

Outreach Programs for Small Schools

By Edward M. Norton

"What can we do for Halloween this year? There must be some way we can give 'treats' rather than ask for them," Miss Harms said to the students in her one-room school. After considerable discussion, the class decided to hand out *Happiness Digest (Steps to Christ)* to the neighbors on Halloween morning.

The books were purchased, the students practiced their introductions, and prayers for guidance ascended to God. Early Halloween morning the children began knocking on doors.

"Good morning," they said. "We are students from the George Sumner School in St. Johns [Michigan]. We would like to give you a treat rather than ask for one this year!"

The students were greeted pleasantly door after door. In every house except two, the occupants took the books and thanked the students for their thoughtfulness.

At one house the lady exclaimed, "My husband is a minister. I'm sure there are some good things in here he can use in his sermons!"

Clowns for Christ

At another school in Owosso, Michigan, preparations begin early. It is Bible Labs¹ day. Applying make-up and dressing as Clowns for Christ takes a lot of time. After suiting up, the students visit a nearby nursing home. They conduct a short song service followed by skits and pantomimes with a spiritual message.

One skit depicts Christ as the Bread of Life, while another portrays the cross as a symbol of salvation for everyone. The audience watches with rapt attention. After the program many residents expressed their appreciation.

On one occasion, as the students were leaving a rest home that they had just visited for the first time, the manager said with amazement: "You are the only students to visit us who know how to express affection!" This provided an opportunity for the teachers to explain the purpose of a Christian school.

Clean-up Projects

While reading the newspaper one day, the Bible labs coordinator² for the First Flint Elementary School noticed an urgent request by local park officials. The city budget had been cut, leaving insufficient funds to maintain local parks.

School officials inquired. As a result, the school was assigned a nearby park that had become a community eyesore. Week after week, with their teachers and adult help, the students picked up trash, cut grass, and cleaned up the neglected park. They received a commendation from the park officials and many words of appreciation from grateful residents of the neighborhood.

Usually the success of the Bible Labs program depends on the assistance of a church member other than the teacher.

Greeting Cards for Shut-ins

On several occasions, while the older students worked in the park, younger students created unusual greeting cards in the gym. The cards started out as a 30-foot to 40-foot long, eight-inch-wide roll of paper spread across the gym floor.

Each student chose a section on which to create a personal greeting and inspirational thought. The completed scrolls were given to the pastor or sent to shut-ins.

An Impossible Task?

Many teachers and administrators of small schools believe in witnessing and community service but ask, "How can a

multigrade school with few children, limited personnel, and restricted resources possibly carry out a viable program?" This is a good question. However, it *can* be done. The cases cited in this article occurred in one- to three-room schools.

Based on more than six years of experience as conference Bible labs coordinator in Washington and Michigan, I have found that the success of the outreach program is generally inversely proportionate to the school's size! In a smaller school it is easier to develop a comprehensive and productive program.

Advantages of a Small School Program

There are several advantages to scheduling an outreach program in a small school setting. Here are a few:

1. *Size.* It is much easier to prepare a small group of students for service and to supervise their activity.

2. *Orientation.* Students need information, materials, and practice before engaging in a project. This is easier to accomplish with a small group.

3. *Flexibility.* The multigrade teacher has had extensive experience in combining and adjusting schedules and subject matter. This expertise makes it easier for him or her to integrate preparation for outreach into the various subject areas. For instance, greeting cards can be made during art time; scripts written and practiced during language arts; Bible studies learned during Bible class, etc.

4. *Transportation and supervision.* Fewer cars and adult volunteers are needed to care for a small group of students.

5. *Outreach Coordinator.* Usually the success of the Bible Labs program depends on the assistance of a church member other than the teacher. A potential Bible labs coordinator would probably find it less intimidating to work with a small school.

6. *Proximity to school* In most cases small schools are located in a community with a sense of closeness and loyalty. People nearby usually have the flexibility and interest to participate in school activities. In larger schools near highly populated urban areas, most parents and church members work. This makes it more difficult for them to participate in school affairs.

Research indicates that smallness offers an advantage in terms of student participation in school activities. Serow writes: "school activity programs are utilized primarily by middle- and upper-middle class students."³ On the other hand, Serow also found "regular students were more active than marginal students." Apparently, upper- and middle-class students who attend school regularly are more likely to participate in extracurricular programs, including service projects.

However, Serow notes a rather unexpected finding of the research:

The difference in participation was almost negligible in the smaller school and quite marked in the larger. Additionally, the less advantaged students in the small school participated more often than the large school "regulars." The compelling factor seems to have been the demands of the environment.

