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# “When Can I Be Baptized?”

## Object Lessons in the Classroom

By H. Helen Meade

**T**he highest aspiration of the Christian teacher is to introduce his or her students to Jesus Christ and then have each child develop a personal relationship with Christ and a desire to join the church through baptism. How does the teacher seize the right moment to bring a child to Christ? Is there a specific plan to follow? What guidelines should the teacher use?

From the beginning God inaugurated principles of life. As we study His Word, we see that these principles, delineated in His character, are diametrically in opposition to the ways of sin and death. This should be the unwritten curriculum in every Seventh-day Adventist classroom. We must establish a classroom climate that is conducive to decision making and developing Christian values.

Each child must be recognized as a separate entity, created to think and do. “There is an individuality that must be preserved in every human agent in Christian experi-

ence. . . . Each one has his own battles to fight, his own Christian experience to gain.”<sup>1</sup>

Students must be taught to analyze, synthesize, and choose wisely.

Each has an individuality separate and distinct from all others. Each must be convicted for himself, converted for himself. He must receive the truth, repent, and believe, and obey for himself. . . . Each must surrender to God by his own act, and the mystery of godliness.<sup>2</sup>

Each student comes to the classroom from a different background. The child’s basic character traits and value system have already been set in the home. The teacher, like the sower in the parable, must plant seeds upon available ground. In some instances, the heart is tender and receptive. In other cases, the hearts are sown

with tares, hardened, stony, and unreceptive. Nevertheless, we must start with whatever we receive and build each character according to the principles of life.

“A wise instructor will give special attention to the development of the weaker traits, that the child may form a well-balanced, harmonious character.”<sup>3</sup> This can only be done in a classroom climate where Christian values are presented as part of the total program. As students perceive these values and begin to accept them as part of their value system, they become changed into Christ’s glorious character. How can we encourage such decisions? Let me share some practical experiences from my own classroom.

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istic standard of conduct for our students that even we ourselves cannot attain.

In closing, let me cite a quotation from *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* that has been of tremendous encouragement to me as I have worked with young people through the years:

When the teacher will rely upon God in prayer, the Spirit of Christ will come upon him, and God will work through him by the Holy Spirit upon the mind of the student. . . . We may bring hundreds and thousands of children to Christ if we will work for them.—Page 172.

May God bless you as you work for Him. □

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## “When Can I Be Baptized?”

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### Practical Experience

At the beginning of the school year, children are given maintenance tasks ranging from keeping the cloakroom in order by distributing lunches, bookbags, and coats to handing out and collecting papers, cleaning chalkboards, vacuuming the carpet, or caring for plants and animals. Through these simple tasks, the students develop a sense of responsibility. As they master a task, it becomes their responsibility to train the next student chosen to do the job. They usually work side by side with the new person for one or two days, instructing and correcting techniques. By this means, students learn to appreciate an orderly classroom and thus a well-ordered life.

Michael, an 11-year-old from a one-parent home with a busy working mother, had already been given the responsibility of caring for his home, which included being in charge of several younger siblings. This awesome responsibility

had developed in him a sense of insecurity. As it became his task to care for the plants, he learned how God cares for him. In watching the plants develop, he developed patience and understanding. As he turned them toward the sun, he learned to direct his life toward the Sun of righteousness.

This experience was enhanced by a nature trip to observe and identify trees. We examined a tree that had fallen. It appeared to be strong and stately; however, the inside was decayed and eaten by insects. Michael recognized the analogy of what hidden sins can do to the soul.

On another occasion, Michael came to my home for Sabbath lunch. Afterwards, we visited the nearby botanical gardens. As we stood beside pools of beautiful water lilies, it was easy for him to grasp the concept that “Bible promises are the pinks and the roses and the lilies in the garden of the Lord.”<sup>4</sup> As he began to look for more promises and claim them for himself, he developed a sense of self-reliance and dependence upon God.

### Lessons From Nature

Anne, an 8-year-old, delighted in caring for cocoons that had been placed in an empty fish tank in our classroom, where they were protected and kept moist. She learned to wait upon the Lord as she patiently waited for the cocoons to open.

Anne’s greatest joy was finding a cocoon in her own neighborhood in an inner-city environment. She carefully placed it in a jar and brought it to school to be put in the tank with the others. As the cocoons opened one by one, week by week, the attention of the entire class was drawn to them. The children grasped the lesson that just as they witnessed the metamorphosis

of caterpillars into moths, our lives can be changed through Christ. Anne’s own moth was the last to emerge. It was her joy to take the cocoon home framed, to share with her family, as a personal testimony of God’s love.

In the spring when we planted seeds, the students discovered weeds in the soil they brought from out-of-doors. The lesson of the wheat and tares growing together was made clear when some students inadvertently removed tiny carrot plants, assuming they were weeds. As the children tended their plants, they also learned to guard the garden of the heart from the growth of weeds that choke the plants.

