

Without data, they say, you're just another person with an opinion. Seventh-day Adventist education around the world runs better because we deal with good data.

By LISA BEARDSLEY-HARDY

### Numbers and Purpose

As of December 31, 2015, the Adventist Church was operating 5,705 primary schools, 2,336 secondary schools, 53 training schools—such as hospital-based nursing programs and some nondegree ministerial training schools—and 114 tertiary colleges and universities. In our 8,208 schools around the world, 102,779 teachers educated nearly 2 million students (1,922,990). What is the mission of these schools? Or, as put by church historian George Knight: “Education for what?”<sup>1</sup>

Adventist existence and purpose are biblically grounded. While education must develop students mentally, socially, physically, and vocationally, this goal is shared by all schools, religious or not. Christian education aims higher, seeking to restore the image of God in students and to prepare them for service in this life and the next. Its aim is to return to God's original purpose in creating humans.

Adventist education shares this spiritual and redemptive goal with other Christian schools. But a third aspect of education makes Adventist education unique: it is the denomination's apocalyptic mission to the world. George Knight observes that the denomination's two schools in 1880 became 16 in 1890, rapidly expanding to 245 in 1900, more than 600 in 1910, and 2,178 by 1930. Adventist mission, he says, grew exactly the same way, showing “a growth curve that goes nearly straight up beginning in the 1890s. . . Both the birth and the expansion of Seventh-day Adventist education were stimulated by the explosive fuel of apocalyptic mission as the denomination sought to educate the coming generation of young people not only about that apocalyptic mission but [also] to dedicate their lives to it.”<sup>2</sup>

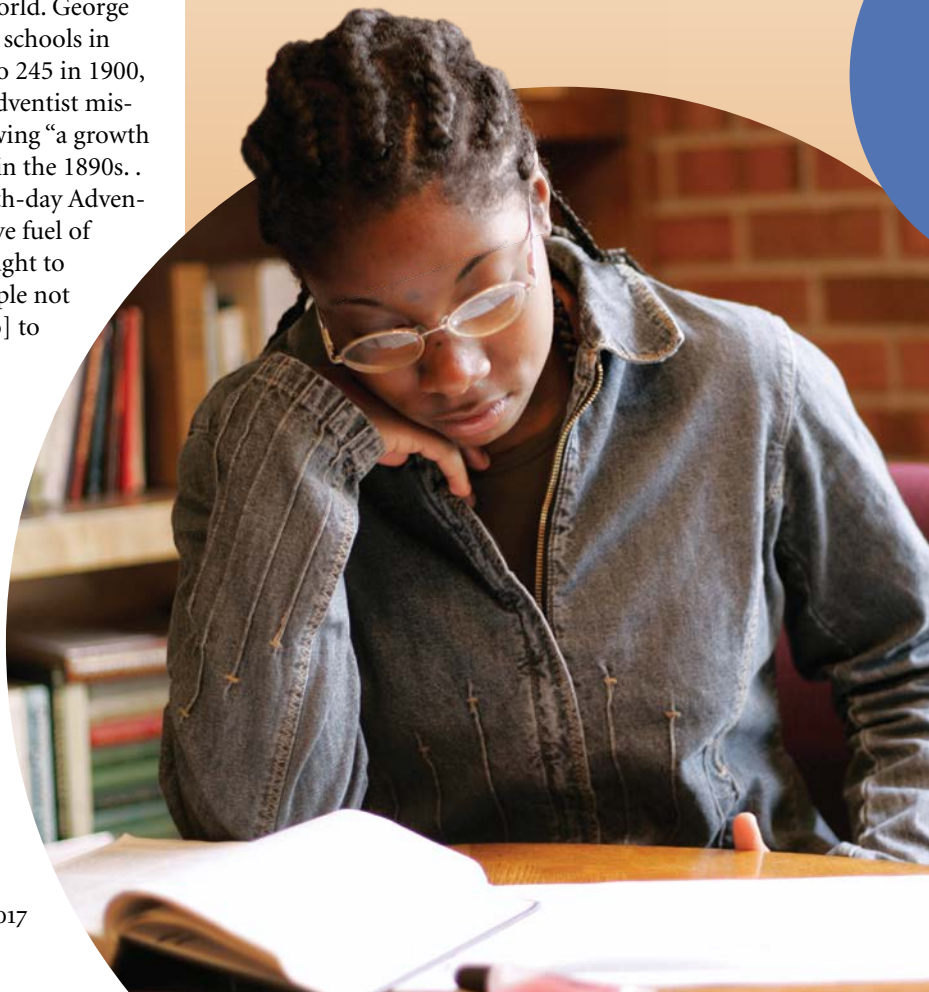
Today, more than 140 years later, we still believe that mission and education are one, that the work of redemption and education are one, and that the Adventist Church is a movement of prophecy with an end-time mission to all the world.

Our enrollment patterns present a great challenge to such belief.

