



# The three faces of Adventist identity: charity, church and corporation

by Wederly Aguiar, *BUC Treasurer*

Our last article addressed the transparency and accountability of the British Union Conference (BUC)'s finances, and how the BUC is accountable to its members, boards and committees, and to the Charities Commission and financial auditors. This article will discuss the many 'faces' of the BUC in its operations.

There is a Japanese proverb which states that we all have three faces: the first face that we show the world; the second face that we show our close friends and family; and the third face, which is the truest reflection of who we are. Similarly, the BUC has three faces. It has the face it shows the world, in the form of being a church; the second face is the one that reflects its purpose and values and gives back to the community, in the form of a charity; and, finally, it has a face that doesn't get spoken about much – the face of being a corporate entity.

Being a church is an important part of the BUC's identity; it can be regarded as the 'truest version' of what the BUC stands for. It is at the heart of our vision and mission of fostering spiritual growth and spreading the Gospel of faith, hope and love. It is the face we are proud to show the world.

This brings us to the second face of the BUC, the charity face. The church is well-known for its humanitarian work, both locally and on a global scale. As a charity, the BUC is accountable to the Charities Commission and has to operate in a

responsible manner and with integrity.

However, when a church becomes a sizeable global enterprise like the Adventist Church, with over 21 million members worldwide, structures are needed to ensure the smooth running of its daily operations. Local churches are led by pastors, elders and boards working cohesively to nurture their communities. Constituents from local churches form conferences with elected conference officers, departmental directors and trustees that provide administrative support. Conferences are overseen by the Union, which shares resources for mission objectives such as Adventist education. Moreover, the Union acts as a vital communication channel between the church and local authorities, enabling coordination across various levels of the organisation. All these entities are part of the General Conference, which plays a crucial role in harmonising ministries on a global scale. To facilitate worldwide outreach, the General Conference is divided into divisions, each responsible for coordinating and supporting a specific region.

With such a comprehensive structure, the church may be classified as both a charity and a corporation. It may sometimes feel as if the corporate face is in conflict with the other two faces, even though it is what allows the church to operate education systems and health systems globally to fulfil its mission.

Since its formation, the Adventist Church has been able to spread its mission through healthcare, education, publishing houses and media centres worldwide. Within the BUC, there are several Adventist

schools: Newbold College of Higher Education, Dudley House School, Newbold Primary School, Stanborough Primary and Secondary Schools, Hyland House School, Fletewood School, and Harper Bell School, all of which are independently inspected to ensure their adherence to national standards of education.

The BUC also has its own publishing house – The Stanborough Press – which distributes literature within the UK as well as overseas, with a physical shop within the BUC building that sells Christian literature and health foods.

In managing these corporations the BUC is subject to corporate Human Resources laws, employment laws and other governing rules of the UK to uphold business practices, and can thereby make a social impact and set an ethical example by conducting business with transparency, integrity and adherence to ethical principles. Managing these enterprises effectively can propel our beliefs and values into action, and the core services that these enterprises provide bolster ministerial support.

The corporate dimension of the church enhances and strengthens the church's various ministries, keeping it accountable to external regulatory bodies while fulfilling its spiritual mission and providing a balance between the spiritual and practical realities that allows the church to make an impact beyond its walls.

In conclusion, understanding the church structure and the faces that the BUC has to portray helps members understand nuances and complexities when it comes to big-picture decisions. These three faces each support the mission of the church.