

A New Mission School Model: *How Adventist Colleges and Universities Can Thrive and Fulfill Their Mission in the Twenty-First Century* | BY DON WILLIAMS



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A man never goes so far as when he does not know whither he is going.

—Eric Hoffer¹

During the summer of 1992, my family and I moved to Florida to help start a new Adventist college of nursing and allied health. At that time, my daughter decided to move into the girls' dormitory at Indiana Academy, where she had been attending as a village student. My son moved with us to Orlando and enrolled as a sophomore at Forest Lake Academy.

Within a year, my daughter graduated and moved home

to start her freshman year at Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences, now Adventist University of Health Sciences (AUHS), where the tuition was free because of my faculty status. By the end of that school year, however, she decided to transfer to Southern Adventist University (SAU), where she could find a more traditional campus life.

That same year, my son began a journey that would first lead him away from Adventist education and, eventually, the church. By the fall of 1994, I found both of my children on educational trajectories different from the one I was helping to shape.

The reality of these distinct paths challenged my thinking about Adventist education. I was working at a school whose standing as a “real” Seventh-day Adventist institution was being questioned because of its low Seventh-day Adventist enrollment. My daughter’s successful transition to SAU forced me to ask whether its homogeneous, conservative atmosphere had captured what was

best in Adventist education. At the same time, my son's choices made me wonder whether there was a place for nontraditional, perhaps even nonbelieving, students in Seventh-day Adventist schools.

Seventeen years later, I'm still working at the same institution, and my children have continued on the paths they started years before. My quest for an answer about what constitutes genuine Adventist education has led me to this conviction: the church must provide philosophical frameworks that help institutions and individuals who do not fit the traditional mold. Fortunately, there is a well-known approach that can be adapted to meet this challenge.

Development of Mission Schools

Most of us are aware of the Seventh-day Adventist schools around the globe whose enrollment, and perhaps even survival, depends on matriculating students who do not come from Seventh-day Adventist backgrounds. Through the years, church members have been supportive of those institutions with their tithe and mission offerings.

My first exposure to this type of school came in 1971, when my wife and I went to New Guinea as student missionaries. There, we found an educational system from primary school through college in which many, if not most, of the students came from animist homes. Later, we spent eight years working in the Far East. Most summers, I taught at the Seventh-day Adventist college in Singapore, where a significant number of the students were non-SDA. During one term, I even taught a class designed specifically to teach non-Christian students about Christianity. I also became friends with the chaplain at the Chinese Seventh-day Adventist high school, whose enrollment of church members' children never exceeded 5 percent of the total, and who baptized between thirty and forty students each year.

In each of these cases, institutions built on the mission school model proved to be the most effective evangelistic outreach in those countries. Years later, while manning the AUHS booth at a General Conference Session, I visited with a worker from New Guinea who shared that a number of members of Parliament and government leaders in his home country were Seventh-day Adventists. He attributed this to the mission schools scattered throughout the villages and towns across his nation.

Floyd Greenleaf, in his work *In Passion for the World: A History of Seventh-day Adventist Education*, tells the story of the development of mission school education in Africa.² Solusi

is, for him, the model of the Seventh-day Adventist mission school. Started on a 12,000-acre gift from Cecil Rhodes, head of the British South Africa Company, Solusi became a center for the spread of the gospel in that part of Africa.³ Converting, and then training, the future teachers of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Africa, Solusi developed a system of smaller outlying schools that, by the second decade of the twentieth century, enrolled over 3,000 students.⁴ Solusi also became an Ellen White-approved model of when it was appropriate to accept government largess at an SDA educational institution.⁵

In India, as the Adventist work spread, so did the mission school concept.

