



# Caring and Excellence

By John M. Fowler

She sat there crying. Eighty-one and poor, she was a nobody. Hundreds of shoppers passed her by, but not one looked at her, spoke a kind word, or inquired about her grief. She was just another hopeless person, not worth a second thought, especially in a country where millions of such poor, forgotten, desperate souls live their lives as mere statistics.

Chitra Puthran just happened to pass by. The familiar white shirt, grey shorts, and blue tie identified him as a student from the local Seventh-day Adventist school. Hearing the wailing, Chitra turned and saw misery etched in the woman's face. Should he offer to help or rush on to school? He was already late. But the plight of the old woman touched him, and he asked her if there was anything he could do.

She told her story: that morning she had been robbed of all her

money, 25 rupees in all, and had nothing left to buy a bus ticket to her home in a nearby town. Chitra had no money. He was only nine years old, but he had a compassionate heart. He called two of his school-mates, and together they led the old woman to the nearest police station, and told her story there.

The police took care of the woman and made arrangements for her to get home. But one thing the police could not understand: why would three little kids stop to care for a poor, untidy old woman?

"What made you do this?" asked the police officer.

Chitra answered: "We learned in our school that God expects us to love our neighbors."

When the newspaper *Thinamalar* carried the story in the next day's edition, the Seventh-day Adventist school at Sankerancoil, South India, was featured prominently.

Seventh-day Adventist schools in Southern Asia seek to develop in young people a caring character.

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"I didn't know what God was like until I came to the Adventist school," writes Jaya Sudha, a student in Madras, India. To Jaya, God was a distant, impersonal, vengeful being. All her life she had lived to appease the great idol that reigned in her temple. But in the Adventist school where she enrolled in the eighth grade, she made a special discovery. The Bible teacher talked of a caring God whose love was so great that He gave everything for her. This shook Jaya out of her tradition. Jesus became her friend. She bravely took the risk of stepping out of her old beliefs to accept Him as her personal Saviour.

Seventh-day Adventist schools in Southern Asia attempt to mediate God's love and care to thousands of children each day.

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The stories of Jaya and Chitra are just two of hundreds that illustrate the mission of the Adventist school in



Southern Asia: to create an awareness of Christian character and concern, to impart quality education that develops academic excellence in children, and to bring the saving grace of God to thousands of children who pass through the Adventist classroom.

### **Story of Growth**

The Seventh-day Adventist educational system in Southern Asia is independent and does not receive assistance from local governments. It is the largest privately operated school system in the division territory. At the end of 1989, it enrolled nearly 78,000 students at elementary through tertiary levels. In 1985, we had a student population of about 67,000 students. In five years, the enrollment jumped by more than 16 percent.

Although Southern Asia's share of world church membership is only 3.3 percent, our division has the distinction of having almost 11 percent of the world church school enrollment. The division also has in its territory the Adventist church school with the largest enrollment: Madurai Central, South India Union, with 2,500 students. Madurai has five Adventist schools, with a total enrollment of 7,000. In this city Adventist school uniforms are seen everywhere.

The Southern Asia Division school system currently employs nearly 3,000 teachers, as compared to 2,419 in 1985. Of these, 23 percent are non-Adventists, mostly hired on a contract basis to care for language, science, and mathematics, subjects

for which qualified Adventist teachers are not available. A sponsorship program is underway to correct this deficiency.

Thirty years ago church leaders began a strong, organized sponsorship program to develop professional, qualified leadership. The program has borne fruit, as seen in the leadership of educational and medical work of the church. We now have established relationships with three distinguished medical schools in India where we can train medical and paramedical workers for our hospital work. The relationship with Christian Medical College in Vellore has endured for nearly 40 years. During the five-year relation with Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, we have been able to train 25 doctors. Last year, we concluded an agreement with Christian Medical College, Ludhiana, North India, which will facilitate the training of more medical personnel.

The main higher educational training center in Southern Asia continues to be Spicer Memorial College. It has a threefold commitment: to develop academic excellence in content areas of human knowledge, to build effective leadership for the church, and to provide for research and development in both academic and ecclesiastical fields.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The Seventh-day Adventist educational program in the Southern Asia Division is strong in many areas, including the following:

*Commitment.* The Adventist school

system in Southern Asia is committed to the philosophy of education advocated by the church—holistic development, preparation for useful service, and positive self-concept within the Christian context.

*Curricular strategies.* The school system has an academically respectable curricular strategy, meeting the needs of society and fostering programs that are approved by governments, professional bodies, universities, and community organizations.

*Community relations.* Wherever an Adventist school exists, it has brought credit and good will to the church. The Seventh-day Adventist name and presence have come to be associated with a spirit of excellence and with the striving for unselfish service. Many of our schools are engaged in community and social service.

