindy Tutsch (2008), retired associate director for the White Estate (an organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church which is entrusted with preserving and appropriately representing the many writings of Ellen White), authored a book, *Ellen White on Leadership* (2008), purporting to capture the leadership principles of the pioneer. Tutsch (2008) summarizes White’s understanding of effective leadership, claiming the pioneer believed “the leader’s greatest need is to know God and be led by His Spirit” (p. 32).

In reality this knowing God and being directed by His Spirit is experienced by adhering to a regiment of setting a portion of time aside each day “for study of the Scriptures and communion with God” (p. 35). Participants in this study understood this principle, recognizing they could only be effective as a spiritual leader if they followed such counsel. In addition, they knew, as a former departmental director mused, that they were not able to do the job of president unless they were able to sense God’s support—but again something that could only be experienced if they were connected to Him. The irony is, according to participants, that with the new position came all the new responsibilities and demands upon one’s time making it difficult to find that “adequate space” in their daily routine to connect by prayer and Bible study with Him.

Finally a major outcome of making God a part of a spiritual leader’s web of support is the benefit it yields in positive character development which is akin to authentic leadership. Referring to authentic leadership, Bill George (2007) quotes historian David McCullough claiming it is “the single most important asset” of a leader, adding “that character without capacity usually means weakness in a leader, but capacity without character means danger” (p. xx). This core requirement in leader development is many times referred to as the foundation of the leader’s *modus operandi*. If this element is missing or flawed, the leader’s effectiveness will be marginalized (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008).

A former departmental director cognizant of the importance of authentic leadership believed a conference would “rarely rise above” the spirituality of its leaders or, in this case, the president. Therefore, support, spirituality, leader development and character are all linked together. In essence, participants’ framework regarding this four-

part linkage is as a leader reaches out to God for support to enable him or her to lead through seemingly overwhelming obstacles, that leader in turn receives not only the necessary support to do so, but also receives elements from the Supernatural to develop true authentic leadership.

Conclusions

As a result of reviewing the findings of my 12 participant interviews, I conclude with six suppositions: (a) spiritual leadership is paramount, (b) support is essential, (c) a deficiency exists in intentional leader development, (d) former pastors sense a lack of preparation, (e) those in transition need orientation to its potential challenges, and (f) gender diversity training should be requirement.

Spiritual Leadership is Paramount

Participants realized their role was more than just leadership for an organization—it entailed being a spiritual leader for a faith-based one. If they were going to achieve their goal of leading a local conference in executing its mission, they themselves first had to be connected to God. As one conference president said, they themselves must “be the people” before they “do the work.” Recognizing this assumption and the value participants placed upon maintaining a meaningful relationship to God in order to manage their sense of being overwhelmed with their new position, I would conclude nurturing a strong faith in God to be a necessary discipline for a president. And strongly coinciding with this significant outcome of a leader maintaining his or her connection with the Almighty, as mentioned in the Discussion section, is that they are

more likely to be able to lead with authentic leadership—in essence manifesting an admirable, genuinely Godlike-character.

Support is Essential

My research with the participants causes me to conclude that the transition from a previous leadership role to that of local conference president is made “smoother” and easier if certain types of support are active. First and foremost as previously mentioned, is their strong faith in God, which they referenced numerous times as a mainstay. Next, a leader in transition is benefited if he or she has support in the following areas: (a) family, (b) mentors, (c) peers, and (d) seasoned administrators. A supportive spouse to pray and process calls with, knowing they were ready and willing to attend and assist their transitioning husband (the female in the study is single), even at a sacrifice to them, was of great encouragement to the first-time president. Peers, mentors and seasoned administrators provided valuable counsel to the new leader, which sometimes took place in a previous role as they observed another president execute his administrative function, other times as a child playing golf with a seasoned administrator and learning “wisdom” from the experienced leader, and yet it may have also come from sitting and chatting with colleagues at an annual meeting of fellow presidents. This emphasizes that a first-time president depended upon or sought support they received from a previous position or time which helped them better understand how to function as an effective conference administrator.