In the classroom, students observed the care mother and father gerbils gave their babies and compared and contrasted it with God’s care for us. The faithfulness of each gerbil parent, keeping only to each other and not even accepting another partner after its mate died, brought lessons of faithfulness to God and the fidelity of the family.

### Learning Self-control

Through daily routine and personal interaction, students begin to direct their will, to control all their powers. They are educated to rule their minds and develop strength of character and self-control. As the transforming grace of God takes hold of their thinking powers and they behold Jesus, they become changed into His likeness.

It is the privilege of each Christian teacher to be a coworker with God. The teacher must establish a classroom climate in which Christ will reign supreme. In such an environment, the student will behold Christ and desire to become like Him. The values the child has witnessed will become part of his or her own life-style. The Holy Spirit will work with us in bringing

about this transformation of each learner.

Evidence of this growth in spiritual maturity comes in many ways, but my most gratifying experience was to have a child approach me this year and say, "When can I be baptized?" □

#### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, Manuscript 6, 1889.
- <sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Manuscript 28, 1898.
- <sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Review and Herald* (January 10, 1882).
- <sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Letter 35, 1887.

## Pastor and Teacher

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tian education outreach? Current policy seems to discourage the recruitment of significant numbers of non-Adventist students in our schools. Many pastors see this as indicating that Adventist educators do not regard their institutions as missionary enterprises. A new policy of seeking non-Adventist enrollments would prove one of our most fruitful strategies. It would both increase the resources available to fund our schools and bring about church growth.

Americans are demonstrating a growing interest in Christian education.

In February, 1983, *The New York Times* commissioned a national poll asking adults whether they would send their children to neighborhood public schools if the cost of private schools was not a factor. Of those responding, 37 percent said they would prefer to send their children to a private school. . . . The enrollment in non-Catholic religious schools has been climbing sharply—from approximately 600,000 in 1970 to approximately 1.7 million in 1983. The northeastern states, home of many long-established, elite, private preparatory schools, had the smallest increase of 48 percent. In the West, enrollment in private non-Catholic religious schools doubled, and in the middle Atlantic-Southern belt from Virginia to Texas the enrollment quadrupled. In the District of Columbia, the home of many federal employees, enrollment in private, non-Catholic religious schools tripled between 1970 and 1983. . . .

[One of] the fastest growing segments of the private school scene [is] nursery schools and kindergartens for children in the two- to five-year-old bracket, in which enrollment nearly quadrupled between 1965 and 1983.<sup>2</sup>

In one Midwest community, Adventists have been operating a church school for more than 40 years, and the enrollment has never been more than 125. Ten years ago, another conservative, Bible-oriented church began a Christian school that now has an enrollment of more than 400. More recently, a third Christian school has begun. Why are we not cashing in on this increased interest in Christian education?

*Teachers and pastors should consider a regular exchange of roles—the pastor teaching in the classroom and the teacher preaching in the pulpit.*

If parents are interested in Christian education and they find that their children have a good experience in our schools, it seems to me that they would consider joining our church. An Adventist parent who enrolled his child in a private Christian school told me that when the school year began, all parents were asked to attend an orientation meeting, during which the staff not only covered policies and schedules, but also made a very winsome and straightforward presentation of why it is important to accept Christ and how Christian values are taught in the classroom. At the end of the meeting, parents were told that if they had questions about faith, they could feel free to chat with any teacher privately at any time. Is it inappropriate for us to do the same?

Family-life ministries are entry

events that non-Adventist church school patrons might find especially interesting. Perhaps a parent resource center might be located in the church school, staffed by volunteers from the church and advertised as a community service. This might include a toy library with special emphasis on at-home educational experiences for preschool children, as well as a series of classes and seminars on parenting, discipline, prepared childbirth, et cetera. A weekly parent support group might be organized. This could serve as a pathway to Bible studies and attendance at church or public evangelistic meetings.

Instead of our church schools being positioned to take care of our own, why not organize them as outreach centers to families and children? The rationale of needing to defend our children from worldly influences is usually used to defend careful segregation, but today we have to face the facts that a great many "worldly" influences have wormed their way into church families via television and other public media, the attitudes of many parents, and the pervasive quality of modern secular culture. Maybe it is time to realize that "the best defense is a good offense," and fight back by intentionally making our schools evangelistic enterprises. □

NOTE: I would like very much to hear from pastors and teachers who are now collaborating or who wish to collaborate because of reading this article. If I can collect a number of firsthand case studies, I will summarize them in a future report. Send information to the Editor, JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, 6840 Eastern Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20012 U.S.A.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Eva Schindler-Rainman and Ronald Lippitt, *The Volunteer Community: Creative Use of Human Resources* (Washington, D.C.: NTL Learning Resources, Inc., 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, "The Role of Private Christian Schools: Facts to Inform Your Position" (Privately published document available through Yokefellow Institute, Richmond, Indiana).