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Ensuring the Safety and Well-Being of God's Children

Even before the mass shooting at Virginia Tech and the deadly fire at Southern Adventist University, I felt strongly that the JOURNAL needed to alert its readers about the dangers facing schools today and offer some suggestions that will help them prevent and deal with disasters that may befall their campuses. To prepare an issue on school safety, I immersed myself for several months in reading about and discussing with a variety of experts the many kinds of disasters that can and do strike schools, ranging from bombings to hurricanes to pandemics.



While thinking about all these alarming possibilities, I've struggled to find a balance between trusting that God will protect us and taking reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of the children He has entrusted to our care.

Many Bible texts promise God's protection against evil people, disease, and other calamities (Psalm 91 immediately comes to mind). But other texts speak of taking appropriate precautions (Matthew 24:43-46). I believe that God has given us the privilege of cooperating with Him in caring for the young people in our classrooms and preparing them for life in a dangerous world.

Ellen White wrote: "The teacher . . . must consider the highest good of his pupils as individuals, the duties that life will lay upon them, the service it requires, and the preparation demanded. The work he is doing day by day will exert upon his pupils, and through them upon others, an influence that will not cease to extend and strengthen until time shall end. . . . The teacher who realizes this will not feel that his work is completed when he has finished the daily routine of recitations. . . . He will carry these children and youth upon his heart" (*Education*, p. 281).

With this in mind, it was time to decide what topics an issue on school safety should include. Special thanks go to Patricia Mutch, who gave unstintingly of her time and expertise in advising about the preparation of the issue. (Some of the areas we struggled with: What topics should be given the highest priority? How do we ensure that the articles are relevant to the JOURNAL's varied readership—teachers and administrators in schools around the world, whose students range from kindergarteners through graduate students? How do the hazards vary from place to place? Where do we find authors with expertise in these topics?)

Accordingly, articles were assigned on a variety of subjects: preparing for the unexpected, ensuring that troubled students get help and do not harm others, preventing school violence, setting up crisis intervention teams at schools, a summary of measures that Adventist colleges have taken to ensure student safety, how one school dealt with recovery after a natural disaster, and how to set up a mass notification system. Other topics, like preventing child abuse, legal issues relating to supervision and school safety, and bullying will be dealt with in future issues.

Helpful input from peer reviewers ensured that the information presented was accurate and up to date. Their recommendations also led to the inclusion of Websites, books, and other resources that will help your school plan for and prevent many kinds of disasters, and deal appropriately with those that do occur. Authors and reviewers also recommended curriculum materials for teaching about personal safety.

For teachers, providing instruction about planning for disasters and ensuring personal safety offers an additional bonus: Their influence can have long-term effects, benefiting the parents and siblings of their students, the local community, and later, their students' children! And teachers and administrators will have the satisfaction of having done all they could to ensure the safety and well-being of God's children.

—**Beverly J. Robinson-Rumble**