



Carol Tasker



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# Mission-driven

## Adventist Education in the South Pacific Division 2015-2020

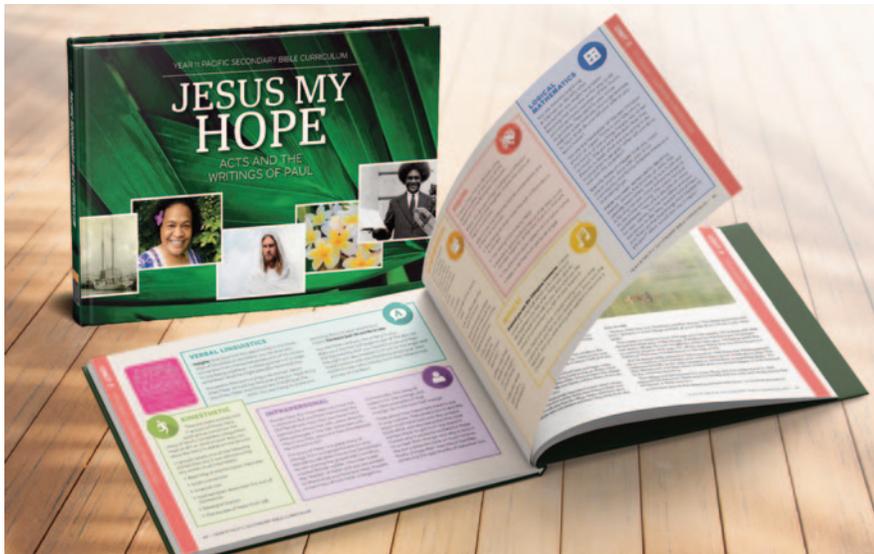
Adventist education is an integral part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's mission in the South Pacific Division (SPD). The SPD comprises Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and the islands throughout the South Pacific Ocean. For more than 120 years, Adventist schools have led mission initiatives and opened new areas to the gospel in the SPD. The establishment in Australia of Avondale School of Christian Workers in 1897, under the personal supervision of Ellen White,

the Adventist Church's cofounder, marked the beginning of intentional training of workers equipped to serve God and humanity in churches, schools, and in the wider community.

### Discipleship Focus

Today, that missional focus of Adventist schools continues, and its discipleship emphasis strengthens the church and its influence across the SPD. In an increasingly secular society, parents from other denominations and even secular families are choosing Adventist education for its unashamedly Christian values, impressive academic opportunities, and other value-added offerings in music, outdoor education, service opportunities, and much more.

In Australia, the end of high school for thousands of students is marked by "schoolies" week, characterized by massive crowds participating in wild parties involving alcohol and drug consumption. In the past few years, many Adventist schools have instead encouraged an overseas mission service trip as the culminating event of their students' secondary schooling. The result? Trans-



The Year 11 Pacific Secondary Bible Curriculum textbook on the Book of Acts and the writings of the apostle Paul.

formed lives with a new understanding of mission and life purpose. The Bible Summary Project in Papua New Guinea, ably supported by thousands of *World Changers Bibles*<sup>1</sup> and discipling Bible study guides, has meant that Adventist students form small Bible-study groups with their non-Adventist schoolmates. Witnessing the students' joy in leading their classmates to the river in baptism is a dynamic experience for fellow students and the community (see photo below). In New Zealand, some students have requested to be baptized at school rather than church so that they can witness to their non-Adventist schoolmates.



**Student leading a classmate to baptism in Papua New Guinea. Photo courtesy of the SPD Education Department.**

### Strengthening School-Church Partnerships

Several newly established churches, sponsored and organized by schools, have been established, with more being explored. Across the division, more school chaplains are being hired to minister to teachers, students, and their families. Daryl Murdoch, national director for Adventist Schools Australia, says: "In the interests of partnership, we need to also work with conference presidents in building stronger links between home, school, and church."<sup>2</sup> Valuegenesis research has highlighted that, when all three are working together, young people are more likely to accept Christ and be baptized.<sup>3</sup> Each year, a compiled evangelism report for every school is distributed to church administrators in each union, highlighting the evangelistic impact of Adventist schools in their communities.

An initiative to bring church members onto school

campuses in Papua New Guinea is positively impacting our schools in this nation. Scheduling church programs and activities on school property attracts church members to our campuses, where they can learn about the school and become aware of the needs. This is particularly helpful to families without school-age children, who don't often get to see the schools or feel a part of them. After a recent youth camp meeting on a school campus, the district youth decided to adopt the school for a year, providing physical assistance and even fundraising. Papua New Guinea Union Mission Education Director Jim Yawane says, "this initiative encourages the youth and the church members and the school, helping them to grow spiritually and to do things together."<sup>4</sup>

The church's recent initiative, Total Member Involvement (TMI), can take many forms in schools. In Tonga, teachers offered extra coaching to students not enrolled in our schools—a previously unheard of but deeply appreciated initiative that opened hearts and strengthened friendships with local churches. A recent centenary celebration in Hamilton, New Zealand, attested that it was the establishment of the Adventist school that has grown the church, cementing the presence and influence of the denomination in that region.

