

# Career Guidance and SABBATH OBSERVANCE

By Mitchell A. Tyner

**L**ook around your classroom. Where will your students be in 10 or 15 years? There's Susan, who wants to be a flight attendant, and Mark, who has his heart set on becoming a doctor. Andrea says she is going to work for the telephone company repairing lines and installing telephones. And Sean dreams of making a lot of money so he can buy a Porsche. Maybe drilling for oil, he says. Vicky wants to join the Army so she can see the world. But what will happen to Kenneth? Considering his grades and lack of interest in school, he will probably end up working in a factory or driving a bus.

How are you preparing your students for their future vocations? Your school, if typical, approaches education more as the acquisition of marketable skills than as the gaining of knowledge and understanding. Young people select careers as much by entry-level salaries and advancement possibilities as by personal interest in the subject matter. Some jobs obviously offer greater financial reward and opportunity for promotion than others. But students need to consider another relevant factor: some jobs are more likely to conflict with Sabbath observance than others.

## **Discrimination Against Religion?**

At this point you may be thinking that discrimination based on

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religious preference is illegal in the United States. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does make it an illegal act of religious discrimination for an employer to fail to accommodate the religious practices of an employee *unless* such accommodation would be an "undue hardship" on the conduct of the employer's business. Obviously the catch here is how one defines undue hardship.

The U.S. Supreme Court examined that phrase in the 1977 case of *Trans World Airlines v. Hardison*. In its

ruling, the Court defined "undue hardship" as (1) anything incompatible with a union contract or otherwise valid seniority agreement, (2) anything that causes the employer to incur more than minimal costs, either in actual expense or in decreased productivity, and (3) anything that interferes with the rights of other employees.

Since 1977 virtually all religious accommodation claims have been measured against those standards. This has not been an encouraging time for Sabbatarians. Of 44 known cases involving the accommodation of a Sabbatarian employee (on either Saturday or Sunday) since *Hardison*, only 18 have produced a judgment for the employee. The employer won 60 percent of the cases.

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## **Schools should help their students assess whether an employment field is especially likely to suffer from economic fluctuations.**

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That figure represents only the tip of the iceberg. Probably only a third of all Sabbath-related employment problems are reported to a local conference by church members. Of those about half result in charges being filed with a federal or state antidiscrimination agency. Of those charges, only a third end up in court. And only 40 percent of the

control economic fluctuations, they should help their students assess whether an employment field is especially likely to suffer from such fluctuations. Some businesses—the oil and gas industry being a notorious example—are historically “boom or bust” industries where the potential for Sabbath problems will be high.

Second, problems occur more frequently in some geographic areas than others. While we can't advise students to avoid the South and the Rust Belt, they should be aware that many more Sabbath problems are reported from these than from other areas.

Third, Sabbath problems occur much more frequently for blue-collar than white-collar employees. Of the 44 reported Sabbatarian-accommodation cases between 1977 and 1987, only 10 affected white-collar employees, and only four involved a position usually classified as professional. Of 13 such cases now being litigated by the General Conference, only one involves a white-collar position. Not one of these employees was a professional. It is morally repugnant for such problems to fall disproportionately on those least able to cope with them. But this is the reality, and it is not likely to change.

### **Problems in Specific Types of Employment**

Fourth, Sabbath problems occur more frequently in certain sectors of the economy than in others.

<u>Economic Sector</u>	<u>Percentage of Cases</u>
Manufacturing	33%
Transportation	26%
Sales	16%
Government	16%
Medical and Health	7%
Banking and Services	2%

There are valid explanations for these statistics. Both the manufacturing and transportation sectors are heavily unionized, with contracts that often restrict an employer's ability to accommodate a

Sabbatarian. Employees are commonly required to work considerable amounts of overtime in jobs whose staffing involves 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week schedules. In these cases, the possibilities for accommodation short of undue hardship are severely diminished.

Government employment generally presents fewer problems, but only at certain levels. One of the most difficult employment situations for a Sabbath-keeper is with the United States Postal Service: a six-day-a-week, unionized operation where often the only way to get the Sabbath off is to have high

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seniority, and the only way to earn high seniority is to work on Saturdays.

Sales work is complicated by the desire of stores to accommodate two-earner families who do a major part of their shopping on Friday night and Saturday. The Sabbath hours are a peak time for these employers, which makes accommodation for Sabbath observance correspondingly more difficult. While wholesale operations are easier for a Sabbatarian than retail, direct customer contact jobs in either present serious problems.

Medical and health-related employment has produced fewer problems for Sabbatarians, but largely because many SDAs are willing to perform such work on the Sabbath. Where employees have refused to perform nonessential work on the Sabbath, they have met with difficulties.

The banking, financial services, and information-based sectors have produced few accommodation crises. Virtually all of those

*Continued on page 43*

decisions are favorable. Based on those percentages, we can reliably estimate that for every 100 such problems incurred by Seventh-day Adventists, only three result in favorable court rulings.

