

Educating Citizens for God's Kingdom

While touring an Adventist hospital, I visited the intensive care unit. A newborn baby, the child of a family of artisans, was connected to sophisticated medical equipment and cared for by highly trained medical personnel, all in order to sustain his life. Each day the child was there cost thousands of dollars. Perhaps in the course of this child's life, he would never earn the equivalent of what it cost to save him. However, his life was so valuable that the expense and the effort to save him were worthwhile.

Who can measure the value of a human life? God is the one who gives true value to the lives of human beings—so much so that He willingly gave His own life to save humanity (John 3:16). Education is about life. The most authentic way that societies show their love and respect for life is

through providing what their citizens need to thrive.

The Adventist Church recognizes the need to provide education to equip young people for service here and to prepare them for the heavenly kingdom. Additional needs include retention in our schools and evangelism throughout the community. Investment in education will enhance the future of individuals and of society in general.

The Inter-American Division (IAD) (comprised of Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Surinam, and French Guiana) places a high value on Adventist education. The church has both a solemn responsibility to introduce its young people to Jesus and to ensure their lifelong loyalty to the church. The rapid growth in membership within this region stimulates excitement and hope for the future; however, it also presents enormous challenges. Because of this, the IAD Board voted to emphasize Adventist education throughout its territory

by designating 2010-2015 as the “Quinquennium of Education,” challenging church leaders and members to identify and solve the problems faced by our schools, colleges, and universities.

The IAD headquarters set an example by increasing its Department of Education staff in order to enhance the assistance provided to its institutions, as well as the development of primary education. A development model was created that identified three strategies to be used in meeting the expected objectives: Revival and Reformation, Growth and Institutional Development, and Community Outreach. Described below are some of the achievements in these areas.

Revival and Reformation

Prayer leads to revival. Therefore, within the educational institutions of the IAD, the students and teachers pray together and with the community, as

BY G A M A L I E L F L O R E Z

well as with and for the regional and national authorities. The first Wednesday of March was chosen as an annual day of prayer for all IAD educational institutions. The event included prayer, Bible studies, and testimonies. The division employees, as well as the union and field staff, travel to the division educational institutions in order to participate with the students in this program. IAD President Israel Leito speaks to a live audience gathered at a central location, and his message is shared with the division institutions over the Internet.

Emphasizing the philosophy of Adventist education will bring revival in the home and among our young people. Therefore, special issues of our

magazines for ministers and elders (*Ministry* and *The Elder*) were dedicated to the philosophy of Adventist education and distributed to every pastor, church elder, and teacher in the division.

Ellen White's *Education* was chosen as the 2014 book for the year, and IAD unions were challenged to distribute it free to their members along with the Sabbath school *Quarterly*. The IAD Education Department financed this distribution.

In order to re-emphasize the mission of Adventist education, on November 16, 2013, the IAD scheduled its first Virtual Teachers Council. Participants included representatives from the local fields and our university profes-

sors. Among the speakers were the church's world director of education and the administrators of the Inter-American Division. Using the Internet, we were able to reach nearly 10,000 teachers. In March 2015, the Second Virtual Congress of Education was held following the same successful pattern as the previous event. This time, the special guest was Pastor Shane Anderson.

The second division-wide Educational Congress, which had as its theme "The Teacher: A Minister of the Gospel," took place in September 2014 and brought together 1,020 delegates (elementary and secondary teachers, university professors, educational administrators, and directors of education



University deans of education who participated in the Bilingual Education Council sponsored by the IAD Department of Education in 2013.

from each union and local field).

At the suggestion of the IAD Department of Education, the Division Committee voted to add to the baptismal manual a Bible study on Christian education to help new converts understand its value.

Growth and Institutional Development

During the Quinquennium of Education, the Inter-American Division voted to dedicate 80 percent of its budget to the strategic development of Adventist education, which included the distribution of five-year, interest-free loans totaling U.S.\$5.7 million to our 15 universities and 22 unions.

To promote the ideals of Adventist education, a “Model Schools” project was created, which honored one school in each union that most closely resembled the goals set for the project. Each of these schools was given U.S.\$10,000 to develop a smart classroom, which will serve as prototypes for our other

educational institutions.

During this quinquennium, throughout the division, professional-development seminars were held for primary and secondary school administrators dealing with philosophy, administration, finances, and academics. Other seminars and meetings included the following: special seminars for (1) university presidents and administrators, (2) the secretaries of governing boards, (3) the staff of the vice presidents of student affairs, and (4) university church pastors; a bilingual education seminar for deans of education; and a workshop for university directors of research. To address the challenges posed by globalization and enhance the mission of the church, the IAD Department of Education offered seminars in bilingual education to leaders of local fields and bilingual education teachers to strengthen and encourage the development of bilingual education programs.

