

**J**an was a leader in the junior academy where I taught. Bright, pretty, fun, and spiritual, she brought a wholesome vitality to each school activity. When the week of prayer was held Jan was the first to stand for Jesus. At the Christmas program Jan sang with consummate grace. During the intramural basketball season she was one of the few girls who participated.

After Jan left for boarding academy I watched her progress. She was a leader there, too.

Then Jan left for a Seventh-day Adventist college, and in her first year

anything of lasting worth. She took her emptiness and sense of betrayal and her questions to her boyfriend, who shared her feelings. Today, five years later, Jan and her boyfriend are still living together, still apart from God.

### **The Rationale**

When I first heard of Jan's apostasy I felt angry and hurt. I secretly wondered if I had failed her somehow. Should I have done anything differently? What's expected of a good teacher, anyway? How should a teacher approach a subject? As a result of wrestling with these thoughts, I came to some conclusions.

*The best teachers do not teach subjects; they teach people.* For these teachers, when the year ends, no matter how many themes or theologies or theorems they've covered, the subject is not finished. Only when the life ends is the subject finished, the assignments completed.

Of course, this approach to teaching is fraught with frustration. It means we must hand over our teaching material to the television for three hours a night, or send our subject to a home where self-esteem is shredded or self-discipline is scorned. It means our efforts will be challenged and nullified to some degree each day and in succeeding years, as in the case of Jan.

It's safer to teach textbooks. It's easier to teach facts. It's less frustrating, even, to teach truth.

When we teach people we take some responsibility for who they are, for what they become. With this in mind I felt that I might have failed to adequately prepare Jan for her future. I decided to make certain (as far as possible) that no more of my students would repeat her choices.

### **The Assignment**

My main thrust in adequately preparing my students took place the last quarter I taught academy Bible. The ninth- and tenth-grade Bible class operated this particular quarter on a points basis. I had gone through the Bible book and assigned points to certain projects.

# **Encouraging Students to Ask Questions About Their Faith (While We're Still Around to Answer Them)**

there, Jan lost her faith.

It seems a teacher in one of Jan's Bible classes asked questions that tore down some of her misconceptions, and apparently she felt he failed to reconstruct

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**BY CHRISTOPHER BLAKE**

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Among the required projects was the following four-part assignment, which turned out to be the best.

1. *Each student is required to attend the main worship service of another religion or denomination. Students must attend in pairs, and only one pair may attend each church. Below is a list of possible churches. You may choose to attend one of these or another of your own choosing. (50 points)*

Below was a list of area churches with their addresses and phone numbers. Included in the list were:

- Assembly of God
- Baptist
- Baha'i
- Southern Baptist
- Brethren
- Catholic
- Christian Science
- Church of Christ
- Church of God
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
- Episcopal
- Grace
- Interdenominational
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Jewish synagogue
- Lutheran
- Mennonite
- Nazarene
- Nondenominational
- Orthodox
- Pentecostal
- Presbyterian
- Roman Catholic
- Salvation Army
- Unitarian Universalist
- United Church of Christ
- United Methodist

If a student could not find a partner I volunteered to go along. (I never regretted taking this opportunity. In one instance where we worshiped with a college-age Foursquare Gospel congregation in a rented Odd Fellows hall, I experienced the most spiritually moving song service I've ever heard.)

2. *After attending the service, each student must deliver an oral report describing the trip to the class. (50 points possible)*

During this report I questioned each student closely: "How was it different from Seventh-day Adventist services? What were the people like? How did you feel while you were there? What did you like? What didn't you like?"

Sherry gave her report after visiting a Pentecostal church. She had expected it to be friendly, but she related to the class

her surprise that not one person had shaken her hand.

"What?" I exclaimed. "Not one person shook your hand?"

"No," replied Sherry, "but I was hugged about 100 times!"

In addition I asked follow-up questions directed toward the entire class: "Do you like this aspect of the service better than ours? Is this aspect sacred? What would happen if we tried this in our church? Who would be offended? Why? Would it be worth making the change anyway?" The ensuing discussions were invariably lively and stimulating. Often students defended the traditional Seventh-day Adventist liturgy.

3. *Invite a speaker from the worship-*

ing body to speak to our classroom. (Optional: 50 points) Note: The speaker must show up in our classroom for you to receive credit!

did take copious notes!) This voluntary silence meant the students were "on their own."

Throughout the quarter we were visited by, among others, a Jewish cantor who sang for us, a Pentecostal who preached to us, and a Latter-Day Saint who recited an overview of his beliefs.