Deficiency Exists in Intentional Leader Development

I would conclude from my research that participants desire more leader development from higher organizations. First-time presidents were candid in expressing the need for organizations to be more intentional in leader development. Even those who had gained what they called “first hand” experience in a conference office, former executive secretaries and departmental directors, prior to becoming a president, spoke about needing more leadership training, especially in areas of organizational asset management (finances and personnel). I believe there is an opportunity for other levels of the organization tasked to develop leaders in their sphere of responsibility to do so now. These leaders, by their own volition, have actively sought leadership development—they have a self-efficacious attitude about learning.

I was surprised to find so few first-time conference presidents had intentionally sought leadership enrichment training in order to prepare themselves to become a president. Some spoke about how it is considered taboo within the culture to actually prepare oneself to become a local conference president. I would therefore conclude such a stigma could be marginalized if a “blanket” leadership training initiative were provided to all conference office leaders. This type of training could incorporate various aspects of leadership, including role expectations, for both the president and his/her spouse.

Former Pastors Sense a Lack of Preparation

My research informs me that pastors who transition directly from the local parish to become a conference president need special support. They are greatly disadvantaged in knowing how to lead and manage a large organization, having never worked in a local conference office. Former pastors in my study felt overwhelmed because they felt ill-

equipped and were the most poignant in describing their deficiency in understanding how to be a president.

Those in Transition Need Orientation to its Potential Challenges

I would conclude that the participants experienced numerous predictable changes (e.g., relationships, identity, family) that they could have been better prepared for during their transition. A type of “road map” would be helpful explaining anticipated changes they could expect to confront. Based upon what I discovered in the interviews with the participants, such a “road map” should explain the following:

Relationships—will be affected by social distancing in order to be objective in the decision-making process, thus creating a type of administrative loneliness

Personal Identity—will be altered for a number of reasons, one of which will be the deference received from other employees. But not all identity change is bad – to function effectively one must see themselves as a leader.

Family—may be impacted in both positive and negative ways. On the “bright side,” one might be able to be in a team ministry with their spouse, but the “negative” could be that a spouse may be challenged with the issues of attempting to find meaningful employment and severing established relationships. In addition, a new expectation will be placed upon the spouse—a special status that carries certain requirements in itself.

Grieving—will most likely happen as a result of them leaving their previous position's established support network (pastors typically struggle the most with this because the office network is different from the local church leadership team).

One finding surprised me as I probed participants' experience in transition: some did not expect the president's role to be so lonely. In reflecting upon this phenomenon, one participant believed it was the result of being in positional leadership and having a degree of authority. Being a former executive secretary I would have expected him to know about this aloneness since he worked so closely with the president, but he did not. It wasn't until he himself became a president that he became aware of this, which has led me to conclude that one can't know the aloneness a president experiences due to his or her positional authority unless they themselves have been a president.

Gender Diversity Training Should be a Requirement

Jennifer's experience with her male colleagues in which they misunderstood her manner of processing decisions and communicating, indicates a need to equip leaders with the understanding of the unique and differing ways men and women lead and communicate. In light of Jennifer being the first female local conference president in many years, one might assume others will be inspired to follow in her footsteps thus creating an influx of women in leadership. I would therefore conclude that in order to have a stronger organization where leaders have a good understanding regarding the different leadership styles and approaches of men versus women, intentional diversity training could be of significant value.

Implications for Practice

Individuals aspiring or contemplating becoming a local conference president should acquaint themselves with the dynamics of transition. They should also seek: (a) an understanding regarding the position's responsibilities and expectations from seasoned

administrators, and (b) identify a mentor/coach who, in the event of the move, could assist them in coping with the potential move and accompanying transitions.

Union presidents, along with selection committees who are tasked with identifying a new president, should be aware of the challenges first-time conference presidents could confront in transitioning, based upon their previous work experiences and therefore need to request different levels of the organization to provide and/or facilitate the necessary support. Especially when hiring pastors into the presidential position, particular attention should be given to their lack of experience with specific conference responsibilities.

