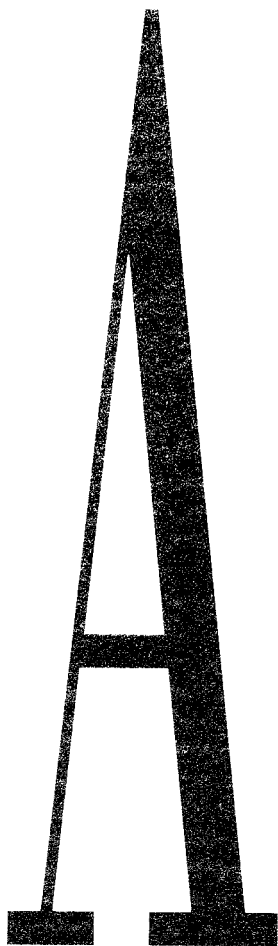


SHARING PICTURES OF JESUS

BY LINDA ROSEN



After lunch each Monday, students at the Sunnyside SDA School in Clear Lake, Wisconsin, receive their assignments for the afternoon. Several students will read to a visually impaired woman, younger students will visit a widow, and another group will clean a yard for an elderly person, while others will arrange pictures in photo albums for an older couple.

Twice a month the students are divided into groups of five. After being assigned to a driver, they visit their "Adopted Grandparents" at the Golden Age Manor.

The students look forward to Monday afternoons, though the activities can be emotionally and physically strenuous. Based on prior experiences, the students know that plans may change, and creative and quick thinking may be necessary. The students have visited and worked with a variety of individuals, most of whom are not members of their church.

Dismissal time comes quickly on these days. The people hate to see the children leave, and the students want to complete their work projects. After returning to school the students meet together to share their experiences. They describe their visits, express concern about certain individuals, give suggestions to those seeking advice, and seek solutions to problems they encountered.

In the past five years the Sunnyside students, parents, and teachers have invested considerable time and energy in Bible Labs. This program requires periodic evaluation to determine its impact and to allow for necessary adjustments.

Students' Reaction

"Mrs. Rosen, I think it's really good that we have adopted grandparents," said eleven-year-old Heather as she walked into my classroom one morning.

I agreed and asked why she thought so. She told me an Adventist friend in public school asked how she could stand going to see those old people in the nursing home.

With a smile Heather said, "I told her it was fun—although at first I wasn't sure

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about it either. You feel good when you help to make someone else happy."

Rewards of Service

Comments like these come spontaneously and often from children involved in Bible Labs. These students have learned that helping and encouraging others brings its own rewards.

The service-structured program has helped our students learn to portray a loving and caring God. They have acquired the poise and confidence to converse with a variety of people, ranging from the warm and friendly to the gruff and disinterested. Because of their increased sensitivity to the needs of others, they have initiated ways to serve community residents and fellow classmates.

Student Awareness Leads to Action

When students come to the teacher asking how they can help a family in the neighborhood that has just lost a barn in a fire, this indicates student awareness. When they collect nearly a hundred dollars, most of it their own money, ask for contributions at prayer meeting, put together bags of food from the Pathfinders' supply of canned goods and then ask you to drive them to the family—who have never heard of our school and are strangers to the children—this is clearly student-initiated action.

Students who have been actively involved in Christian service search for ways to carry out their own ideas. A third-grade student showed his teacher a note he had received. I overheard the teacher say that he must have a big brother from their upper-grade room. Upon investigating I discovered that two of my students, seeing a need, had decided to reach out to several younger children through notes and friendship.

When other students heard about the project, they wanted to participate, too. Their involvement has reassured the younger children that the older ones care about them. It has also helped the older students to be more understanding and tolerant. Often, an older student asks a

younger one to join him or her for lunch.

Community Impact

People in the community often ask about the children who visit the nursing home. Our students have become an integral part of the nursing home's activity program. After observing their interaction with the residents, the state surveyors recommended that certain residents get involved in our program. According to activity director Rhonda Paulsen, the staff at the nursing home have noticed a change in the residents.

