Seventh-day Adventist Church world headquarters
May 10, 2011

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In This Issue:

ADRA awarded for women's empowerment project in Bangladesh
Adventist aid agency also recognized among leading humanitarian agencies

Church Chat: How much does the church value Adventist education? VP asks
Simmons on the future of the Adventist model, church's commitment to it

In Florida, woman charged with swindling fellow church, community members out of millions
Jean promised high interest on bogus investments, says pastor who lost savings

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10 May 2011, Washington, D.C.
ANN staff

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency International received a Best Practices & Innovations Award last week for its Bangladesh women's empowerment initiative.

ADRA Bangladesh Country Director Elidon Bardhi accepts an InterAction Best Practices & Innovations Award for the aid agency's women's empowerment initiative in Bangladesh. The program has taught literacy and income generation skills to some 5,400 women in the country's Mymensingh district. [photo courtesy ADRA International]
InterAction, the largest United States-based alliance of international nongovernmental organizations, honored ADRA with the award for its Improving Livelihoods through Women Empowerment, which over the last three years has taught literacy and income generation to some 5,400 women in the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh.

ADRA officials estimated more than 100,000 women have benefited from the project since it began in the 1990s.

In a May 4 awards ceremony at its Washington, D.C. headquarters, InterAction also recognized ADRA as one of the five leading humanitarian agencies for work in agriculture and rural livelihoods.

"This is a tremendous work ADRA has done in Bangladesh, which started many years ago and has developed and progressed in many stages," said ADRA Bangladesh Country Director Elidon Bardhi. "This isn't just a women's issue but affects the entire community," he said.

The latest round of training was sponsored by ADRA Sweden. As a result, 80 percent of participants now have the ability to read, write and actively partake in family-making decisions. Some 70 percent of participants have increased their household income by about 20 percent through the income generating activities.

Last week's award was the third Best Practices recognition from InterAction. ADRA was awarded last May for a food security project in Bolivia and in December for a similar project in Ghana.

For more information, visit adra.org.

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**Church Chat: How much does the church value Adventist education? VP asks**

_Simmons on the future of the Adventist model, church's commitment to it_

4 May 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Ansel Oliver/ANN

Dr. Ella Simmons is positioning the Seventh-day Adventist world church for the next five years to formally refocus its commitment to education. She believes that as Adventist education goes, so goes the denomination.

A church vice president, Simmons is calling for leaders to view education as internal evangelism and support it as such. That could mean changing institutional funding structures or the way education is managed in some world regions.
Simmons is also leading the church's International Board of Education toward developing a worldwide master plan for Adventist education, as well as establishing a research agenda to assess worldwide needs and evaluate outcomes, both spiritual and academic. Doing so could create a better model for providing Adventist education, she says.

Even more, she's hoping for a renewed focus on Jesus and better integration of his life and teachings in every class subject.

Raised a Baptist, Simmons became an Adventist at age 16 following several years of personal Bible study and later attending a public evangelism series that came to her neighborhood.

She went on to earn a bachelor's degree in Education from Indiana University, a master's degree in Education from church-owned Andrews University in Michigan, and a doctorate of Education from the University of Louisville in Kentucky.

Much of her research and development projects focused on underrepresented groups, mostly defined by race, socio-economic status and gender.

Simmons has served as provost of the church's La Sierra University in California, vice president of the church's Oakwood University in Alabama and associate dean of the University of Louisville's School of Education.

Simmons was elected a vice president of the Adventist Church in 2005 and serves as the advisor to the Education and Women's Ministries departments.

In a 40-minute interview, Simmons discussed her vision for a worldwide series of formal conversations on Adventist Education, how they should proceed and where they might lead. She also proffered what she thinks might be a more sustainable model for Adventist education in some regions.
Adventist News Network: What do you hope happens as a result of these conversations on Adventist education?

Dr. Ella Simmons: I would like for us to come out recognizing that we must be committed to education as internal evangelism as we are to external evangelism. The Lord holds us accountable for both. My ideal would be to engender a new excitement that plays itself out in terms of support and involvement in Adventist education worldwide. There would emerge a renewed understanding of true education as redemption as the future of our church through the salvation of our children, youth and their families.

ANN: There are controversies over what is taught in some institutions. Does the need for these formal conversations stem from some concerns about La Sierra University?