### Our Vision

Our vision for the 2015-2020 quinquennium was to have *Committed Adventist teachers, nurturing student disciplers in quality Adventist schools.*

Committed Adventist teachers provide the backbone of Adventist education; therefore, during the past quinquennium, there were several recommendations at the division, union, local conference/union levels, as well as in the schools regarding initiatives that would affirm and encourage teachers. Because our teachers are Adventist education's greatest asset, they need to be nurtured and developed at each stage of their career.

Our Adventist identity and biblical worldview introduce to school communities our distinctive beliefs and provide a Christ-centered, Bible-based, and value-added education. We want administrators, teachers, students, and all school personnel to demonstrate a balanced approach to education that places a high value on spiritual, academic, and physical development, as well as social well-being. When the Great Controversy theme is understood, this provides the perfect opportunity to offer life purpose, meaning, and hope in an unpredictable and often frightening world. The SPD Adventist identity initiatives have included the following:

- *Transformational Teaching: Adventist Worldview Curriculum Frameworks* documents,<sup>5</sup> seen in the rewriting of the curriculum frameworks for each subject

from an Adventist worldview, use the four lenses of Creation, the Fall, redemption, and restoration;

- New Zealand's Discipleship Dashboard and Spiritual Reflection Inventory;
- The new Pacific Secondary Bible Curriculum, a primary aim of which is for each student to graduate from high school with his or her own copy of the following books: *Steps to Christ*, *Messiah*, *Acts of the Apostles*, and *The Ministry of Healing* (see page 61).
- Advent Schools Australia's *Early Encounters With Jesus* curriculum, reaching the hearts and minds of children in early learning centers and pre-primary programs;<sup>6</sup>
- Distinctive programs for staff who do not have an Adventist background in their professional training;
- Conferences on Adventist distinctives and worldview in the Trans-Pacific Union Mission (TPUM);<sup>7</sup>
- Chaplains' and Bible teachers' conferences;
- The production of special readings that are used for nightly meetings during the annual week of education emphasis in churches and villages;
- The ABIDE Spiritual Masterplan (<https://adventeducators.org/2020/12/abide/>), which is designed to engage staff in a deeper personal walk with Jesus so that their discipleship of students will be engaging and authentic;

- The distribution of *As Light Lingers: Basking in the Word of God*, (<http://aslightlingers.com/>) a Bible-study guide for all ages, to all school staff in the division, to assist them in their personal walk with God;

- New Zealand's Re-align Conference in 2019, which emphasized the importance of constantly re-examining direction, values, and practice in Adventist education;

- School chaplains' training in mental health first aid, for which they obtained certification from the Manukau District Health Board. The training included instruction in dealing with students who exhibit complex social or behavioral patterns that challenge school routines.

*Leadership and professional development*, another strategic focus that is vital to the sustainability of the system, and includes initiatives such as these:

- Biennial educational leadership conferences for Australia and New Zealand;
- TPUM's first-ever educational leadership conference in 2018, with more than 200 participants from 10 Pacific countries (see photo below);
- Papua New Guinea's principals' conferences, which meet in various schools, during which participants observe day-to-day operations, inspires them to bring new ideas and vigor to their school settings;



**More than 200 participants from 10 Pacific countries attended the first-ever Trans-Pacific Union Mission (TPUM) educational-leadership conference held at Fulton College, Sabeto, Fiji, in June 2018. Photo courtesy of the SPD Education Department.**

- The establishment of Adventist Schools Australia Leadership Institute in Australia;
- Correspondence with and visitation of advanced-study students from SPD at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (Philippines) and Andrews University (Michigan, U.S.A.) to encourage meaningful and timely outcomes; and
- Mentoring young leaders to lead sessions in other countries in the TPUM.

### Quality Assurance and School Improvement

The Quality Adventist School Framework (QASF),<sup>8</sup> developed by Adventist Schools Australia, has been pivotal for embedding—in a cycle of continuous improvement—15 modules covering Adventist identity, teaching and learning, community engagement, and partnerships. The QASF Framework aims to ensure that every student can flourish—spiritually, academically, and personally—in a rich soil of faith and learning. This process has been enhanced by establishing the union-wide Data Dashboard, which provides each school with its own data set for analyzing progress.

The TPUM has adopted a modified version of the QASF and is beginning to roll it out. Some schools in Papua New Guinea use the church's accreditation process (Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities). At the same time, the Education Review Office (ERO) in New Zealand evaluates and then reports on each school's program.