The IAD also has an ongoing commitment to improving Bible teaching

and curricula. For quite a number of years, we have had primary-level Bible textbooks in Spanish, but the IAD publishing house has now produced these textbooks in English and French. Commissioned by the IAD Department of Education, Montemorelos University (Mexico) is developing secondary-level Bible textbooks for the secondary schools, with the first two volumes already distributed.

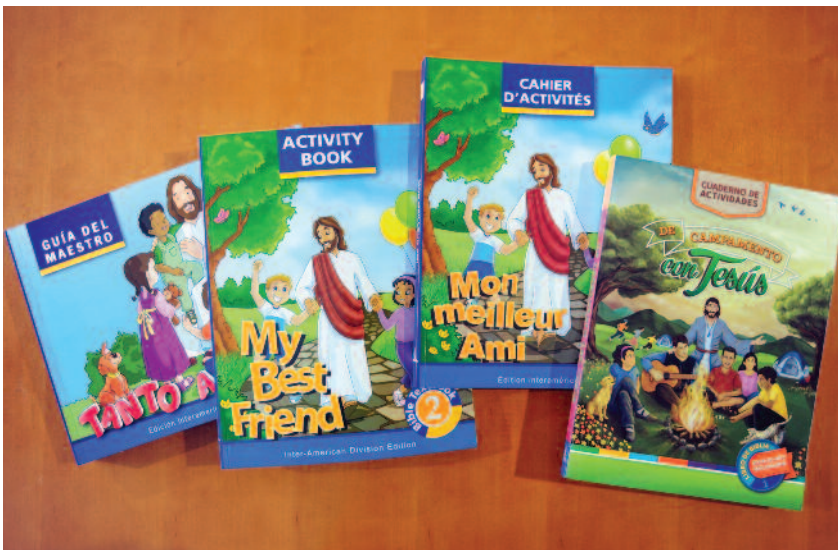
IAD expanded its university programs during this quinquennium; as a result, there are now 21 new undergraduate programs, as well as 20 new Master’s and six new doctoral programs.

Several IAD universities have recognized the need for extension campuses to provide denominational education to students who cannot attend the main campus. As a result, six new extension campuses were opened between 2010 and 2015.

The Inter-American Adventist Theological Seminary (IATS), which offers graduate theological education at vari-



Construction of Greaves Hall, the men’s residence of the University of the Southern Caribbean campus in Trinidad.



Elementary-level Bible textbooks in English, French, and Spanish.

ous sites throughout the division, has also made significant progress, receiving full accreditation both by the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist schools, Colleges, and Universities (AAA) and the Association of Theologi-



cal Schools (ATS). In addition to its Master's and Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) programs, it plans to initiate its first Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) program soon.

Community Outreach/Evangelism

The *Great Controversy* book distribution project was enthusiastically embraced by the Inter-American Division, which challenged its educational institutions to distribute two copies to each student, one as a personal copy and one to share with someone else. The families of non-Adventist students and community members also received a copy of the book.

We believe that making Adventist education available to our young people is the primary strategy to ensure the retention of members. The large numbers of non-Adventist students enrolled in our schools, however, present an evangelistic challenge that must be addressed. The IAD has designated April as the month of evangelism in all of our educational institutions. Each year during this month, union and conference directors of education hold evangelistic meetings in institutions throughout the IAD territory. Upon the completion of the 2014 educational evangelism outreach program, the

unions reported 3,000 baptisms, which surpassed the results of previous years.

Throughout the division, 2014 was designated as the year of “non-formal education.” All the IAD departments participated in training of their lay leadership. On October 25, 2014, 181,179 lay leaders were certified during a ceremony that was broadcast online.

Challenges for the Future

Inter-America has made a serious commitment to its educational system, but despite the many positive accomplishments, the division continues to face a variety of challenges:

- Implementing the ideals of the philosophy of Adventist education;
- Providing increased educational opportunities for church members;
- Enhancing the quality of our institutions;
- Increasing the number of university programs.

Our biggest challenge, however, is to prepare a people to meet the Lord when He returns. We are dedicated to this mission. Through division-wide revivals, conventions, education initiatives, and outreach, we are resolved to partner with Christ to fulfill His mission that “whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, NKJV).*

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