Simmons: No, this isn't focused on La Sierra or any other specific institution. It's just time in our history, especially at the rates at which [the church is] growing in membership and simultaneously losing young people at alarming rates that we need to reengage ourselves with the foundations of Adventist education and articulate the definitions and expectations to new and grounded members as well. ...We certainly need to make it possible for Adventist education to be viewed, understood and operated as the Lord intended for its nature, aims and outcomes within the realities of our myriad cultural and geographic contexts.

ANN: How many formal conferences are you suggesting, and where?

Simmons: My ideal would be one giant world convocation, ... but perhaps with the development of the [Biblical Research Institute] conferences we need to go where they go. So whenever we talk about what it means to be an Adventist theologically we also talk about what it means to engage in Adventist education, theologically and practically. We could be talking about 30 or 40 of these meetings worldwide in strategic geographic locations. However, if we aren't able to align with the BRI conferences, we could consider four or five gatherings of representatives from two to four divisions in centralized locations.

ANN: You've previously said that the church hasn't quite achieved the "seamless integration" of faith into every class subject the way educators have hoped. Why isn't that happening?

Simmons: Maybe we've been too keenly focused on individual elements of our faith as opposed to focusing first on Jesus and allowing those elements of our faith to be defined and directed by the model of his life and God's word. We need to rediscover the essential core elements that make us Adventist as opposed to just Christian or Protestant and then apply those to Adventist education.

ANN: How do you think Adventist education is perceived?

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Adventist Education

| Serves nearly 1.7 million students |
| Three medical schools (United States, Mexico and Argentina) |
| Two law schools (Brazil and Nigeria) |
| 112 total colleges and universities |
| 1,748 secondary schools |
| 5,899 elementary schools |

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**Simmons:** In most places in the world Adventist education is highly respected. In some places -- and we might look at North America as one example -- there are some people who have placed more value on public and other private education. But some of that is because we have not been educated or continuously reoriented to the aims and values of Adventist education. And sometimes when people indicate they don't value Adventist education it's not that they have specifics related to lesser quality, it's just that it's so close to them it's taken for granted while the grass on the other side of the road appears greener. Then, yes, unfortunately, there are times when we have not done all that the Lord calls us do in terms of achieving quality -- that is spiritual faithfulness and academic excellence. All of this is reason for us to step back, look at who we are as a people and look at what Adventist education is supposed to be and what it should do.

**ANN:** Many issues often come down to money. Does this mean the church would have to shift some of its resources?

**Simmons:** It's more than just money. Our greatest need is for Adventist teachers, but our focus can be on financial resources for this point. It is clear that the resource pool we have at our disposal in the church is a finite amount. It's limited. But yes, there would either need to be an increase in our resource pool, or we would have to make some decisions about what our priorities might be for a given period of time. ... Of course we would need to make some decisions within education to use the funds we already receive in different ways. Perhaps, in some places we could probably do with fewer institutions and put more money into the remaining institutions. If all of our young people were in our schools or many more than are there now, we would receive more and we would probably actually need the number of institutions we have in these locations. In any case there will have to be some decisions about priorities for resource allocation.

**ANN:** [Adventist Education department Director Dr.] Lisa [Beardsley] has previously said the same thing -- institutions grow but sometimes the market in some places changes and some institutions should scale back operations. It's a sensitive issue and some would rather not talk about it. How do you respond?

**Simmons:** By the grace of God, and that's not a pat answer, we need to engage in serious prayer. If we're really talking about Revival and Reformation we need to realize how those also apply to organizations as well as to people. Then as we endeavor to revive and enhance our organizations we release them to the Lord and seek His will, I believe He will make it clear to us to give one up and build another one up. But you know it's human nature to want to hold on to, or not lose ground where we have made progress in times past.

**ANN:** So could you see the church in North America moving toward the Mormon type of model where there are just a few institutions of higher learning?

**Simmons:** In a word, "No;" or another word, "Never." I don't think ever in my lifetime and probably not before Jesus comes would enough people be able to give up enough to make that happen.