As of December 31, 2015, Adventist Church membership stood at more than 19 million members, but less than half of them (47 percent) have had some Adventist education. Fifty-two percent have had none. Enrollment varies by division. Contrast, for example, the North American

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## *Rediscovering Our Mission*



Division (NAD), where only 29 percent of members have never attended Adventist schools, with the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (SID), where 76 percent have had no Adventist education; or the Inter-American (IAD) and West-Central Africa (WAD) divisions, where 66 percent report having no Adventist education. This is partly explained by the numbers of adults who join the church in these places. We could hope that children of these adults are benefiting from being enrolled in Adventist education, preparing them for service and mission. This is an opportunity for enrollment growth.

Of Seventh-day Adventist pastors, 36 percent report having only five to eight years of Seventh-day Adventist education. Only 14 percent reported having completed 13 or more years of Adventist education. Astonishingly, 8 percent of Adventist pastors report no Adventist education, which raises the question of where their ministerial education was from. Were there that many pastors of other denominations who became Seventh-day Adventists? Overall, most Adventist pastors have less than eight years of Adventist education,<sup>3</sup> a factor that may help explain our members' increasing diversity of views on the church's fundamental beliefs. Too many Adventist pastors have not benefited from a distinctively Seventh-day Adventist education.

### **Strengthening the Gates**

The General Conference Department of Education has set Adventist identity and mission as its principal priority for the quinquennium 2015-2020. It is one of four priorities designed to secure the gates that safeguard the mission focus of education.

By "Adventist mission and identity" we mean both capacity and evidence that Adventist education functions within a biblical worldview and that it pursues a meaningful integration of faith and learning in all disciplines and all levels. It means that teachers and administrators give the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy their foundational role in the school's operation, and that we are educating not just the mind, but the whole person, within a balanced, redemptive framework that develops the ability to think and to do. We aim to restore in our students the image of their Creator, holding ourselves accountable for Adventist mission and identity through processes such as the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA), where we perform audits of schools, provide recommendations for improvement, and give commendations for what is going very well.

Through the functions of the International Board of Education (IBE) we establish general guidelines and direction of the church's education program. The International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) cooperates with world divisions to provide overall guidance and standards for the professional training of pastors, theologians, teachers of Bible and religion, chaplains, and other denominational employees involved in ministerial and religious formation.

Beyond promoting and guarding Adventist essentials in all levels of education, we have recently focused on graduate and professional programs, because that is where there is growth. In the past quinquennium we opened three medical and two dental schools: in Nigeria, Peru, the Philippines, Argentina, and Brazil, respectively.

In technology our challenge is to adhere to the Adventist philosophy of education in distance learning. How do we do Adventist education when we never see the student? when they live in their own homes and communities? How do we do it when they just come for an intensive, are in a cohort, or attend an urban campus while living in urban surroundings? To foster academic excellence, focusing on measurable goals for quality culture is not enough. Mission must be integrated with traditional measures of academic excellence. Andrews University and the Adventist Learning Community (see pages 20, 21) are at the forefront of developing distance education that is distinctly Adventist. But in every school, technology needs to be baptized for our purposes.

We assess our schools on their implementation of a spiritual master plan appropriate for each level and type of student. Key performance indicators include such evidence as that students are studying their Bible, or using textbooks in harmony with the Adventist philosophy of education. Using the same books that every other school uses will not carry out our purposes. Our textbooks are being integrated with and be based on the biblical worldview. These are examples of what it means to strengthen Adventist identity and mission in education today.

### **Student Access**

Our second priority is to increase student access to Adventist education. Parents agree that Adventist education is desirable, but many struggle to afford it. Adventist education needs to be affordable, but it has to be sustainable. No margin, no mission. We need to partner with other departments, and with the divisions, to increase student access. Barriers to enrollment need to be identified and removed or lowered.

To the best of our knowledge, 30 to 31 percent of our members are estimated to be 16-30 years of age. Of these 6 million members, 74,000, or 1 percent, attend a Seventh-day Adventist tertiary institution. Evidently we have a problem.

Of course, not everybody in that age group is in school.

**47%**

Percentage of church members worldwide with some Adventist education



Some are working, some are at home, others are in rural populations farming or caring for family. Yet if the UNESCO higher education enrollment rate of 26 percent is applied to that 6 million, an estimated 1.5 million who could be in Adventist higher education are studying somewhere else. We now estimate that 5 percent of all of those Adventists who are studying in higher education attend one of our schools. Our schools cannot possibly offer every degree, but we still need a better enrollment ratio.

### Mission-focused Teachers

Our third priority is mission-focused teachers. *Annual Statistical Report* data show that this is the area of greatest concern. All teachers need to develop their capacity to achieve the redemptive purpose of Adventist education and to model Adventist values and lifestyle. The data show that we also need systems and deliberate effort to increase, where needed, the percentage of Seventh-day Adventist teachers who work in the system.

