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Editorial

Global Trends in Adventist Education

At the beginning of 1992, the Seventh-day Adventist Church sponsored 5,836 educational institutions worldwide (4,731 elementary schools, 980 secondary schools, 46 training schools, and 79 colleges and universities). In these schools, 41,547 educators taught 860,232 students.¹ These figures reveal a steady growth in all categories. However, they tell only part of the story.

During the past six years, I have visited scores of schools and met with hundreds of Adventist teachers in every world division, first as associate director and lately as director of the General Conference Education Department. These travels and contacts have allowed me to detect several global trends. These reveal the dynamics of our system and may suggest its future direction. I list seven of them here for your reflection and discussion.

1. *Increasing recognition of the value of Adventist education by parents and government authorities, resulting in more state involvement and higher ratios of non-Adventist students in our schools.* Ministers of education and national congresses, especially those in the developing world, continue to grant formal recognition to our schools and to officially charter our universities.

These developments, in turn, open the possibility of greater government involvement in the operation of our educational institutions. At the same time, larger numbers of non-Adventist parents are sending their children to our schools, attracted by their academic quality, Christian principles, and lower teacher/student ratios.

2. *Growing parental concern about the academic quality of our programs and, consequently, demands for greater school and teacher accountability.* Adventist

parents, particularly the better educated and more affluent, no longer see the local church school or academy as the only option for their children. Because of their interest in the future careers of their sons and daughters, they want to make sure that their offspring will enter prestigious institutions of higher learning. Consequently, they demand higher standards, better facilities, and stronger programs. Yet, in many parts of the world, Adventist teachers' salaries, benefits, upgrading opportunities, and recognition lag behind their ministerial counterparts within the denomination.

3. *Declining ratios of Adventist students in our schools, relative to church membership, which reflect changing priorities, economic difficulties, and diversified academic and professional interests.* At present, more than half of the students in our schools worldwide either come from non-Adventist homes or are not Adventists themselves.² This is particularly evident at the elementary and secondary levels, and in developing countries, where our membership is growing the fastest. While in 1975 there were 99 Adventist students attending our schools for every 1,000 members worldwide, the ratio had dropped to 59 per 1,000 by 1990. Educationally, our church is not keeping pace with its membership growth. Many Adventist parents are finding it more difficult to send their children to our schools. For a variety of reasons, larger numbers of our young adults are attending public colleges and universities.

4. *Renewed concern by parents, educators, and church leaders about the role of our schools in fostering Christian spirituality, biblical values, and service orientation among our youth.* A recent survey found that many of our North American students lack assurance of salvation in Christ and tend toward legalism.³ Sev-

Continued on page 47

EDITORIAL *Continued from page 3*

eral schools are using Bible Labs to involve students in practical service and outreach. More teachers, with support from the Institute for Christian Teaching, are seeking to integrate faith and learning in their curricular and co-curricular activities.⁴

4. *The student missionary program continues to expand around the world.*

5. *Growing evidence that the longer a student from an Adventist home attends our schools, the higher is his or her involvement in and support for the church's beliefs and mission.* Doctoral dissertations by Warren Minder (1985), Kenneth Epperson (1990) and Robert Rice (1990) compared sizable numbers of graduates from our schools with Adventists who had attended public schools in the United States. They concluded that church school attendance is one of the best predictors of denominational loyalty.⁵

6. *Stresses in the tripod that traditionally supported Adventist education—home, church, school—resulting in added responsibilities for Adventist educators in conveying values and operating our schools.* The breakdown of families both outside and within our church circles and the apparent lack of support to schools by some ministers are requiring Adventist teachers to play a larger role in the Christian formation of the children and youth who attend our schools. Limited educational subsidies from denominational entities make it increasingly difficult for school administrators to obtain the necessary financial resources to ensure educational viability and growth.

7. *Realization of the need for strategic planning, innovation, and networking in Adventist higher education.* The growing

complexity and the increasing cost of operating quality Adventist colleges and universities demand better long-range plans and closer cooperation among schools. Institutions in several world divisions are beginning to implement these changes. An action taken during the first international seminar for Adventist college and university presidents, in August 1992, recommended establishing a world association or consortium of denominational institutions of higher learning.

The trends described above present Adventist educators with special opportunities and challenges. They demand the best of our Christian commitment, creativity, and vision.—H.M.R. ✍

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *World Report 1991: Adventist Education Around the World*, Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, July 1992.
2. See the editorial "Alarming Trends" in *The Journal of Adventist Education* 54:3 (February/March 1992), pp. 4, 38, 39.
3. See Roger L. Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (La Sierra University Press, 1992), especially chapter 6, "Split Personalities."
4. For information on curricular frameworks and other materials write to: Institute for Christian Teaching; General Conference Education Department; 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904; U.S.A.
5. Warren Earl Minder, "A Study of the Relationship Between Church Sponsored K-12 Education and Church Membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," Ed.D. Dissertation, Western Michigan University, 1985; Kenneth James Epperson, "The Relationship of Seventh-day Adventist School Attendance to Seventh-day Adventist Church Membership in the Southern Union Conference," Ed.D. Dissertation, Loma Linda University, 1990; Robert W. Rice, "A Study of the Relationship Between Attending Seventh-day Adventist Academies 9-12 and Subsequent Commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Denver, 1990.

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