Similar to Adventist schools in Africa, the original purpose of Adventist schools [in India] was to convert students to Adventism rather than preserving Adventist children to the church—at first there were no Adventist children to preserve—but they also prepared workers. . . It was from the elementary and mission schools that the church realized membership gains.⁶

In a country with strong Hindu and Buddhist traditions, Seventh-day Adventist education became a critical evangelistic tool. "As G.G. Lowry envisioned it, the mission school was the most important vehicle to carry the gospel to the Indian masses."⁷

Seventh-day Adventist education in China developed a more complex model. There, Fredrick Griggs envisioned four categories of institutions: "Schools for the children of missionaries and English members, training schools for nationals, elementary schools conducted by church members for native children, and mission schools for the public."⁸ The approach was successful. By the beginning of the third decade of the twentieth century, the Seventh-day Adventist educational system in China was the largest outside of the North American Division.⁹

The history of those mission schools belies the "one blueprint" misconception identified by George Knight in *Myths in Adventism*.¹⁰ His contention is that there has never been a single blueprint for Adventist education. Quoting Ellen White concerning this, Knight says,

*Again in 1907 she wrote regarding the Madison School, which was doing its best to follow the "pattern" under Adventism's most zealous educational reformers, that "no exact picture can be given for the establishment of schools in new fields. The climate, the surroundings, the condition of the country, and the means at hand with which to work must all bear a part in shaping the work (CT, p. 531)."*¹¹

Clearly, the Adventist church developed several models of education even in its earliest years. From the implementation of the classical model of education at Battle Creek College, to the establishment of the Avondale Model endorsed by Ellen White, to the establishment of the schools in Africa, India, and China, Adventist education adapted to fit the time, place, and needs of the surrounding population.

So, what does this all have to say to twenty-first century Seventh-day Adventist education in North America? Let us begin with some basic facts. The North American Division has fourteen colleges and universities ranging in size from small to medium, when compared with other private institutions of higher education. Their educational offerings fall into two broad categories, liberal arts and health professions. The makeup of their student bodies divide along these lines as well. The eleven liberal arts colleges cater largely to members of the Seventh-day Adventist church. The three health professions schools, Loma Linda University, Kettering College of Medical Arts, and Adventist University of Health Sciences, enroll students from within the church, as well as significant numbers from the larger community. The number of non-Seventh-day Adventist students in the former group of colleges ranges from 4 percent to 30 percent. The latter three institutions have enrollments of the same demographic, ranging from 50 percent to 90 percent.¹²

While the health sciences schools might seem to fit the mission school model, it would be inaccurate to give them that label. The traditional mission schools had certain aspects in common:

1. They were established in developing countries where the number of Adventists was low—too low, in most cases to support a school for the children of church members only.
2. Typically, the government educational system was nascent or non-existent.¹³
3. Other, more traditional, means of evangelism were challenging, at best.
4. Within the family and the culture at large,

education was seen as an important avenue to a better life.

5. While there were various times and places where the colonial link with mission endeavors were seen as a negative factor, in many cases the idea of a foreign-sponsored school had built-in appeal, especially to the elite.

While Loma Linda, Kettering, and Adventist University of Health Sciences do not share most of the above factors, they do share one central characteristic with the traditional mission school—they have reached beyond the church roles to define their circle of influence on a much broader scale. Because their parent medical institutions cannot conduct business with only the number of Adventist health care professionals available, each of these educational institutions has purposefully reached beyond the church for students, faculty, and staff. Depending on one's point of view, the result has been either a breach in the wall defending the denomination's youth, or an opportunity to impact the world for good.

A New Model

To provide a framework to guide those institutions with a significant number of non-SDA students, I am proposing the New Mission School Model. It is an approach that addresses the contextual issues identified by Ellen White as critical in developing effective educational institutions—"the climate, the surroundings, the condition of the country, and the means at hand with which to work."¹⁴

The New Mission School Model provides a way of dealing with these factors in a principled, rather than a pragmatic, way. This model does not replace the original mission school model, which is still an effective educational and evangelistic approach in many parts of the world. Rather, it builds in a mission approach that will help them address the unique challenges faced by the growing number of non-SDA students, faculty, and staff.

A critical component of this model is based

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upon the concept of the centered set. Centered sets and their converse, bounded sets, are sociological models that identify the organizing principles used to define group membership. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch in their book *The Shaping of Things to Come* use the agricultural metaphor of wells and fences to illustrate their understanding of centered and bounded sets.¹⁵ In their native Australia, water wells, rather than barbed wire fences, are used to control herds of livestock. Providing a source of water keeps the animals centered geographically. In America, ranches are more likely to use fences to corral their herds. The Australian way could be considered a centered set, and the American way a bounded one.¹⁶

And so it is with the church; if Christ is at the center, individuals are drawn to him as the source of living water (see John 3:14–15). Centered set institutions identify an individual's movement toward or away from Christ as the defining principle for "membership." In contrast, bounded sets have criteria such as doctrines or religious practices that help a church know who is in or out of their group.