The past 14 years show a clear downward trend for primary, secondary, and tertiary teachers. We increasingly employ people of other faiths, or no faith at all. As of 2014 almost 30 percent of teachers were not Seventh-day Adventists. The annual decrease is on average 1 percent per year, sometimes more. Thus, of our 100,000 teachers, we have been exchanging 1,000 Adventists every year for 1,000 who have not committed to our faith by baptism.

As Knight has asked: “What is Christian education without Christian teachers?” “What is Adventist education without Adventist teachers?” Teaching is an incarnational process. It’s not just teaching how to add numbers, but also how to live a life of faith and carry out the unique mission of Seventh-day Adventist education.

Percentages of Adventist students are declining; less than half of enrollment is Adventist. We might celebrate this as an evangelism opportunity! But the two trends are going down together. Some say that these teachers are more caring or better role models than Seventh-day Adventist teachers. They may indeed have superior academic qualifications, and be effective educators in their discipline. They may even be warm Christians who share the love of Christ with students. But how can these teachers share the unique vision and mission of Seventh-day Adventist education if they do not subscribe to it themselves?

The expansive proliferation of degree offerings—a whole alphabet soup just at the graduate level, going all the way to medicine, pharmacy, doctors of theology, and Ph.D.s in a variety of areas—has required employment of



**100,000**  
Adventist teachers  
worldwide



professors with specialized degrees. But we have not found enough Seventh-day Adventists to supply that need.

The Adventist Professional Network (APN) is one initiative to monitor the preparation of future teachers, and a tool to recruit teachers and other personnel. Every Adventist with at least a bachelor’s degree, is invited to the simple 10-minute task of registering in the database [APN.adventist.org](http://APN.adventist.org). It gives us a way to find you and help you with your own professional development. Mission-focused teachers is an area where the walls are broken and the gates burned. But you can help us redouble our efforts so that Adventist education can achieve its unique apocalyptic purpose.

### Educational Leadership

Our fourth and final priority is to strengthen educational leadership. Principals, presidents of colleges and universities, and boards carry local responsibility for overseeing more than 8,200 schools, colleges, and universities around the world. In a hand-poll of the 2016 General Con-

# 1,922,990

students attend  
Adventist schools  
(primary through  
college/university)



## Reaching Cities Through Education

In a final consideration, the role of education as a means of mission to big cities cannot be overstated. Of the global urban population, approximate 1.7 billion people live in cities. Three million of them are Adventist. In the cities there are 547 people for every single Seventh-day Adventist.<sup>4</sup>

Viewed on a map, there is a correlation between educational institutions and where the membership is 20,000 or more. There are two features to note in the demographic distribution of membership. The larger concentrations are located on coasts, reflecting the early efforts of pioneering missionaries who went out not by airplanes in those days, but by ships, where they established the work in coastal areas.

Where educational work was established, the church is strong. Memberships of 20,000 or more are virtually a map of our educational system. Education has proved to be a stable foundation on which Seventh-day Adventist work has grown from strength to strength. The many places in Europe and the 10/40 window, where membership is between zero and 125 members, should see Adventist education as a major approach for work in these challenging areas. In doing so, they continue the work of the Master Teacher and fulfill Adventism's apocalyptic mission to the world. ■

<sup>1</sup> George R. Knight, "Education for What? Thoughts on the Purpose and Identity of Adventist Education," *The Journal of Adventist Education*, October/November 2016, pp. 6-12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/statistics/article/go/-/seventh-day-adventist-world-church-statistics-2015/>

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Jerry Chase, Rick McEdwards, David Trim, and the annual reports compiled by the Office of Archives, Statistics and Research, Silver Spring, Maryland, for the data, maps and charts used in this report.

ference Executive Committee, about 20 percent were new to their positions. For that reason, we stage an annual leadership conference to equip new officers for the responsibilities they must carry out in the field.

At the institutional level, demonstrating accountability and effective governance requires robust institutional decision-making processes and structures. We provide support for this through journal articles, board training, the 2016 General Conference LEAD conference on education, and board retreats. Formal means include graduate training for church leadership at Andrews University, the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS), and the Adventist University of Africa (AUA), which celebrated its tenth birthday this year. Over the past year the IBMTE Handbook was updated to strengthen ministerial and theological education. Regional LEAD conferences on education are scheduled for 2017, but more needs to be done to develop leadership, particularly for the preschool/kindergarten, primary, and secondary levels.



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## Raising the Standard

Here are four recommendations that will significantly contribute to reaching God's ideal for your school.

**Make it** a place of genuine welcome.

**Make it** a home that values every member's story, be they students, employees, or administrators.

**Make it** an educational institution known for its creativity and innovation.

**Make it** a place where participation is born of personal spiritual commitment.

—From the inaugural address of Andrea Luxton, October 25, 2016, as sixth president of Andrews University, a leading institution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.