An intentional network of support should be instituted by the local unions and the NAD for newly elected conference presidents. This support could facilitate: (a) a viable mentorship program, (b) an assessment and feedback process on leader performance which includes input from union leadership, (c) a social connection time for presidents while attending requested meetings, and (d) a continued focus on how such leaders can maintain a vibrant spiritual life.

The NAD and local unions should develop an intentional leader development program that incorporates cohorts of newly elected presidents (minimal two-years) to meet together for support, including social time for connection, and to receive presentations on leadership principles and application. The NAD and unions should also provide resources and accessibility for online academic level, tailor-made business courses for conference leadership.

Those responsible for orienting new local conference presidents should educate them regarding how to manage letting go of the previous role identity and to recognize the subtle changes the new role demands of an effective leader.

The NAD should address gender uniqueness in its diversity training, with special attention given to educating current conference administrators (executive officers—president, executive secretary, and treasurer) and departmental directors.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. A longitudinal study of transitioning local and union conference presidents in the NAD to determine how these leaders adapt and cope over an extended period of time with the dynamics of transition as identified by theorists.

2. A correlation study of asset management and financial stability in those local conferences where presidents transitioned from pastoring to determine if former pastors' lack of experience contributes to poor fiduciary oversight.

3. Further study of local conference presidents' perception of positional leadership and authority as it relates to policy, granting full authority to a committee system which represent the constituents. This is in light of the fact that the expediency adjustments necessary in getting things done have over time become tacit policy especially in the arena of power and the attendant authority extended to executive leaders.

Epilogue

Without instruction, most people have a difficult time learning to swim, drive a car, or even ride a bicycle. Yes, many things can be done without training; however, the process is fraught with avoidable accidents. Many individuals have become leaders in

senior executive positions with little or no formal training in leadership. However, it doesn't have to be that way. There are numerous models to assist organizations in intentional leader development strategies. Current and future conference, union, and division leaders within the NAD and other organizations need to awaken to the value of being intentional about developing individuals to lead in senior executive roles.

APPENDIX A

CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS DATA FROM NAD AS OF
JULY 1, 2013

Conference Presidents Data from NAD as of July 1, 2013

<i>President</i>	<i>Conference</i>	<i>Previous Role</i>	<i>When Began</i>	<i>How Many Terms</i>	<i>Other Conference</i>	<i>If so, # of yrs.</i>
Anobile, Tony	Arizona	Conference Secretary	2008	1.5	No	
Attiken, Raj	Ohio	Conference Secretary	1998	Four terms	No	
Barnett, Ed	Minnesota	Ministerial Director	6/2009	In first full term	No	
Biloff, Neil	Dakota	Ministerial Director	2005	2	No	
Bogges, Larry	Mountain View	Conference Secretary	2006	Almost 2	No	
Brown, Jeffrey	Bermuda	Conference Secretary	2005	In third term	No	
Cano, Ramiro	Central California	Conference Secretary	2010	First Term	No	
Carlson, Ron	Kansas-Nebraska	Conference Secretary	2006	Third	No	
Cauley, Michael	Florida	Conference Secretary	1995	4	Yes	8
Caviness, Larry	Southern California	Conference Secretary	8/1997	Fourth	Yes	3.5
Coridan, Dean	Iowa-Missouri	Pastor	2006	2.5	No	
Corkum, Ken	Newfoundland	Pastor	9/2010	First	Yes	12
Cortes, Jose	New Jersey	Conference Secretary	9/2007		No	
Cox, William	Allegheny West	Pastor	2012	Begun first full	No	
Craig, Carlos	Texas	Conference Secretary	6/2011	First term	No	
Crawford, Ken	Alaska	Pastor	2004	In third	No	