Says Rhonda, "There is an electricity or charge in the air since the students have been coming to the nursing home. The mood is upbeat and happy. We used to have to coax the residents to come to the activity room. Now they come on their own. They tell the nurses that they want to be wakened if they are napping when the Sunnyside kids come."

Near the nurses' station hangs an 18 x 30-inch group picture of the students and adopted grandparents. The attached plaque reads, "Adopted Grandparent Program," with our school name and the year the picture was taken. In appreciation for the students' volunteer work, the photographer donated an identical photo to the school. The nursing home had it professionally framed and presented it to us on Valentine's Day as a token of their love.

About a year after we began visiting the nursing home, Rhonda invited me to help plan the manor's Christmas program. As we talked, she told me how the

residents had responded to our students.

Then she said something that surprised me. "And to think I almost told you no that day you called. I thought of every excuse, but you sounded so excited and persistent I couldn't say no. The residents weren't too happy about it either. I am so thankful I didn't say no."

She said that other groups had come a few times and quit. The children were rough and loud. The residents felt as though the children were being dumped on them to watch, and they were not very happy about it.

She added, "There is something different about your kids. They are polite and kind. They are comfortable with what they are doing and confident. There is something different about your school. It's very special. The residents look forward to having your students come."

Church members also have shared feedback from the community. Our school-board chairman talks with many people in his work as an excavator. He says that prejudice toward Seventh-day Adventists has been reduced by our Christian-service program. Local residents view our student involvement in the community very positively.

The city newspaper heard about our adopted grandparent program at the manor. A few days later, the photographs they had taken covered most of the front page of the newspaper.

Far-spreading Ripples

Like the ripples on a lake caused by a pebble plunging into the still water, the effects of Bible Labs are far-reaching. As the news spreads, more opportunities open to us. Often we have more to do than we have students or time. Two other nursing homes want us to participate in their activity program; lonely elderly people would love to have our students visit them every week; young mothers could use a helping hand; homebound or handicapped people need their windows washed, yards cleaned, or simple housekeeping tasks done for them.

Imitation is another ripple effect of Bible Labs. A relative of one of the adopted grandparents visited the Golden Age Manor while we were there. Thrilled with what she saw, she vowed to develop a similar program at her local nursing home in another state.

Our church members are proud of their school. Bible Labs have bridged the gap between the church members and the students. When a young person chooses a church member as a prayer pal, secretly gives him cards and various handmade items, and prays daily for him, this helps the student become more aware of the people who make up the church. It also fosters friendships between church members and the children.

Influence of Students and Parents

A non-Adventist seventh-grader helped present a sermon she and her peers had prepared. Afterward she expressed her decision to follow Christ. Her mother, who is not a church member, came forward with tears in her eyes and hugged her daughter. Later that spring this girl was baptized. She was active in our service activities and influenced positively by her Christian friends. I am convinced that these experiences influenced her decision.

Our students have become positive role models for younger children in the church. Preschoolers want to choose prayer pals and adopted grandparents. At the beginning of each month a little sister of one of the students chooses an older child to be her prayer pal. She prays for that person every day and makes cards for him or her. Her mother helps her put the cards in the student's church mailbox.

Our parents are pleased that their children are participating in Christian service. Their positive reinforcement encourages the students.

Service an Outgrowth of Love

For service to be truly meaningful it must come from an outgrowth of love for humanity. We must see those around us through Jesus' eyes. When this happens, caring and helping come naturally. Knowing Jesus as their Saviour and seeing the example of humble service and love for humanity that He set helps put Christian service in its proper perspective.

A few vignettes from our commu-

nity outreach program may help to illustrate the impact of loving service.

An elderly widow takes pleasure in using her pretty dishes to serve fancy cookies and juice to the children visiting her.

Everyone in the nursing home activity room gathers around the pool table as 92-year-old Victor plays pool from his wheelchair with his adopted grandson, Paul.