### **Areas Presenting the Most Difficulty**

Obviously, with that sort of record, a better approach would be to avoid situations where such problems are most likely to arise. In analyzing the cases, several patterns begin to emerge.

First, the weaker the economy the more frequently Sabbath problems occur. While schools can't

the same program.

### Other Possibilities

A little ingenuity could develop other viable labor-intensive programs. These programs could include instruction in marketing techniques and the operation of small businesses, as well as agricultural technology. While such programs would not affect all or even most students in a large school, they would certainly fulfill the educational goals of Adventist agriculture more effectively than do present endeavors.

These enterprises could provide a necessary boost for Adventist agriculture. They would give more educated Adventists the ability to move to rural areas instead of to the big cities where most modern work is located. That opportunity, in turn, could help revitalize some of the rural churches that usually lose young people to urban areas. Adventist schools could thereby have a role in widening the options of those who were not born into a "landed family." Other students might use their training to develop family gardens or part-time businesses.

### Agriculture and the Church's Mission

New approaches to agriculture could also have a significant impact on the denomination's worldwide mission. To prepare missionaries schools could offer courses covering the principles of agriculture and methodologies for applying this information in poverty-stricken nations. Students would learn about labor-intensive methods of farming, the mores and culture of third-world nations, marketing techniques appropriate to such societies, as well as instructional methods and principles of nutrition. In addition, they would be taught the technical-scientific knowledges and skills that are supplied to farmers by the county agent in the United States.

"High-tech" agricultural missionaries may have little to contribute in many localities, but "low-tech" experts could make a real difference in the lives of many individuals and the functioning of the church throughout the world.

Ken Flemmer of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) says that some of these ideas are already being carried out in Africa and other places through the training of lay agricultural missionaries.

### Improving the Quality of Life

Flemmer points out, for example, that most Africans—including SDAs—live in rural areas and gain their livelihood from the land. Many members are "little more than subsistence farmers, producing barely enough to feed their own families." Such people can hardly be expected to support a rapidly growing church.

Flemmer calls for the training of lay agricultural teachers who can live in a village and teach improved methods. This not only provides a cash base for the support of the local church, but also serves as an arm of evangelistic outreach. Beyond that, it has obvious nutritional implications. "What," queries Flemmer, "would happen if each village had a self-supporting missionary?" He closes his article with an appeal to the Adventist Church to make a positive investment in village agriculture.<sup>9</sup>

For several years I have had concerns similar to Flemmer's. Unfortunately, Adventist schools in developed nations have done little to assist such agricultural endeavors as those sponsored by ADRA. If we were to seize this vision, we could generate research and develop innovative techniques that would substantially enhance the lives of people in preindustrial nations. We could also train agriculturalists to instruct Flemmer's indigenous lay missionaries in their homelands.

Developing such programs could help Adventist agricultural education to again contribute in a major way to the worldwide mission of the church in both industrial and developing nations.

The denomination's agricultural programs and school farms do not have to be symbols of guilt, when in fact they can be transformed into unlimited opportunities. Such a transformation, however, will take thought, the willingness to change, and a dedication to fulfilling the

true mission of the denomination. □

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1923), p. 319.

<sup>2</sup> ———, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), vol. 6, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the role of Avondale in the development of Adventist education see George R. Knight, "A System in Search of Identity," *The Journal of Adventist Education*, 48:4 (April-May 1986), p. 15; and Milton Hook, "The Avondale School and Adventist Educational Goals, 1894-1900," Ed.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1978.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1943), p. 349; ———, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1915), p. 374; ———, Ms. 92, 1900.

<sup>5</sup> George R. Knight, *Myths in Adventism: An Interpretive Study of Ellen White, Education, and Related Issues* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1985), pp. 235-250.

<sup>6</sup> *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 307.

<sup>7</sup> *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 319.

<sup>8</sup> "Farm and Greenhouse Operation," *Weimar Institute Bulletin*, special edition (October 1987), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Phone interview with Jerry Ellquist, Nov. 13, 1987.

<sup>10</sup> Ken Flemmer, "The Challenge of Village Agriculture," *Adventist Review* (May 21, 1987), pp. 8-11.

## CAREER GUIDANCE AND SABBATH OBSERVANCE

*Continued from page 25*

experiencing problems have been bank tellers. This part of the economy more frequently adheres to a traditional five-day week, and employs a higher percentage of white-collar and professional employees.

### Employee Attitude Problems

A final factor that causes difficulty in a large number of cases is employee attitude and/or personality clash. An employee cannot control a supervisor who denies scheduling changes as a way of maintaining authority. But that employee can—and must—demonstrate a positive attitude toward his or her work. A productive and highly valued employee will have less difficulty resolving Sabbath conflicts.

Students rightly look to SDA schools for career guidance. Aptitude assessment and job training are not enough. Teachers and counselors must also help students choose occupations where they can avoid conflict between employment and Sabbathkeeping. □