Culmore, Wayne	British Columbia	Conference Secretary	2011	Completing first	No	
Davis, Jerome	Lake Region	Ministerial Director/Pastor	9/2005	2.5 terms	No	
Edge, Mike	Wisconsin	Conference Youth Director	4/2010	First full	No	
Edmond, Dana	South Central	Conference Secretary	9/2009	Second term	No	
Edwards, Mansfield	Ontario	Pastor	8/2009	1 Four Year Term	No	
Eisele, Melvin	Gulf States	Conference Treasurer	1996	3	No	
Fordham, Henry	Allegheny East	Conference Secretary	2012		No	
Fournier, John	Maritime	Pastor	2010	In first term	No	
Freedman, John	Washington	Conference Secretary	2002	Almost 3 terms	No	
Gallimore, Jay	Michigan	Conference Secretary	1990		No	
Green, Sam	Southwest Region	Union Secretary	6/2011		No	
Haley, Steve	Kentucky-Tennessee	Conference Secretary	2009	In second	No	
Hartwell, Ray	Pennsylvania	Conference Secretary	12/2003	Starting 4th	No	
Honore, Daniel	Northeastern Region	Conference Stewardship Director	2012	First Term	No	
Hoover, Paul	Upper Columbia	Conference Secretary	2013	0	No	
Hurst, Van	Indiana	Union Youth Director	2009	One	Yes	5
Knight, G. Earl	Greater New York	Conference Secretary	10/2010		No	

Knowles, Merlin	Montana	Conference Secretary	2010	.75 term	No	
Latchman, Daniel	Quebec	Pastor	12/2010	In second term	Yes	6
Louis, Leslie D.	Carolina	Conference Secretary	2012	First term	No	
Miller, William	Potomac	Conference Secretary	2006	1 term	Yes	5.5
Morel, Hubert	Southeastern Region	Conference Secretary	5/2008	1	No	
Moyer, John H.	Oklahoma	Conference Secretary	2003	2	No	
Nelson, Ron	Manitoba-Saskatchewan	Ministerial Director	1/2011	Finished 1 term and in another	No	
Orian, Stephen	Arkansas-Louisiana	Conference Secretary	2001	3.25	Yes	4.33
Ortel, Michael	Northern New England	Departmental Director	2002	11 years	No	
Pedersen, Jim	Northern California	Conference Secretary	2006	In Second term	No	
Penick, Gerald D.	Southeastern California	Conference Secretary	2004	2	No	
Pichette, Ray	Illinois	VP/Pastoral Ministries	4/2011	First term	No	
Prest, David, Jr.	Idaho	Conference Departmental Dir.	4/2012	First full	No	
Reimche, Al	Oregon	Conference Secretary	2009	One	No	
Remmers, Rick	Chesapeake	Conference Secretary	2011	First full	No	
Rodriguez, Angel	New York	Conference Secretary	2012	First	No	
Stevens, Jim	Texico	Conference Secretary	1996	4 terms	Yes	16.5

Thurber, Gary	Rocky Mountain	Conf. Assist. To the President	2009	In second term	Yes. 2	9
Tochterman, Frank	Southern New England	Assistant to the President	2003	Two plus	Yes	3
Torres, Louis	Guam-Micronesia	Vice President of a supporting ministry	6/2009	One	No	
Unterseher, Larry	Nevada-Utah	Ministerial/Education	2008	1	No	
Valentine, Maurice	Central States Region	Union Secretary	2012	First Term	No	
Watts, Ralph, III	Hawaii	Pastor	2006	Two	No	
Wiebe, Kenneth	Alberta	Conference Secretary	2010	One term	Yes	10
Winston, William	South Atlantic	Conference Secretary	10/2011		No	
Wright, Ed	Georgia-Cumberland	Pastor	2005	2 Terms	No	

