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# Why Support Christian Education?

## A Personal Testimony

I squeezed myself into the overcrowded bus. With one hand holding a briefcase and the other hanging onto the railing, I was not exactly enjoying the ride that summer afternoon in Bangalore, India, not far from my native town. The driver did a Jehu and swung the bus around a sharp corner. I spun with the bus, making a 360-degree turn.

In that moment, I saw a face that seemed familiar. Could it be my childhood friend, Jaya? I had not seen him for years, ever since we parted ways, he to a local school, I to a distant Adventist school. I was about to call him by name, but time has a way of playing tricks, and I wondered if the man on the bus was indeed my old friend.

As my mind reviewed the distant past, a memory surfaced that solved the identity puzzle. While returning home after a long day of school and a soccer game, I had urged the group to walk faster. "I'm so hungry," I said. Soon after, we heard Jaya's screams. Rushing over, we found him with a bloody face. After hearing my cry of hunger, he had decided to do something about it. After sneaking into a roadside bungalow, he climbed a guava tree and stuffed as many guavas as he could in his pockets. As he was returning to the group with the smile of a mission accomplished, the guard spotted him and gave chase. Running as fast as he could, Jaya jumped over the fence but fell on the barbed wire and cut his cheek. He paid for his adventure with 16 stitches and a permanent scar.

That's it. The scar. I leaned across and spotted the scar on his right cheek. "Jaya," I called out excitedly, but there was no response. I identified myself, but he stood like a frozen statue—looking cold and mean. No smile, no sign of joy in seeing a childhood friend after decades of separation.

The bus was signaling a halt. I told Jaya to get off at the next stop so we could go to a restaurant, share a fine meal, and let all the years gone by set the agenda for our talk. But Jaya shook his head and rushed toward the exit. Suddenly he returned, thrust something in my hand, got off the bus, and vanished into the crowd. I looked into my hand, and to my amazement and wonder, I saw my wallet. Sometime between the moment I boarded the bus and my 360-degree turn, Jaya had picked my pocket.

That was years ago, but the question still lingers: Why? Both of us had much in common—the same environment, the same misfortunes, and the same opportunities. But one becomes a pickpocket, the other a pastor?

I could say, "But for the grace of God, there go I." That would be answer enough, but I had the greatest fortune in my life—God taking me in my mid-teens, as unshaped, wobbly clay, and molding me according to His will. And that took place in the Adventist school I attended as a teenager.

What did my Adventist education give me? Three things:

**First, Adventist education made me conscious that I am not an accident in space and time.** I learned at the Adventist school that there is a God who loves me intensely, who has made me in His image, and who wants me to be His own. The reality of God overwhelmed me in the classroom, in the hostels, and in the poultry farm where I worked to earn my fees. When God grasps an individual, He holds him or her for good with tender chords of love and care. Life takes a new turn.

**Second, Adventist education made me aware that life has a meaning and a destiny.** Within the campus of the Adventist school, I learned that education is more than the mastery of information—be it Bible, English, history, math, or science. Education means being like Jesus, walking like Him, relating like Him, working like Him—and above

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John M. Fowler

During the past eight years, a number of NAD K-12 educators have been experimenting with non-traditional delivery methods such as videoconferencing and the Internet. The history of these initiatives suggests that Adventist K-12 educators are reshaping Adventist education to make it available to more young people.

Who provides support and guidance for these initiatives? The NAD union directors and the NAD K-12 Board of Education established the Technology and Distance Education Committee K-12 (TDEC) for this purpose. This standing committee has been given the responsibility of researching issues in educational technology; developing Adventist distance education policies and guidelines; serving as a resource for distance education course development; reviewing and evaluating technology-based courses and programs; and facilitating the integration of technology in the instructional process. TDEC meets three times a year and consists of one representative from each of the nine unions of the North American Division, Home Study International, and North American Division Office of Education. The NAD Office of Education also maintains a partnership with Griggs University so that local schools can enrich their programming with courses offered by its accredited teachers. This is especially beneficial for small schools that may not have certified teachers for some of the courses the school would like to offer.

Larry Blackmer, vice president for education and technology director for the NAD, is planning a "Distributed Learning Summit" for spring 2008 that will bring together those who are providing distributed learning in NAD. This summit will doubtless expand and enhance the AVLN vision of strengthening Adventist education through the use of technology and deeper collaboration. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. . . . A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NKJV).<sup>1</sup>

**Shirley Freed** is an AVLN board member and Chair of the Department of Leadership and Educational Administration in the School of Education at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Dr. Freed teaches all of her classes online.

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## Editorial

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all, it means getting ready to be with Him. That last dimension—the eschatological one—provides a destination point in life's journey, regardless of its many contours.

### Third, Adventist education provided me with a distinct worldview.

Before I went to the Adventist school, my world goals were to climb the professional ladder and live a decent life. But Christian education provided a more wholistic worldview—I am not alone. Above me and within me is God. Around me are human beings

just like me. A vision and a mission link us all together, bidding us to march toward the kingdom of God and to help one another.

The march to the kingdom, the fellowship with Christ here and in the hereafter, and reaching out and touching one another are part of Christian education's challenge to more than a million young people today.

I cannot guarantee that Adventist education will do for everyone what it did for me, but I do believe having that Adventist advantage can make a huge difference in the lives of young people. That's reason enough to support Christian education.—**John M. Fowler.**

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