

South Pacific Division

Change and Con- solidation

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Lester Devine

During the past few years, the church's education ministry in the South Pacific basin has changed from a highly centralized program to one led by a resource-based division office of education. This shift in emphasis began under the leadership of Dr. Gerald Clifford, who during his 15-year tenure as director of education took a loose collection of free-standing schools and created a highly organized and professionally run K-16 system of education—a remarkable achievement and a lasting tribute to his ability and leadership.

Changes during the Clifford era included the upgrading of teachers, the establishing of a new college in Papua New Guinea to train young people from Melanesia and Polynesia

for service to their own people, and a program of nationalization to coordinate the withdrawal of expatriate educators back to Australia and New Zealand. The number of schools, students, and teachers doubled between 1975 and 1985, which resulted in a relatively inexperienced teacher workforce, more than two-thirds of whom had less than 10 years of teaching service. During the past decade, senior educational leadership has had to adjust to the shift from an authoritarian tradition to a more collegial relationship with the educators.

Today, 82 percent of the South Pacific Division membership lives in three union missions. The remaining 18 percent live in the two union conferences in Australia and New Zealand, which have the major burden of financing the church work in the entire region. As academic standards rise in the island nations of the Pacific basin, it has become clear that boarding schools can no longer support themselves through fees or farm and plantation income. Accordingly, funding an educational infrastructure with an exploding membership growth has proved to be a significant challenge for church leadership—one that requires a careful long- and short-term planning.

"Toward 2000," the SPD Department of Education's strategic planning document for 1990-1995, can be summarized in three goal statements:

The South Pacific Division Department of Education will develop and implement strategies to renew the vision of Adventist education, highlight its distinctives, improve its overall quality and bring it closer to God's ideal setting for the children entrusted to its care through:

1. *Presenting to the students a more attractive eternal and glorious vision of what redemption is in practice in contrast to the immediacy of contemporary world views based on existential and self-operative principles.*

2. *Helping the teachers through precept and example to improve relationships between themselves, their leadership, and their students, thereby*

ensuring the learning environment is truly a saving place.

3. *Inspiring principals to accept their role as agents of change, thereby ensuring the vision of Adventist education is effectively transmitted to the several publics which form the school community.*

The major emphases of the past quinquennium may accordingly be classified under four headings:

Administration

We are switching from direct supervision of SPD schools by government and church authorities to an accreditation process that uses visiting teams and self-studies. All 100 schools in Australia and New Zealand and all secondary schools in the union missions will be accredited by the end of this quinquennium. In 1994, two elementary schools in the Solomon Islands were the first grade schools in the union missions to gain accreditation. Particularly gratifying was the decision of the State of New South Wales to allow the SDA accreditation process to replace the government inspection and re-registration procedures—a landmark decision and the first of its kind in Australia.

As part of SPD educational restructuring, the union education directors have been given significant additional authority. This has enabled the division to withdraw from heavy routine administrative involvement in the schools of Australia and New Zealand and allowed division directors of education to focus on consulting resources and professional growth issues.

The four colleges in the division are now coordinated by a tertiary education board, established last quinquennium to ensure that the programs of the several colleges complement one another.

For a time, it appeared the church would lose all 17 schools in New Zealand because of the depressed

national economy and resulting unemployment. However, after much hard work, contracts were negotiated between each school, the conference, and the government, which now appropriates money to cover salaries and most operating expenses of the schools. In return, each school commits itself to maintaining the special character it has outlined in its charter and to offer free tuition. Enrollments have increased 40 percent in New Zealand in the two years since this program began, and the teachers are

ment financial support.

Curriculum

Much credit goes to Ian Howie and his team, whose creative abilities have won worldwide respect for their elementary curriculum development program, which began in 1988 and has moved from the development to the implementation phase. Don Roy, formerly head of the Education Department at Avondale College, has assumed the responsibility for the equally important implementation phase.

Max Miller delayed his retirement to ensure the completion of an elementary curriculum for developing nations, which could not have been produced without his expertise and experience. The 125 inexpensive documents in this series are specially designed for “bush schools” with limited resources and minimal teacher training and are available for use in other divisions.