Bruce Bauer, an Adventist missiologist, sees the centered set church placing Jesus at its heart.¹⁷ While baptism (and therefore church membership) still plays an important role at the beginning of the Christian life, discipleship, with its goal of moving people toward the center, is the end. In contrast, he identifies three characteristics of bounded sets. One, they are created by "listing essential characteristics." Two, "objects inside

the set share [common] characteristics." And three, these sets identify who is either inside or outside of their boundaries.

The adoption of the centered set within an educational model has important implications. Institutions using this approach view their students not in terms of whether they are in or out of the church, but whether they want to move closer in their relationship with God.

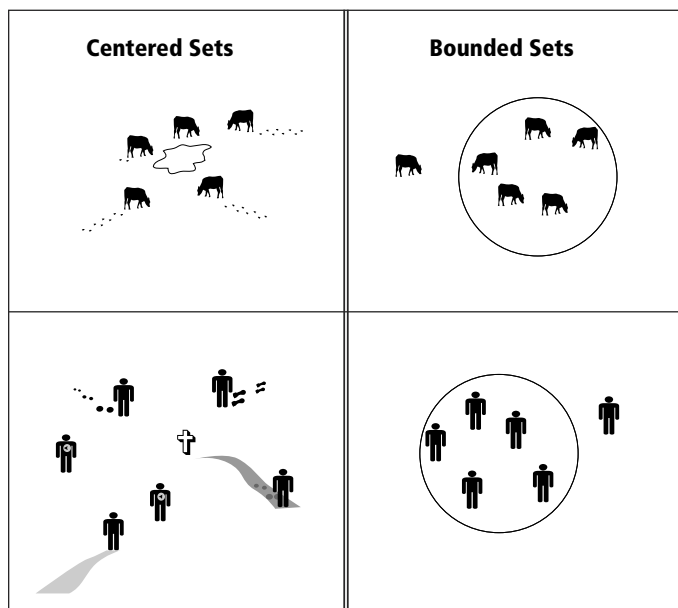
My experience at Adventist University of Health Sciences is indicative of what I know has happened many times at each of the health sciences schools. The opportunity to teach hundreds of non-Adventist students in the religion courses at AUHS has been one of the great joys of my life. When asked by church members whether I was teaching Adventist truths, I replied that I always taught the Bible from an Adventist perspective. The centered set approach brought in students who wanted an education in a faith-based environment, and did not preclude the teaching of Adventist doctrine. In fact, it ensured that the Christ-centered basis for each of these doctrines was what was being taught.

Thus, within the context of the New Mission School Model, students who are not members of the Seventh-day Adventist church should be considered part of the marketing mix. If an institution has made its faith orientation clear, any student interested in growing within that environment should be considered for admission. Both Loma Linda and Adventist University of Health Sciences have their statements of mission on their recommendation forms. Individuals asked to complete those forms are encouraged to give their feedback on whether that prospect is a good fit in light of the school's orientation.

The inclusion of these students can help schools fulfill their evangelistic mission.¹⁸ When criticized by others for having a "mixed multitude" at Adventist University of Health Sciences, I always respond by asking which of those students would they not want sitting in Bible class. Many stories could be told of students who have never entered a church before, but who found Christ as a result of going to school in that environment. The AUHS student from Communist China who became a Christian, and the Hindu student who was baptized several years ago, quickly come to mind.

One might ask what the presence of this type of individual has on the institution's Adventist students. I believe institutions with this mix provide a healthy, real-world

Centered and Bounded Sets



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environment for Seventh-day Adventist students preparing for their lives and careers. Rather than bringing distractions or temptations that they may not otherwise be exposed to, rubbing shoulders with peers of different persuasions can actually strengthen and clarify their own faith. Students who have grown up within the Adventist educational system are challenged to not only stake out their spiritual turf, but also explain it to others. A number of students I have worked with at Adventist University of Health Sciences have stated that this environment has helped make their faith real.