In other words, small schools need full participation to accomplish their tasks. Their teachers are therefore more likely to urge every student to participate, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Alexander, Saylor, and Williams, in *The High School*, agree with the observations of Serow. They write, "Participation in the activity program varies inversely with the size of the school. Unlike the program of studies, the program of activities seems to fare better in small schools."⁴

The Conference's Role

What part should the conference play in service-learning activities? First and foremost, conference leadership must articulate the divinely revealed philosophy relating to service.⁵ Jesus Himself said that "the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28, RSV).⁶ Jesus was the embodiment of the self-sacrificing character of God.

Ellen White has clearly stated that such unselfish service to others is to be a hallmark of Adventist education. She wrote:

True education is missionary training. Every son or daughter of God is called to be a missionary; we are called to the service of God and our fellow men; and to fit us for this service should be the object of our education.⁷

Second, the conference should provide official support for this type of curricular innovation. This support should

come from conference committee and K-12 educational board actions.

Third, the conference must provide a curriculum guide, models for scheduling the service projects and project ideas, as well as suggestions for supervision and transportation.

Fourth, the conference should schedule in-service training and practice for teachers. If possible, conference personnel should assist students and teachers in carrying out volunteer projects. Such participation provides both example and encouragement.

Last, the conference must provide adequate public relations to inform the church members about service activities in their schools and the tremendous advantage to youth of participating in the "Caring and Sharing Curriculum."

Scheduling

How can service projects be effectively scheduled in the weekly program? The most successful schools set aside one afternoon a week, generally from 1 to 3 p.m., to go to the project site. On occasions when more preparation is needed, they may remain at school one afternoon to complete the task. The week before the project, students receive instruction and prepare items. The projects can be integrated into the daily subjects.

Schools that cannot set aside time for weekly projects can use a biweekly or monthly schedule. This often works better if no outside person can be found to coordinate the activities.

Confusion, poorly prepared projects, and discouragement may result if one person tries to carry the program alone. The teacher must be careful not to take on too much. It is better to start small and accumulate a track-record of successes. This will allow the students to catch the spirit of service to others.

If properly prepared and carefully implemented, service-learning will be the most enjoyable and spiritually satisfying experience of the week. Albert Schweitzer was quoted as saying, "The only ones among you who will be happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."⁸

Through service, students will find real meaning in life and preparation for the life to come. Small schools have an ideal setting to provide these experiences. □

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Bible Labs are an organized program of community service. They are designed to be an integral part of the Adventist educational curriculum. The

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North American Division Office of Education is writing excellent materials for small schools. Thanks to this, and to advances in curriculum and instruction, our small-schools teachers can hold their own anywhere. □

Arthur B. Devlin is a graduate student in curriculum and instruction at the School of Education, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Before enrolling at the university, he taught for nine years in Georgia-Cumberland Conference church schools and served on the Adventist Reading Management System committee.

REFERENCES

¹ M. G. Tymeson, "A Study of Materials Used in Developing a Principal's Handbook for Seventh-day Adventist Elementary Schools," Master's thesis, School of Graduate Studies, Potomac University, Washington, D.C., 1959, p. 3.

² Robert L. DeBruyn, "Pleasant vs. Unpleasant," *The Master Teacher*, 20:23 (February 20, 1989).

³ ———, "Two Vital Skills," *The Master Teacher*, 1:14 (December 14, 1987).

⁴ E. L. Morphet, R. L. Johns, and T. L. Reller, *Educational Organization and Administration: Concepts, Practices, and Issues* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1982), p. 103.

⁵ D. Keele, *Handbook for Senior Academy Principals of Seventh-day Adventist Schools* (Silver Spring, Md.: Office of Education, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, 1990).

⁶ Alan Paisey and Audrey Paisey, *Effective Management in Primary Schools* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 23.

⁷ A. H. Shuster and D. H. Stewart, *The Principal and the Autonomous Elementary School* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Pub. Co., 1973), p. 17.

⁸ Quoted by L. W. Hughes and G. C. Ubben, *The Elementary Principal's Handbook: A Guide to Effective Action* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989), p. 373.

⁹ Morphet, et al.

¹⁰ Schuster and Stewart.

BOOK REVIEWS

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Educators will find it useful to assign this book for students to discuss and to apply in personal experiences.

—Selma A. Chajj Mastrapa.