*Building the church.* The Adventist school system in this division has functioned as a servant to the church. This relationship has been nurtured through the years so that today the school not only supplies facilities and leadership to varied activities of the church, but also takes active part in evangelistic activities such as Vacation Bible Schools, Adventist Youth Outreach, and branch Sabbath schools.

The church-school relationship is one of the strongest factors that contribute to the development and growth of evangelism in Southern Asia. Take, for example, the school in Vishakapatnam. The city, located on the eastern seafront of India between Calcutta and Madras, is a cultural



and educational center of Andhra Pradesh. For the past 50 years, no major evangelistic program had been conducted in that city. Last year, the school staff, under the direction of the local conference, began a major witnessing program. They invited the division educational director, Dr. John Fowler, and his associate, Pastor K. Jesuratnam, to conduct this campaign. The teachers were fully involved in every aspect of the evangelistic work, and the local conference provided a team of trained evangelists.

When the campaign began on November 25, few would have believed what the Holy Spirit accomplished. The hall, with a seating capacity of 700, was filled to overflowing every night. At the conclusion of the crusade, 93 people gave their hearts to Christ. The church today has the potential of organizing at least seven churches in this city, all because of the concentrated efforts of a committed school staff.

"Each school an outreach center" has been the motto of Southern Asia Division schools throughout the past quinquennium. Evangelism has been a continuing part of the institutional witnessing thrust, both within and outside institutions. Thanks to Christian education, 1,239 students were baptized during the current quinquennium. Were it not for the witness of Adventist schools, these students would never have come to the knowledge of God's saving grace.

**Work-study program.** While work-study is a fading concept in many parts of the world, in Southern Asia it is very much alive. All of our boarding schools have a work-study program that teaches the dignity of labor (a badly needed concept within the context of a culture where manual labor is considered undignified) and affords economic assistance to needy students. Spicer Memorial College continues to operate an efficient work-study program in which all students are expected to work for a minimum number of hours each grade period. Strict records are maintained, grades are given for work performed, and satisfactory completion of an agreed work program is required for graduation. The program has attracted the attention of educators throughout India. In fact, Poona University, a premiere institution in the country, has invited the college administration to serve as consultants on their academic restructuring.

**Academic excellence.** Seventh-day

#### *riculum in Southern Asia schools.*

Adventist schools in our division are known for their academic achievements. For example, of the 34 Adventist high schools whose students took public government examinations last year in South India, 21 had 100 percent of their students pass the tests, with many students scoring first class or distinction ranks. With the exception of two schools, all others achieved more than a 75 percent passing rate in public examinations. On the average, only 37 percent of other students in the state pass these exams.

While we rejoice in the achievements of our schools, we are also striving to overcome some weaknesses. One major problem is the lack of trained teaching personnel. Nearly half of our staff do not possess any type of certification. Today almost one-third of our staff is non-Adventist, whereas 20 years ago, the figure was only 9 percent. Other weaknesses exist in the areas of facilities, financial self-support, and integration of faith and learning.

#### **The Agenda for 1990s**

Despite all the accomplishments, we cannot say we have arrived. Adventist education is not a destination; it is a journey—searching for excellence, reaching the unreached, striving for the better, shaping new lives. Every teacher and administrator in Southern Asia is forced to reflect on the question: Why operate Adventist schools?

The Adventist school has served the church well in Southern Asia. It has taken the flag of Adventism to towns and cities across the land, and in each the banner is flying high. But the future demands that we maintain and reemphasize three distinctives of Adventist education.

#### *First, the redemptive imperative.*

Adventist schools exist because we believe it is the task of education to restore in the child the image of God. To that extent, the educational process is redemptive, both in terms of the child's usefulness in today's chaotic world and his or her readiness to face eternity.

#### *Second, the educational imperative.*

The moral dimension of Adventist education and the character development in each child are crucial to the Adventist philosophy of education. Character development is the very heart of our program, which aims to develop the whole person. That is why we require Bible as an integrating center in our teaching program. We strive to achieve that "degree of moral power pervading a school" by which its prosperity can be measured (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, p. 143).

Third, *the personal imperative.* The human touch is an essential part of Adventist education in Southern Asia. From the one-room experiment of an orphanage in the late 1800s to the towering strength of Adventist academia, we have come a long way. But in the process, have we lost the one-to-one, eye-to-eye, soul-to-soul concern for Christian education? We want our teachers to be not simply dispensers of knowledge but also mediators of divine grace and wisdom to the growing child.

While we are thankful for the past, we want to be conscious of the future: to press for the extension of God's kingdom, to assist each student in preparing for eternity, and to hasten the day when doors of the Heavenly School will open to the redeemed of all ages. As they face the 1990s our schools are committed toward that objective. □