At the same time, this approach can help ensure the economic viability of institutions designed for the education of the church's children. Sadly, if the financial rationale for admitting non-Seventh-day Adventists is placed first, the mission/evangelistic goal may be watered down or missed altogether. However, kept in its appropriate place, the financial benefits can be significant.

This means that institutions using the New Mission School Model must be very purposeful in their mission emphasis. This is critical, not only for the success of this approach, but for the true success of the institution. For example, at AUHS each academic department has committed to having prayer and a devotional thought before each class period. Even online course chats begin with prayer requests and prayer. Sadly, in my undergraduate experience at another Seventh-day Adventist college, only the religion teachers regularly had prayer in class. In my major field of study, psychology, no attempt was made on the part of my professors to give me an Adventist, or even Christian, perspective in a very secular field. I tell myself that I should have figured it out on my own, but speaking as one who found Christ in college, I didn't know anyone who could guide me in the process. Perhaps my teachers assumed or presumed too much because of the homogeneous makeup of the student body.

With the presence of students from a wide variety of backgrounds in the health sciences

schools, no assumptions can be made about what the students already know or believe. In the New Mission School Model, no aspect of school life is left unaffected by the overall spiritual mission of the college. Every employee hired is screened for mission fit, not just for church affiliation. Every course is designed with the spiritual/moral/ethical development of the student in mind.

In reality, the New Mission School Model is a framework that can address what is already happening at all of our colleges and universities. As seen from the enrollment statistics stated previously, non-SDA students are already on our campuses, and in growing numbers. Many are in graduate and evening adult education programs. One institution is contemplating a partnership with the local community college. Others are opening programs in response to needs in their state, rather than just in their Adventist constituency.

It is not that the more traditional Seventh-day Adventist institutions don't care about the mission impact of these trends. They do. What I am concerned about is that, as a church, we have no model to guide the demographic changes taking place to ensure their fit to mission. Perhaps we have even been guilty of downplaying these changes because they have not been mission driven. In some cases, I fear we have slid into these trends and programs for financial reasons. Thus, spiritual opportunities may be missed and important services neglected. For example, what should the chaplain's office, student services or residence halls look like with a significant number of students coming from non-Adventist or non-Christian backgrounds?

What strikes me is that while some may recognize that there is more than one model operating in North America (e.g., Loma Linda), even this institution is frequently criticized sotto voce for not fitting the traditional model. In Floyd Greenleaf's (2005) comprehensive history of Adventist higher education, I find no mention of either Kettering or Adventist University of Health Sciences. Clearly, these institutions do

not meet what might be considered the traditional model or blueprint for Adventist higher education. A recent article on Seventh-day Adventist education in a church paper, in an area where one of the above institutions resides, did not mention the nontraditional college within its territory, while fairly extensive coverage was given to both the traditional institutions as well as the nontraditional high schools and homeschools.

I propose that, rather than ignore (as in the case of Kettering and Adventist University of Health Sciences) or criticize (as in the case of Loma Linda), the church should learn from the approaches these institutions are pioneering, and, where appropriate, embrace them. There is no doubt that seeking a heterogeneous environment presents significant challenges and that these institutions have fallen short many times of their own goals. However, in spite of the challenges, much good has been done by these schools, and lives have been changed which might not have been, were it not for their efforts.

An additional benefit of the New Mission School Model is that many students from SDA homes who are not choosing Adventist schools may give this type of education a second look. With a larger pool of applicants to choose from, these schools may be able to offer their education at a lower tuition level. A significant part of church growth in the North American Division in recent years has been coming from first-generation immigrant communities. These families may not have yet reached the median income levels found in the general population. Their children might be better able to afford this option.

Looking at the benefits from the perspective of the students who do not fit into a traditional Adventist environment, the New Mission School Model institution may provide an attractive option. With its centered set approach that looks at one's openness to spiritual matters rather than behavioral or doctrinal ones, this model may provide an attractive atmosphere for these nontraditional students. It is not that spirituality is a soft sell in this new model; it is simply presented in ways that may appeal to them.

Caveats

Up until now, I have identified the benefits of the New Mission School Model. There are weaknesses and dangers inherent in it as well. One of the most obvious is the fact that parents send their children to Seventh-day Adventist colleges not only to find a career, but also to potentially

find a life partner. At a school where there are a significant number of students not of our faith, the odds increase that those students might fall in love with someone outside that circle.