**ANN:** Your answer doesn't indicate you're opposed to it. Is it a desirable option?

**Simmons:** Yes, it could be a desirable option, and I hasten to say, I wouldn't expect just a few institutions, but I could possibly see four or five. Educational leaders are beginning to see that more clearly. It is my understanding that some independent of us here [at the Adventist Church world headquarters] have begun conversations. Lisa and I were part of those conversations in years past, so we're not separating ourselves completely. But there have been some conversations about how, perhaps all the higher education institutions could collaborate, first of all, and then could partner more officially and formally. Then at some point we could reduce to just four or five institutions, even if we retain the remaining campuses for a while and had multiple campuses of those remaining institutions. Ultimately, even with increased enrollment we could close some of our campuses and enhance some others.
ANN: Adventist education can be expensive. Our readers often comment on the expense, as well as the post-education debt many people have. How do you respond?

Simmons: One thing I'd like to come out of these conferences is to find ways to provide Adventist education for all Adventist young people. I really don't know how this could be done at this point. But if the Lord says "all of our children should be taught of the Lord," and if we believe it, then it can happen by various means. Some have observed that reducing tuition does not bring all of our young people into our schools. Yet, I'm just wondering what it might be like if each local church or conference could receive into its coffers funds that are allocated for education in such a way that the conference provides schools and teachers where they are needed and all the members of the churches feel responsibility to all of the children and contributed proportionately.

ANN: Would you be calling for subsidies, then?

Simmons: You see, this is a circle. Of course I would love to see greater subsidies for education. However, in order for that to happen, we the members in each church would need to be faithful in returning a complete, honest tithe along with more generous offerings. Consider the fact that many of our members do not return tithe; think of the resources lost to education and public evangelism.

ANN: Whom do you most want to hear this message?

Simmons: Ideally I would like to see division and union leadership -- noting that unions are often most closely associated with higher education -- and then conferences, which often are most closely associated with elementary and secondary levels. Also, education administrators, teachers, parents and church members who serve as constituents who make decisions about the board and leadership of our institutions must participate. We all need a better understanding of Adventist education and the needs of the church.

ANN: How do you feel about exposing students to a variety of ideas and evidence, even if they might conflict with current official Adventist beliefs?

Simmons: I believe that's biblical. I'm fine with that. However, our responsibility, while exposing them to that which they may encounter when they go out into the world is to keep them focused on God's word. We have a responsibility to say "That's what this theory teaches us, that's what another theory teaches us, but this is what we believe, based on the Bible." When the two lines of thought are not congruent, such as the physical evidences we have in science, my position has been -- as a teacher and a parent and now a grandparent -- evidence might indicate a certain line of thought, but when the Bible indicates something different, we must continue to grow through more research and exploration in search of this truth. As we continue to grow in our understanding of the Bible, we will grow more so in our understanding of science, history and all else.

In Florida, woman charged with swindling fellow church, community members out of millions

Jean promised high interest on bogus investments, says pastor who lost savings

9 May 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
ANN staff

A South Florida woman was arrested and jailed last month on charges of swindling her fellow Seventh-day
Adventist church and community members out of millions of dollars.

Miami-Dade County prosecutors said Marguerite Martial Jean, 38, convinced 300 Haitian Americans in Miami's Little Haiti neighborhood to invest at least $3.4 million in a spurious import business from 2007 to 2010, CBS News affiliate WFOR-TV in Miami reported.

Jean told potential investors she owned a lucrative wholesale rice business, said Michael Lamartine Porcena, pastor of Eden Adventist Church in Little Haiti. Porcena, who himself invested "all I had" in her scheme, said Jean used his name to lend credibility to her business.

"She would say, 'Well, Pastor Porcena is invested in my business.' Church members thought it must be a good business if I was invested," Porcena said.

Jean, who previously attended Eden Adventist Church, most recently transferred membership to nearby Shekinah French Adventist Company, an outgrowth of Eden, Porcena said.

"I could never think that someone like her, who taught Sabbath School and was a member of the church board, would do something like that," he said.

Jean promised her investors up to 22 percent in interest on their investments, Porcena said. Claiming she earned $600 in interest on every $1,800 pallet of rice from India, Jean said she would keep $200 and hand over the remaining $400 to the investor. Instead, Jean lived off investors' money, he said.

Though rare, the incident is not the first case of affinity fraud to strike the Adventist Church. In 2008, a London court found three Adventists guilty of leading a similar fraudulent investment business.