### The Challenges

While both Australian and New Zealand Adventist schools receive significant government funding, such support in the nations of the Pacific is much lower and unpredictable. This means that funding day-to-day operations is challenging for 80 percent of the division's schools in the South Pacific. PNG's tuition-free funding for all school-age students has significantly strained infrastructure to accommodate these new students. Classrooms designed for 40 are now straining with 70 to 80 students. Basic textbooks are scarce. Professional support for teachers is overtaxed. Whereas, in Australia, there is approximately one education director or professional support person for every 15 teaching staff in church schools, Papua New Guinea Union Mission has one support person for every 82 teachers, and in TPUM,

one for every 90 teachers. One education director has 68 schools to look after in a vast territory that requires canoe travel over large expanses of ocean.

The annual World Bank Human Capital Index (2019) indicates how countries in our division score in the various areas they assess. Whereas in Australia and New Zealand, a child who attends public school for 13 years is likely to gain the equivalent of 11 years of schooling, a child in PNG who attends school for an average of 8.2 years gains 4.7 years of schooling achievement. Add to these figures alarming rates of stunted growth among young children (growth rates of between 28-50 percent in the birth-5-year-old group, who will never reach their mental or physical potential (due to poverty and lack of access to education) in several nations, and we have a human tragedy in our midst.

Early-childhood courses offered at Sonoma Adventist College and Avondale University College play an



**Courses offered at Sonoma Adventist College and Avondale University College (now Avondale University) provide teachers in the South Pacific Division with training in early-childhood education to maximize the potential for healthy development. Photo courtesy of the SPD Education Department.**

essential role in maximizing the potential for healthy infant development. Other tertiary institutions, such as Pacific Adventist University in Papua New Guinea and Fulton College in Fiji, continue to provide excellent work-ready graduates for the church and the wider community. Each institution is uniquely positioned to add further value to the church's mission in terms of upskilling leaders, producing resources, and engaging in church-commissioned research, which also benefits the rest of the world.

Unlike many other countries, the term *university* is currently restricted to 30 institutions in Australia, which function under a highly regulated government

body. In 2019, Avondale College was awarded the right to add “University College” to its name after documenting its academic rigor over many years. This step paves the way for a further submission within five years for full university status, and we rejoice in this hard-earned recognition.

Finally, mission by and for Australia’s indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island population begins at Mamarapha College, a church-owned and operated tertiary Bible college that offers Certificate II up to Advanced Diplomas in Indigenous Studies (Ministry Bible Work and Lifestyle Health Promotion) and an Advanced Diploma of Indigenous Pastoral Ministry. The word *Mamarapha* combines a widely used Aboriginal word with an ancient Hebrew word meaning “God makes whole.” At this school, indigenous students gain freedom from addictions, true acceptance in Christ, an understanding of their purpose, and a desire to share God’s incredibly Good News with friends and family. Blocks of short courses, interspersed with ministry engagements, alternate throughout the year. At the end of each year, graduation is celebrated by everyone, as milestones toward the particular diplomas are celebrated.

While we thank God for incredibly committed teachers, and for His sustaining power, strength, and encouragement, we are mindful of the considerable work yet to be accomplished by His Spirit. ✍

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The SPD Adventist Youth Ministries Department, under the leadership of Nick Kross, launched a million-dollar initiative to provide 200,000 Bibles and discipleship kits to youth ages 15 to 35 in the South Pacific so that they could share their faith. For more information, see <https://discipleship.adventistchurch.com/world-changers-bible/>.

2. Quoted in an article by David McClintock, “Adventist Education Core to Kingdom Growth,” *Adventist Record* (August 20, 2016): 11: [https://issuu.com/adventistmedianetwork/docs/recd\\_16\\_low\\_res/11](https://issuu.com/adventistmedianetwork/docs/recd_16_low_res/11).

3. South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, *Value-Genesis Study 1 Core Report* (1993): <https://circle.adventist.org/download/VGCORERE.pdf>.



**Graduation ceremony at Mamarapha College in Karragullen, Western Australia. Photo courtesy of the SPD Education Department.**

4. Quoted in an article by Tracey Bridcutt, “Schools Benefit From Hosting Church Activities,” *Adventist News Network* (2019): <https://adventist.news/news/schools-benefit-from-hosting-church-activities>.

5. See <http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=27855> for links to the *Transformational Teaching: Adventist Worldview Curriculum Frameworks* for several subject areas that can be used to plan faith integrated units and lessons.

6. See <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=284L> for more about *Early Encounters With Jesus*.

7. See article by Pete Navosailagi, “Teachers Challenged to Expand Their Horizons,” *Adventist Record* (July 18, 2018): <https://record.adventistchurch.com/2018/07/18/teachers-challenged-to-expand-their-horizons/>.

8. Adventist Schools Australia, *Quality Adventist School Framework (QASF)* (May 2013): <http://circle.adventist.org/files/download/QASFframework.pdf>.

9. On July 1, 2021, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency announced the decision to add Avondale to the Australian University category. Confirmation of the change in status, and subsequent name change to Avondale University, took place on August 5, 2021. For more information, see the article by Brian Stacey, “Name Change Official: Welcome to Avondale University,” *Adventist Record* (2021): <https://record.adventistchurch.com/2021/08/26/name-change-official-welcome-to-avondale-university/>.