With that reality in mind, several countervailing factors must also be noted. If this type of school is able to attract Adventist students who might have ended up at a public institution, they will at least have greater odds of meeting an Adventist mate in one of these schools than in the public sector.

Also, one of the realities of Adventist students living in this more diverse environment is that they have the potential of ending up with a stronger, clearer sense of their own spiritual values. As a result, I believe those solidified spiritual values will help them choose mates with greater discernment. For example, while the single Seventh-day Adventist students at AUHS have individuals from many faith backgrounds to choose a mate from, to my knowledge (and this is certainly not a scientific study), I am not aware of one Seventh-day Adventist student at AUHS who has married outside their faith as a result of attending AUHS. While that does not mean it won't happen, it does indicate the risk of poor choices may not be as high as feared.

A concern often expressed by the church organization is the creeping compromise that, it is assumed, will accompany the trend of accepting more non-SDA students. There is no doubt that this is a possibility if this direction is chosen for the wrong reason or without a clear mission in mind. That has not been the case with the traditional mission schools when they have stayed true to their mission mentality.

The works of two men are often cited when raising this concern: Philip Marsden's study of the drift to secularism in the Ivy League schools in *The Soul of the American University*,¹⁹ and James Burtchaell's similar study of smaller denominationally related schools in his work *The Dying of the Light*.²⁰ Both authors document the drift away from spiritual mission and denominational orientation by many well-known and respected schools such as Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Duke, and Wake Forest. Their analysis should act as a cautionary tale for Seventh-day Adventist education. The factors identified by these authors as leading these institutions toward secularism are as follows:

1. Weak or tangential denominational linkage from the beginning of the school
2. Spiritual matters relegated to the religion department or the service sectors on campus

3. A clear identification by the faculty with larger trends in society, such as evolution in the sciences and postmodernism in the humanities
4. A decline and disappearance of financial and leadership support from the founding denomination
5. A desire to be open and tolerant of all points of view—
a movement away from the truths and absolutes identifiable at the founding of these institutions

The trends identified by these authors are real and must be addressed, but they are not inevitable. For example, there is a difference between intellectual drift toward a particular position (or for that matter away from one), and a well-thought-out decision to take a particular position and provide the support to make it happen. In the case of the New Mission School Model, a conscious choice is made to diversify the student body. That need not mean a corresponding watering down of beliefs or mission. In fact, as stated earlier, it may mean a more intentional mission, and more clearly chosen theological positions.

I believe that there is an important distinction between a drift or slide and a carefully embraced approach to Christian education. One may not agree with those choices, but the fact that they are well thought-out and have a clear basis in mission can make a big difference in the final outcome.

A related issue is that of hiring faculty members who are not members of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Does the embracing of the New Mission School Model result in a corresponding increase in the number of teachers who are not Adventist? Not necessarily. With the three health care institutions, it would appear to be the case. These schools not only have the highest percentage of non-Adventist students, but they also have the highest number of non-SDA teachers. According to the *World Report 2007*, the percentage of non-SDA teachers

at these three schools was as follows: Loma Linda—35 percent, Adventist University of Health Sciences—40 percent, and Kettering—69 percent. The percentage for the liberal arts institutions ranges from almost nil to 17.5 percent.²¹

Since mission is lived out by faculty members (and staff as well), does the presence of those who may not embrace all of the fundamental tenets of the Seventh-day Adventist church inhibit the accomplishment of that mission? Though Robert Andringa identifies a strong president as one of three recommended best practices for Christian colleges, he also says that, “if a campus wants to position itself as a distinctly religious institution, one key is to hire faculty who see faith not just as a private matter but as one central to the development of the whole person.”^{22, 23}

Both Burtchaell and Marsden attribute the drift in the schools they studied at least in part to the hiring of faculty with different spiritual values and beliefs. Burtchaell states,

Whatever presidents and trustees do, whatever be the market forces imposed by those who pay (students and benefactors), the inertial force of these institutions is in their faculties. And in our saga, the faculty was the first constituency to lose interest in their colleges being Lutheran or Catholic or Congregational. The faculty shifted from clerical to lay status before the presidency did. The faculty resided farther from their students [colonial institutions had students living with faculty], became dissociated from responsibility for their moral discipline and from partnership in their piety.²⁴

In his “Concluding Unscientific Postscript,” Marsden addresses this issue in particular for the liberal Protestant institutions he was studying.

