



“Immense Investment” — Eternal Results

Change is occurring daily in the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission (MENA), where the Adventist Church must continue to implement creative ways of sharing Christ’s love with almost 500 million people, the majority of whom live in cities. Heightened readiness and responding quickly and decisively to whatever changes take place will prove effective in this region. This new union, a special mission field for the world church, includes the countries of Algeria, Bahrain, North Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Our education mission aims to continue addressing huge challenges speedily and effectively.

New Approach

During this new phase, the church in MENA had to take a hard look at itself,

and start to focus on the evangelistic opportunities peculiar to our surrounding cultures and needs. There is a desperate need to establish organized work in cities thus far unentered by the church. To break down prejudice and build strong relationships, we need to be perceived as contributing to the local society, rather than as a threat. Projects such as the opening of the Adventist Learning Center School for Syrian refugees in Beirut, Lebanon, as well as the opening of the ADRA school for refugees in Lebanon, will strengthen the work of education and provide opportunities to connect with communities. The goal for 2015 is to establish at least 30 additional centers of influence within the large cities of our region. These centers can provide services that meet the “felt needs” of the local population, thereby winning their confidence and building bridges to share our faith.

Growing Numbers

When it was organized in 2012, the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission had approximately 2,788 students in seven schools and one university. Currently, there are approximately 272 full-time education workers serving in this region. Teaching is part of ministry and is a systematic witnessing endeavor that takes place five days per week, excluding holiday periods. Today, teachers comprise approximately 71 percent of the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission workforce, thus confirming their vital role in ministry.

We are reminded of the important reason why the Seventh-day Adventist Church is engaged in the work of education in this statement by Ellen White: “In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one, for in education, as in redemption, ‘other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.’ ‘It was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fullness

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dwel.' 1 Corinthians 3:11; Colossians 1:19, R.V." (*Education*, p. 30); and the divine admonition given through Solomon, which reads: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6, KJV).

Continued Professional Development

Through the work of Adventist education, leaders are groomed to fulfill the mission of the church, and workers are trained for service in the church's institutions. I am happy to report that our educational work in the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission is making a significant contribution to evangelism and the promotion of Sev-

enth-day Adventism in the region. Since its organization three years ago, the MENA Education Department has focused on the following key educational issues:

- Promoting the values of Seventh-day Adventist education throughout its constituency;
- Working with our institutions in developing systematic and effective school-improvement strategies;
- Building leadership capacities through training and support;
- Ongoing teacher development;
- Implementing education goals set out in the MENA strategic plan; and
- Establishing more church schools in local fields.

Middle East University—Islamic Studies

Many wonderful things have been happening at Middle East University in Beirut, Lebanon. The mission of the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology is to furnish the Seventh-day Adventist Church with competent, highly motivated, and consecrated graduates in pastoral ministry; and to prepare Bible teachers for the church's educational institutions. Renovations to the Institute of Islamic Studies were completed in anticipation of an expanding program that would attract students from Adventist institutions (as well as other institutions of higher education) from around the world to learn more about Arabic culture, Islam, the Arabic language, and regional developments. The institute envisions itself becoming the global Adventist Church's knowledge center on the Middle East and North Africa region, its cultures, its languages, and its religions.

The MENA Union Mission's commitment to the work of Adventist education is concretely demonstrated by the resources and strong support it provides to education. The MENA Education Department invests in the development of existing school leaders and in nurturing and building the capacities of emerging school administrators. Recent training covered aspects such as a survey of current developments in educational leadership and management principles, approaches to school self-evaluation, an introduction to Seventh-day Adventist education, nutrition and learning, legal updates, and innovative teaching and learning styles. Regular in-service training programs have been conducted by our schools to meet the staff-development needs of our teachers and to enhance standards in teaching and learning. There is an urgent need to focus on the global development of employees across the MENA region.

Seventh-day Adventist education can be at the forefront of our church planting movement. We have an educational philosophy and a perspective that can ad-



Top: Middle East University Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities team 2014.

Right: Students at the Irbid School in Beirut, Lebanon.



dress many of the current educational challenges confronting our Middle East and North Africa region as we seek to develop the potential of our young people. The challenge for every Adventist teacher is to become an expert in his or her field of work and to be a powerful witness for the true and living God we serve.

Conclusion

Change is occurring on a daily basis, and the church must continue trying

creative ways of dealing with this huge 10/40 Window region! We are praying earnestly that God will use each member to spread the good news and add new converts to the church so that an even greater work can be done. May God give us insights into how to effectively share His great love for the people of the MENA region. May we also comprehend the limitless resources He has at His disposal just waiting for willing human channels through which they may be made manifest. ✍



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Tkachuk, director of education for the Euro-Asia Division (ESD), reports that in Ukraine, the local conference in Lviv donated its headquarters to become the city's first Adventist school, and the members in Chernovtsy renovated and transformed their conference office building into the first Adventist school in that city. In independent assessments of academic performance, Adventist schools in Ukraine and Russia outperform the national average by wide margins.

The CognitiveGenesis Study demonstrated that students in Seventh-day Adventist primary and secondary schools in the U.S., Canada, and Bermuda also have an academic advantage. In standardized tests, students in Adventist schools outperformed the national average in every subject and for every grade level tested. The benefits of an Adventist education were cumulative: The longer a student attended, the higher the academic performance compared to the national average in both achievement and cognitive ability.²

During the current quinquennium, we have witnessed a range of events in Adventist education. For example, while Brazil Adventist University celebrated 100 years of continuous operation, on the other side of the world, the newly started education work in Mongolia adds a new grade level each year at Tusgal Adventist School. It will soon outgrow the building it occupies in downtown Ulaanbaatar. Elsewhere, as part of training future pastors, the eight theological seminaries in the Inter-European Division (EUD) continue to engage in outreach activities in their region and abroad. One such activity is Friedensau Adventist University's *ProMission* project among the Maasai ethnic group in Tanzania.

The Inter-American Division (IAD) took a truly bold step by designating 2010-2015 as the "Quinquennium of Education." Gamaliel Floréz, IAD director of education, describes how 80 percent of the division budget was allocated to the strategic development of Adventist education, which included the distribution of five-year, interest-free loans totaling U.S.\$5.7 million to 15 universities and 22 unions. Nearly 10,000 teachers participated in the division's first Virtual Teachers Council on

the Internet. Since pastors are vital partners for our schools, a Bible study on Christian education was added to the baptismal manual to help new converts understand its value.

Managing the demand for Adventist education is a challenge in most regions, and affordability continues to be an issue. As colleges grow in size and in the number and level of degrees they offer, the cost of an Adventist education rises. There are insufficient work-study programs for the many young people who would like to attend an Adventist school but do not have the funds to do so. But the greatest need is not for money or for students, but for qualified teachers "who love children and can see in them souls to be saved for the Master."³ As a result, we will continue to promote Adventist mission and identity through conferences and seminars, as well as our other goals. And through publications like *THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION*, we will directly support Adventist educators with articles that strengthen teachers, administrators, and boards; demonstrate how to integrate faith with learning; and provide models for nurturing and discipling Seventh-day Adventist students at every institution. Together, we will foster the best of theory and practice in Adventist education, and inspire in educators a heart for mission in a world of learning.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. All data are from the Annual Statistical Reports for the years 2009 to 2014 (latest available) (Silver Spring, Md.: Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists).
2. Jerome Thayer and Elissa Kido, "Assessing Academic Achievement and Cognitive Ability in Adventist Schools," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 21:2 (August 2012):99-115: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10656219.2012.698826#preview>.
3. Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1913), p. 166.