APPENDIX B

EMAIL FROM A CHURCH MEMBER REGARDING LACK OF
BUSINESS TRAINING WITH CHURCH LEADERS

From: _____ To: _____ Sent: 2/20/2012 8:43:35 A.M. EST

Subj: Re: _____ FYI - February 19, 2012

Morning _____,

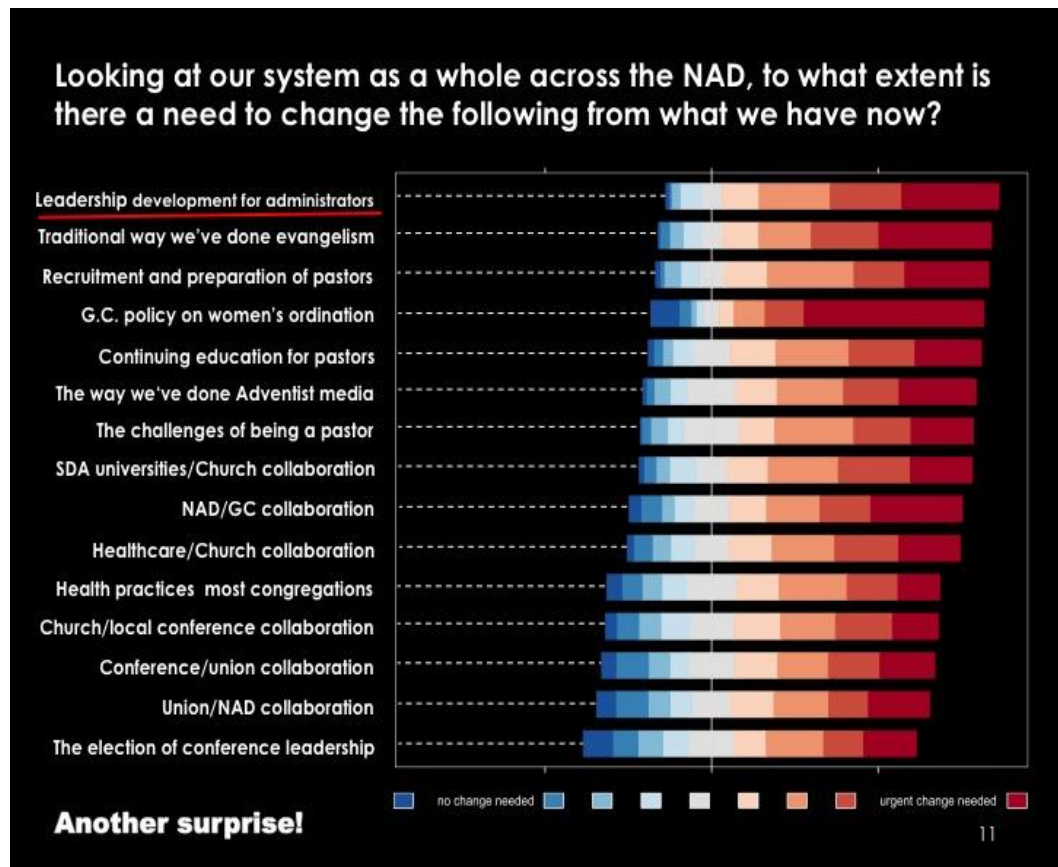
Having a hard time with this...

Were any non-ministerial business people involved with the financial planning and the responsibility of running such an institution? Over and over ordained ministers, never having any personal business experience, have cost the denomination huge sums of money by designing schemes which ultimately failed without any personal financial harm coming to the instigators. They don't use their own funds and have no personal risk, but are perfectly willing to use funds contributed in good faith by trusting souls, many times less well off...I hope I'm wrong on this, but.....too many years of life watching such schemes go bust.

APPENDIX C

SURVEY OF NAD ADMINISTRATORS (UNION & LOCAL
CONFERENCE) AND PASTORS

May 2014 (n = 320)



North American Division “NAD Competencies for Conference Administrators Survey” PowerPoint presentation slide #11. Used by permission Dr. Paul Brantley PhD., NAD Vice-President.

APPENDIX D

NAD LARGE CONFERENCE DESIGNATION



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST
CHURCH

North American Division

May 5, 2015

Office of the President
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, Maryland
20904-6600 USA
Telephone: (301) 680-6400
Fax: (301) 680-6464

David Weigley
5427 Twin Knolls Rd
Columbia MD 21045

Dear Pastor Weigley,
I am writing in response to your inquiry regarding the designation "large conference" in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Up until four years ago, the conferences of the NAD were ranked according to size and then divided equally into three groups - small, medium and large sized conferences.

Currently, large conferences have been arbitrarily identified as those having 18,000 members or more.

Please feel free to contact me should you need additional information.