Throughout the first sixty years of the twentieth century, as prevailing intellectual ideals became less friendly to religious concerns and the dominance of the mainline Protestant ethos receded, Protestant leaders became increasingly uneasy with this original arrangement [the exclusion of religion from the core business of their universities]. They realized that in academic life itself it favored purely naturalistic and materialistic worldviews. In response, they added campus ministries, schools of religion, chaplains,

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*impressive chapel buildings, student programs, and literature to promote religious concerns. They had limited success, however, in challenging the original definitions of academic life, and with the cultural upheavals of the 1960s, such efforts declined as well. Academic life remained a haven largely freed from religious perspectives.*²⁵

In thinking about this issue, several factors must be taken into account before any conclusions can be reached. The first is that membership in the Seventh-day Adventist church does not guarantee either doctrinal buy-in or spiritual commitment. A look at the history of any of the institutions of higher education in the NAD reveals action on the part of administration to reform or remove Seventh-day Adventist faculty members who do not meet institutional spiritual bona fides. Certainly, the movement on the part of the General Conference to institute the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education attests to these concerns relative to faculty in the religion departments. And there has been informal discussion at various levels within the church as to whether a statement of faith in young earth creationism on the part of science teachers is also warranted.

Another factor to consider is the challenge that the health professions schools face in recruiting and retaining Adventist faculty. Even when there is a preference for Seventh-day Adventist educators, if a position comes open in a professional program and no Adventist accepts, should the school close down the program? Large programs such as nursing present less of a problem than allied health, but even if there is a policy to search for Adventists first, I'm sure that each of the three schools in North America have had to make strategic choices to get the best candidate available.

Since faculty members play such a critical role in mission, there are several strategies used by Seventh-day Adventist health care institutions and the schools they run. One, hire a Seventh-day Adventist first if he or she is qualified. Two, keep Seventh-day Adventists in institutional leadership positions. Three, core areas of mission delivery must have qualified Seventh-day Adventists or no one. Four, no matter who is hired for whatever position, the institution should never compromise on mission. Each person hired at AUHS is interviewed by the president for mission fit.

Would the ideal be to have a faculty of academically qualified, Seventh-day Adventist teachers? Perhaps. But there are two problems with that. One, some employees from other faiths may have as much or more of a commit-

ment to the Christ-centered approach we are striving for. It was a non-SDA faculty member who proposed the pre-chat prayer sessions for our online classes. Two, it is unlikely to happen at the health science schools for the reasons stated above.

In fact, as counterintuitive as it may seem to some, the presence of non-Adventist teachers keeps us from falling into the trap of assuming we are all on the same page when, in fact, we almost never are. That has benefits for both employees and students.

One of the trends identified by Marsden is the influence of fundamentalism on the devolution of the institutions he studied.²⁶ As a reaction to biblical higher criticism and evolution during the early part of the twentieth century, the fundamentalist movement played a major role in driving a wedge between the denominations and the educational institutions they had founded.

There appears to be a similar trend taking place in Adventism today. The development of Weimar and Heartland a generation ago, and the more recent development of the ministerial training centers such as the Black Hills Health and Education Center, are an indication of the split between the traditional colleges and universities within Adventism and those members who believe the drift mentioned above has already taken place. These feelings are strong enough that some conferences are reluctant to hire ministerial graduates unless they have come from either Southern Adventist University or the Black Hills Health and Education Center. Several years ago, the academic deans at two Seventh-day Adventist colleges reported at a meeting of the Association of Adventist Academic Administrators that they each had only one ministerial graduate hired as pastors by the local conferences. At the same time, a number of those completing a ministerial program at self-supporting ministerial institutes had been hired as pastors in the same conferences.

What does this trend have to do with the New Mission School Model? First of all, it is a recognition that there is in fact more than one blueprint for Adventist education already operating in the North American Division. Second, the needs of a wide variety of homes and students must be met, and the traditional campuses may not be able to be all things to all people. Third, in their own way, and from a more fundamentalist approach, these new institutions are as sincere in their attempt to accomplish mission-driven goals as are Loma Linda and Adventist University of

Health Sciences. I believe the church is a healthier place not only for having this wide variety of institutions, but also because the competition/dialogue among these entities will make all of them stronger. As in the case of my daughter, not all institutions will be a good fit for all students. Options should be available so students can choose.

