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Affirming the pastor: “Gatekeeper” to Seventh-day Adventist education

We left while it was still dark. The sun began to rise as we descended into the Great Rift Valley in Kenya. We were on our way to Kamagambo Adventist College to hold a conference for 700 teachers. As we traveled, our driver told us how the work started there. Back in 1906, Arthur Carscallen came to Kenya after graduating from what would later become Newbold College in England. He settled in Nyanza province in an area of tribal warfare between the Luo and Kisii people. After years of fruitless effort trying to plant churches, Carscallen started a school and enrolled four children. This proved to be a massive engine for church growth.

Following his example, some missionaries left Nyanza for the central region, and they started a school among the Kikuyu, who were otherwise hostile to the colonials “taking our land.” The father of our driver was one of those earliest students in Muruguru at the foot of Mount Kenya. While there he accepted Christ and went on to become a pastor. Today one of his sons is vice president of finance for Hope Channel in Silver Spring, Maryland, and the other—our driver, and the source of my information—is Dr. Andrew Mutero, education director for the East-Central Africa Division. As of 2015, we have 55 primary schools, 36 secondary schools, and two universities in Kenya, with a church membership of over 866,296.

Then I was in Peru. This time I traveled by boat to a school on the highest navigable body of water in the world, in the remote Peruvian Andes, with education director Jorge Maquera as our guide. Jorge Maquera has now written *Operación Andes Libres: Construyendo la Utopía*, informing us that education also

launched gospel outreach in Peru. There are now 90 primary and 69 secondary Adventist schools, and 27,000 students in Peru. At Peruvian Union University, another 7,000 tertiary students are preparing for service as pastors, nurses, physicians, teachers, and in other professions. In 2015, Seventh-day Adventist membership was 407,492 in Peru.

I’m happy that in Africa, India, the Philippines, and Inter- and South America, among other areas, the demand for schools and teachers exceeds the available supply. But I’m mourning because in other parts of our world field, Seventh-day Adventist parents are making other choices, Seventh-day Adventist schools are closing, and Seventh-day Adventist children and young people by the thousands are missing out on the mental, physical, social, and spiritual blessings of Adventist Christian education.


Dr. Ella Simmons, vice president for the world church and a local church elder, speaks with joy and humility about the successful partnership she had with her local pastor as the principal of a church school. As educators we want pastors to know that we accept Dr. George Knight’s pastoral challenge that the goal of the school must run hand in hand with the goal of the church, namely, to train our students and church members to carry the apocalyptic message of Revelation 14:6–12 to all the world, until Christ returns.

I began by highlighting two regions I recently visited. I close by highlighting three pastors I recently encountered. The first was a youth pastor whom I met with her homeschool association. They were on fire for Adventist education. Everybody received the book *Education* by Ellen White.* Most parents do not

home school, though. For these parents, the good news is that as of 2015 there are 8,208 Seventh-day Adventist schools around the world from which to choose, with 102,779 teachers educating some 1,922,990 students.

The second pastor I encountered was Dr. Jiri Moskala, dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. All master of divinity students will now take a course on the ministry of education! Dr. Moskala believes that church schools must be “powerful evangelistic centers for building bridges in the community.” They can be centers for creative programs that draw people to the school who might not readily come to events in the church. “The school,” he says, “should be a church during the week.”

My final pastor is South American Division president, Erton Köhler. He said, “We don’t have schools. Rather, we have churches that we build in the shape of schools!”

Home, school, and church; parents, teachers, and pastors: “A threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccles. 4:12, KJV). 

My training in theology and my service in chaplaincy have given me an unquestionable appreciation for one thing: the sacrificial work of pastoral ministry. Thank you, pastors, for what you do in the churches. Thank you for what you do in the hospitals. And, from the bottom of my heart, and on behalf of educators around the world, thank you for what you do in our schools. We love you; we need you; and we thank you.

* I recommend this book to every pastor, as well as receiving the *Journal of Adventist Education* (jae.adventist.org). Both are available in many languages and as apps for computers and smartphones.

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