An incident I won't soon forget occurred when the Latter-Day Saint began relating his views on the state of the dead. My students peered over their shoulders at me with lifted eyebrows; I smiled back benignly. And then *every one of them* reached for his or her Bible. For the rest of the period the air was filled with the sound of riffling pages. Turning to the texts quoted, the students

challenged the implied context or pointed out contradictory passages, while the speaker grinned and waffled, or backpedaled and then pulled out a text that had the students scratching their heads.

After the guest speaker left, the class and I held stimulating discussions. An atmosphere of deep interest and openness prevailed. Often I used some of the

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# ENCOURAGING STUDENTS

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more puzzling problems as a basis for future study or an optional project.

4. Write a report summarizing what you learned from this experience. Include in your summary:

- a. what you expected to find, and what you found.
- b. some questions you have thought about as a result of your visit.

- c. some answers you discovered.
- d. how you can apply what you've learned to practical living. (50 points possible)

This helped me probe into any lurking or residual doubts, and provide a sense of closure and a commitment to growth. Without exception each student expressed appreciation for having gone through the experience. Moreover, in the year-end evaluations (when students grade me) more than half of them chose the "Visit Other Churches" assignment as the most valuable experience of the year.

## In Summary

The only "negative" comment I received on the assignment took place when I picked up John to go to the Odd Fellows building. John's grandfather walked us to my car, and turning to me with a half smile said, "Now don't you let him be corrupted, you hear?"

Oftentimes adults are threatened by youth asking questions. What needs to be emphasized is that youth will ask questions at some time. That is certain. It's up to us to decide whether we will be around to answer them. □

## NEWS NOTES

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president, Dr. Simongkir has given tremendous leadership and service to Adventist education in the Far East.

In addition to the four Medallions of Merit, seven Citations of Excellence were issued, two in absentia. Present to accept the awards were Drs. Kim Chong Wha and Maria Tumangday of the Far Eastern Division; Dr. M. E. Cherian and Pastor V. I. Varghese of the Southern Asia Division; and Pastor Harold Thomas Irvine of the South Pacific Division. Each of the recipients has given more than 20 years of continuous service and exhibited an unusual dedication to and impact upon Seventh-day Adventist education.

Dr. Kim Chong Wha, president of Korean Sahmyook University for the past 17 years, was honored in part for his efforts to gain government recognition for the university and for facilitating KSU recognition by the Board of Regents. Dr. Kim led the drive to increase enrollment at Sahmyook University—the largest union-operated SDA college in the world—and has played a major part in an ambitious building project there.

Outstanding in years of service as well as contributions, Dr. Maria Tumangday, vice president of academic affairs for Philippine Union College, has educational accomplishments that stretch over 39 years. She gave 18 years to classroom teaching at the elementary and secondary

levels before joining the staff of the PUC department of education. Her leadership ability led her into a top departmental post and she became the dean of the school of education.

In 1976, she became vice-president of academic affairs for PUC. Over the past 10 years Dr. Tumangday has welded together the various schools and departments of the college into a harmonious working unit and has significantly advanced the college's academic standards. Dr. Tumangday's use of gentle persuasion rather than force of authority has endeared her to those with whom she has worked. She has also added to the success of the graduate program by teaching, advising, and at times leading out in its administration.

Pastor Harold Thomas Irvine, associate director of education for the South Pacific Division, received the Citation of Excellence for his distinguished service to education in the South Pacific Division. In addition to outstanding work in the area of teacher training, he has also served as headmaster and teacher in several primary schools. Held in high regard by his fellow educators in the division, his role as an educator has been characterized by a quiet dignity, courtesy, and integrity.

Dr. M. E. Cherian, president of Spicer Memorial College for the past 23 years, was honored with the Citation of Excellence for his lifelong commitment to Christian education. In the 38 years he has been connected with Spicer College, he has exhibited an unusual devotion to the cause of

academic excellence and spiritual maturity on the Adventist campuses of Southern Asia.

As the senior-most educator/principal in the secondary system of the Southern Asia Division, Kothakulathu Itty Varghese, principal of Lowry Memorial Higher Secondary School, received special recognition for his 30 years of devotion to K-12 education. Combining an emphasis on classroom excellence with a strong Christian witness, Varghese has contributed to the growth of Adventist education in three different unions of the SAD. He is noted for his quiet spiritual strength and Christian concern for young people.

Those unable to be present to accept the awards were Dr. Senzo Naga-kubo, president of Saniku Gakuin College in Japan, and Dr. Ella Haddad, a professor at Middle East College.

Never before in the two decades since the General Conference Department of Education initiated top educational awards have so many honors been bestowed on non-American recipients. When the awards were developed, the church's school system in North America stood almost alone in advanced educational development. Such is no longer the case. According to Dr. George Babcock, "The vast majority of our students, teachers, and schools are now outside the United States. These honors are just one indication of recognition by the General Conference that overseas education has come of age."—Betty S. Eaton, Far Eastern Division Communication Department. □