Selma A. Chajj Mastrapa is a psychologist who works at Takoma Academy in Takoma Park, Maryland. Until the fall of 1990, she was Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology in the School of Education at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Rock, Calvin B., *Church Leadership: A Call to Virtue*. Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1990. Paper, 96 pages, \$7.95.

The author speaks to church leaders from a broad background as a pastor, college president, and general vice-president of the General Conference of Seventh-

day Adventists. Church and educational leaders at all levels of the organizational structure will find this book to have practical appeal. It provides both a professionally and a spiritually centered discussion of the leadership needs of the late 20th century.

The author points out that today's world challenges church leaders with attitudes and perceptions unknown in the past. This calls for a distinctive type of leadership for today's church.

Rock does not downplay the importance of leaders' being on the cutting edge of technology, or the need to keep pace with scientific management techniques. However, his basic premise is that the Christian church, led by Christian workers, suffers or succeeds in proportion to the virtue of its leaders, and that today the church faces a crisis of ethics that must be resolved if God's purposes are to be fulfilled.

The book then addresses these questions: (1) What specific conditions in society make leadership increasingly difficult today? (2) What leadership traits are especially challenged by these circumstances? and (3) What, if anything, can be done to make sure that leaders acquire the virtues required by the current situation?

The book consists of nine chapters, each based upon one of the indispensable leadership qualities so necessary today. Beginning with self-confidence, Rock moves on to courage, trust, self-control, versatility, honesty, decisiveness, loyalty, and disinterested love.

Rock addresses the real problems and challenges of modern leaders by using practical illustrations from everyday life. He also draws upon personal experiences to illustrate the various virtues.

Academy and college administrators will readily identify with the situations presented. A case in point is the chapter on "Courage." How do we decide between courage and mercy? Does courage mean steadfastly applying the rules, and administering justice? Or does it mean having the courage to make an exception? Can one give a coveted second (or third or fourth) chance and still administer justice?

Rock's book is replete with situations that leaders can identify with. Illustrations, quotes, and examples buttress the original premise and lead the reader to a better understanding and a deeper commitment to more adequately fulfill his or her role in God's church.

Rock warns that virtuous leadership may or may not result in "thank you" plaques, certificates, or accolades.

But the greatest reward of all will be that of knowing that one is perpetuating in a doomed society the noble principles of our Lord. That, in the final analysis, is all we have a right to

desire to expect in this world. The promise of heaven and the earth made new will often buoy our spirits and fire our imaginations, but even these are not our ultimate stimuli. That which gives fuel to our witness and life to our souls must ever be the unfathomable, unsearchable love of Christ.

This book is highly recommended reading for all those holding leadership positions in the church or school.—Gil Plubell.

Dr. Gil Plubell is Director of the Office of Education, K-12, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, in Silver Spring, Maryland.

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program was first piloted and then incorporated into the regular weekly schedule by Washington Conference schools. It has been further developed in the Michigan Conference. Several other conferences are also actively participating in Bible Labs. For further information about the program and materials write to Dr. Edward Norton, Associate Superintendent of Education, P.O. Box 19009, Lansing, MI 48901, U.S.A.

² The Bible Labs coordinator is a church member selected by the church nominating committee. He or she gives leadership to the school's community service program. *The Bible Labs Manual*, a "How to" booklet, contains among other information the job description for this position.

³ Robert C. Serow, "The High School Extracurriculum: Cui Bono?" *National Association of Secondary School Principals*, 63 (April 1979), pp. 91, 92.

⁴ William M. Alexander, Galen J. Saylor, and Emmett L. Williams, *The High School* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), pp. 214, 215.

⁵ For further information on the philosophy of service see the author's dissertation: Edward M. Norton, *The Philosophy of Christian Service and Its Practice in the Seventh-day Adventist Senior Academies of the United States During the 1979-80 School Year*. Ed.D dissertation, Andrews University, 1985.

⁶ The Bible text marked RSV is from the Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1946, 1952, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, and is used by permission.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn. 1905), p. 395.

⁸ Cited in Dan Conrad and Diane Hedin, *Action Learning in Minnesota* (Bethesda, Md.: 1975 [ERIC Document Reprod. Service No. ED117 016]), p. 13.

Dr. Edward M. Norton is currently Associate Superintendent of Education for the Michigan Conference of SDA, Lansing, Michigan. His responsibilities include Bible labs, secondary staff supervision, and curriculum development. He has been an elementary and secondary teacher and principal, and has taught religion at the college level in the United States and Argentina. He served on the Washington Conference Bible Labs manual committee and on the General Conference Bible Textbook Steering Committee, and has taught several seminars and in-services on Bible labs and school service activities.