With the support of “cluster groups,” Barry Hill has completed 16 secondary curriculum frameworks. The General Conference has provided copies to all divisions as well as to its colleges and universities. Barry is currently working with Inge-Lise Butler to rewrite the secondary Bible curriculum—a major task that will take until 1997 to complete.

Evidence suggested that during the late 1980s, SPD’s system of education was in danger of secularization. The Curriculum Unit, established in 1988, has successfully worked with the teachers to reverse that trend, has contributed significantly to the quality of the academic program and, just as importantly, has highlighted the soul-winning work of the minister-teacher. As a consequence, we believe that the SPD system of education today is much closer to the ideal than it has ever been and are grateful for that to all those who have worked so hard in

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As part of Australia’s bicentennial activities, Kempsey Adventist School students dress as convicts and work at plank desks.

very conscious of the need to demonstrate uniquely Seventh-day Adventist practices in keeping with the statement of special character accepted by government.

Most governments in the South Pacific Division assist with the cost of operating the Adventist school system. Rommert Spoor serves as full-time education liaison between the church with national and state governments. His work, along with the structure of our educational program in Australia, has led to a significant level of support from commonwealth and state governments. The government authorities appreciate the fact that Adventist education is philosophically driven, compared with some groups that seem preoccupied with demanding additional govern-

the Unit and to the conferences that provided the funding. However, curriculum development is a process—not a product—and because we are in an era of rapid change, we realize that much remains to be done!

Teacher Development

Some 39 students have completed M.A. degrees this quinquennium through the La Sierra University extension program at Avondale College (Cooranbong, New South Wales), which includes a summer session at the LSU campus in California, U.S.A. Currently, 16 teachers are enrolled in a similar LSU program in counseling. Many other teachers are receiving assistance from their local conferences to study for advanced degrees at local universities. Avondale College is providing a summer upgrading program for elementary teachers that leads to a Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree. In addition, each conference has established chapters of CAPE (Curriculum for Adventist Primary Educators) and in eastern Australia and New Zealand, CASE (Curriculum for Adventist Secondary Educators). These organizations are “owned and operated” by teachers to meet their needs. The division also sponsors an annual conference for elementary and secondary principals on a three-year cycle to promote the “Thrust of Adventist Education.” In addition, teacher training at Fulton, Pacific Adventist, and Sonoma

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Students at Imbo School on the island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands.

Adventist colleges has been recently upgraded from two-year to three-year programs. Two years ago, Avondale College added a fourth year to its elementary teacher-education program. The most recent innovation has been the introduction of a Bachelor of Education (Primary) program at Pacific Adventist College in Papua New Guinea, an in-service course designed to upgrade experienced teachers to

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Happy students at Nunawading Adventist Primary School in Melbourne, Australia.

this degree level. Finally, curriculum development workshops have been provided for teachers in Papua New Guinea, the Kingdom of Tonga, the Solomon Islands, and Samoa. These workshops have led to significant improvement not only in the academics at the participating schools, but also in the schools’ external examination and achievement test results.

Island Mission Program

Much effort has gone into improving the educational program in the Pacific island nations during this quinquennium. Nine national secondary teachers have completed their M.A. degrees and the first national with a Ph.D. is now serving as principal of Fulton College in Fiji. Several island nations are providing government scholarships for Adventist youth to attend Pacific Adventist College in Papua New Guinea. A major effort has gone into establishing Adventist schools in urban areas across the Pacific, which have been long ne-

glected. New elementary schools have opened in Port Moresby and Lae in Papua New Guinea and at Honiara in the Solomon Islands, and a new secondary school has opened in Suva, Fiji. These desperately needed schools serve constituencies of educated and employed church members. In developing nations where education is the passport to a good life, they are the key to the success of the next generation of the church.

The year 1994 was a landmark time because the last two career-length island educators in the South Pacific Division retired: Alan Sonter, principal of Pacific Adventist College in Papua New Guinea, and Ray Wilkinson, director of education for the Western Pacific Union Mission and founding principal of Pacific Adventist College. To these dedicated men and their wives much is owed. They have been instrumental in preparing national workers to take over from them—who will doubtless serve with equal ability and commitment!—*Lester Devine, Director of Education, South Pacific Division.*

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Fifth-grade students from Avondale School (Australia) enjoy produce from their class garden.