Conclusion

The New Mission School Model with the centered set paradigm provides a philosophical framework for recruiting students from outside the fold, and growing them spiritually in ways that are consistent with the overarching purpose for Adventist education. While there are challenges inherent in the model, I believe the benefits outweigh the potential harm.

Does Adventism need another model of higher education? I believe one is needed. The downward trend in enrollment, the increased number of students from other faiths at our institutions of higher education, and the fundamentalist divide all demand we look at education in new ways. ■

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There is an important distinction between a drift or slide and a carefully embraced approach to Christian education.

Mugging → continued from page 7...

the light.

Again, he opened the door and put one foot on the ground.

“Okay. I’ve got one foot out. Now give me the money.”

I shook my head. “Not till you are all out and shut the door.”

“You’ll floor it and take off! You’ll call the cops!”

I shook my head again and leaned forward. “You forgot. *We don’t lie!* And we won’t call the cops. But there’s one thing you’re going to have to watch out for. We turned you over to God tonight. He’s going to be after you until he catches you. He loves you and wants you in heaven. He’s better than cops.”

Leaning toward him as he half-exited the car, Sherri chimed in.

“Yeah, God’s going to do something in your life. Watch for it *this* week. He’ll intervene in your life somehow. You’re going to be all right.”

He sighed, and leaped out of the car.

George held the money out the window at arm’s length.

He hesitated, shut the door, snatched the money, and then grabbed George’s hand and uncovered his face.

“I’m sorry,” he blurted, “and I’ll try to make restitution somehow. I promise I won’t do this again. You’re good people.”

And with that, he turned and ran back up the access road—we think. None of us looked to see where he’d gone! We just drove off.

We hadn’t gone two blocks before Sherri said, “Oh no! Daneen and Stephen might still be at the theater. He might get back there and hold them up—and they have the offering from both showings in a big popcorn bucket. I have to warn them!” She dialed Daneen’s number. We had all

been so calm during the holdup, but now Sherri’s hand shook so hard that she could barely hold the phone to her ear. To her relief, Daneen reported that they were in the car on their way home. Sherri told her what had just happened.

“No!” Daneen exclaimed. “We came out of the theater right after you. It’s a good thing he wasn’t standing there, then, because someone asked how much we’d gotten in offerings, and a student called out, ‘\$980! Isn’t that great?’ After Stephen and I said good-night, we made our way to the rental car, which we’d parked on the far edge of the lot in the dark. If that guy hadn’t gone with you, we’d have lost all the offering! I’m so thankful you weren’t hurt. This is terrible!”

True to our promise, we didn’t call the police. But the faculty member who had rented the viewing site did inform the theater manager that someone had been mugged, and he should request police protection for his patrons after midnight.

Back at the hotel, we read Psalm 91 and thanked God for guardian angels. In trying to process the whole thing, we puzzled over why all three of us felt we should pick up this fellow—although it was 12:45 a.m. in a notoriously high-crime town.

“I think God struck us stupid,” Sherri concluded. “He wanted to intervene in that young man’s life and protect the movie money. It’s kind of like the sixty dollars he took was insurance on the \$980! If you’d told him no when he asked for a ride, he’d either have pulled the gun on us then, or robbed Stephen and Daneen when they came out a few minutes later. They were young and fit and more of a threat, and if he had overheard the amount of

money they had, the stakes would have been higher, and they could have been hurt badly.

“Two old people and a woman had looked like an easy mark. He just hadn’t counted on a car full of angels! As soon as he told us to turn away from McDonald’s, I made a plan. I thought if he did anything strange, I’d throw out my left arm and karate chop him across the face and follow it with a right punch. But when he said it was a holdup, God just filled me with love for the guy. We’d been talking all evening about God loving everyone, and I guess God gave me a glimpse of what it’s like to look through his eyes.”

Since then, we’ve been praying for the young robber, asking God to turn his life around. We can hardly wait for heaven to hear the rest of the story. ■

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involved in Adventist education since 1961. She holds a master of arts in teaching. She has published twelve books and numerous arti-

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