Sincerely,

Kenneth A. Denslow
Assistant to the President

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL

January 14, 2014

Dave Weigley
Tel: 301-676-5667
Email: dweigley@columbiaunion.net

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
IRB Protocol #: 13-149 **Application Type:** Original **Dept.:** Leadership
Review Category: Expedited **Action Taken:** Approved **Advisor:** Erich Baumgartner
Title: Exploring the transition experience for first time local conference presidents in the North American division of Seventh-day Adventists: Narratives from conference presidents' career transitions.

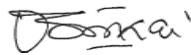
This letter is to advise you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your IRB application of research involving human subjects entitled: "*Exploring the transition experience for first time local conference presidents in the North American division of Seventh-day Adventists: Narratives from conference presidents' career transitions*" IRB protocol number 13-149 under Expedited category. This approval is valid until January 14, 2015. If your research is not completed by the end of this period you must apply for an extension at least four weeks prior to the expiration date. We ask that you inform IRB whenever you complete your research. Please reference the protocol number in future correspondence regarding this study.

Any future changes made to the study design and/or consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. Please use the attached report form to request for modifications, extension and completion of your study.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risk with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any project-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University physician, Dr. Reichert, by calling (269) 473-2222. Please feel free to contact our office if you have questions.

Best wishes in your research.

Sincerely



Mordekai Ong
Research Integrity & Compliance Officer

APPENDIX F

NAD APPROVAL FOR STUDY



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST®
CHURCH

North American Division

October 9, 2013

Elder Dave Weigley
Columbia Union Conference
5427 Twin Knolls Road
Columbia, MD 21045-3247

Office of the President

12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, Maryland
20904-6600 USA
Telephone (301) 680-6400
Fax (301) 680-6464

Dear Dave:

We have reviewed your request to do a study of certain leaders within the North American Division as a part of your work in the Andrews University Leadership program.

We have voted to approve your study of first-time conference presidents within our division. And we hope your study will be helpful in understanding the transition experience and leader preparation for individuals newly elected to the presidency. Also we trust you will conduct your study utilizing appropriate ethics insuring best practice standards in confidentiality and anonymity.

Furthermore we understand you will be conducting your study for the next 9 months or so from the date of this letter.

May the Lord bless you in your study.

Sincerely,

Elder Daniel R. Jackson, President
North American Division

KD:jda

APPENDIX G

UNION CONFERENCE GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

Atlantic Union Conference – pg. 180; Territory: Bermuda, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont; comprising the Bermuda, Greater New York, New York, Northeastern, Northern New England, and Southern New England Conferences.

Canada, Seventh-day Adventist Church in – pg. 185; Territory: Canada and French possessions of St. Pierre and Miquelon; comprising the Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba-Saskatchewan, Maritime, Ontario, and Quebec Conferences and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Columbia Union Conference – pg. 190; Territory: Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia; comprising the Allegheny East, Allegheny West, Chesapeake, Mountain View, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Potomac Conferences.

Lake Union Conference – pg. 197; Territory: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, and a portion of Minnesota; comprising the Illinois, Indiana, Lake Region, Michigan, and Wisconsin Conferences.

Mid-America Union Conference – pg. 201; Territory: Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and San Juan County in New Mexico; comprising the Central States, Dakota, Iowa-Missouri, Kansas-Nebraska, Minnesota, and Rocky Mountain Conferences.

North Pacific Union Conference – pg. 205; Territory: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington; comprising the Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Upper Columbia, and Washington Conferences.

Pacific Union Conference – pg. 211; Territory: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Utah, Johnston Island, and Midway Islands; comprising the Arizona, Central California, Hawaii, Nevada-Utah, Northern California, Southeastern California, and Southern California Conferences.

Southern Union Conference – pg. 221; Territory: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee; comprising the Carolina, Florida, Georgia-Cumberland, Gulf States, Kentucky-Tennessee, South Atlantic, South Central, and Southeastern Conferences.

Southwestern Union Conference – pg. 231; Territory: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico (except San Juan County), Oklahoma, and Texas; comprising the Arkansas-Louisiana, Oklahoma, Southwest Region, Texas, and Texico Conferences.

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