Fifteen-year-old Ivane has just given her school picture to her adopted grandmother, Gladys. As they walk down the hall, Gladys shows off the picture, saying, "Look what I've got! Isn't she pretty . . . You know, she's my girl. Do we look alike?" A few weeks later Ivane tells me, "My grandma (her adopted grandmother from the nursing home) is so proud! She says she is going to send me to college." Gladys gives Ivane five dollars each time we go to visit. Ivane is saving it for

college. "Gladys never married, has no family, and does not spend her money," says the activity director. "She loves Ivane and wants to do this for her."

A little old lady serves the students ice cream and cookies to thank them for cleaning her apartment and reading a large-print magazine to her. She gathers them around her and prays for them. The children thank her and leave quietly.

A dozen students fill the living room of an elderly couple. As the children sing their songs from memory and unaccompanied, the couple sit on the edge of their seats, smiling broadly. A teenage boy steps forward and says, "We would like to pray with you." The couple serve cookies and the children linger. Later, my mother-in-law receives a call telling how the children ". . . even prayed for us by name."

A husband files for divorce after 25

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eral years of service-learning:

It's so exciting to be involved in a great work such as this and I hope and pray that every school in the world can take on a program such as Bible Labs. It's a blessing that lingers with you forever. It also helps you to be more prepared, happy, and enthusiastic young people to carry on the most sacred and special work on earth. It's like a fire, a fire that starts very small, but becomes bigger and bigger until everyone can see it and witness it, and feel it. Bible Labs may be the start of that fire. It ignites our spirits and nurtures it until it becomes a roaring fire and it cannot be contained. It spreads everywhere leaving its path and influence behind for all to see. It's God's fire and with His help we are His flames."—Tammie Kroehler, Wilson Junior Academy, Wilson, Michigan. ❧

Dr. Edward M. Norton, coordinator for this issue, is Associate Superintendent of Education for the Michigan Conference of SDA, Lansing, Michigan. He has had major responsibilities for Bible Labs in the Washington and Michigan conferences, and has served on the General Conference Bible Textbook Steering Committee. A former teacher at all levels from elementary through tertiary levels in the United States and Argentina, Dr. Norton's doctoral dissertation dealt with service-learning. His enthusiasm, persistence, and hard work helped make this issue on service-learning a reality.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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32. *Ibid.*, pp. 396, 402.
33. CE, p. 193.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
35. *Education*, pp. 29, 30.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
37. Bible Labs, a service-learning program was first piloted in the Washington Conference of the North American Division. Subsequently, Michigan and about 12 other conferences have been in-serviced in the program. For further information, correspond with the author of the article, Dr. Edward M. Norton, Associate Superintendent of Education, Michigan Conference of SDA, P. O. Box 19009, Lansing, MI 48901. Telephone (517) 485-2226.

Sharing Pictures of Jesus

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years of marriage. He asks to have his name removed from the church books. The students carefully choose Bible verses to write on cards they have made. Two older students deliver the cards. He takes the cards and quickly walks off, leaving the students wondering if he is offended. Later a friend tells us that he was fighting back tears, and quickly went into the house where he read and reread the pile of cards.

Three eighth graders travel to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, with Sue, our substitute teacher. Her brother, who works in Russia, has asked that they visit a Russian teenager with a rare blood disease. They bring him a small gift and a card and return with a gift box of candy from Russia and a large book on Russian art.

The drivers say that the ride back to school after Bible Labs sounds like a beehive. The children share experiences with the people they have visited.

We meet immediately upon returning from Bible Labs to share the

afternoon's events. The children talk freely about their day. Though most of the activities have gone well, some have experienced difficulties. The teachers acknowledge and empathize with the students. They ask the class for suggestions and ways to solve the problem.

Effects on Students' Lives

Do the students think Bible Labs have made a difference in their lives? We talk about that once a quarter. Students say that Bible Labs have helped them to be less selfish. The program has helped them to think of ways to be of service on their own outside of school. The students also say that Bible Labs help them to organize and plan their daily lives. They are less fearful in new situations.

I have also observed a growth in social skills and personality development. Their "people" skills improve the longer they are involved with Bible Labs.

Our Bible Labs coordinator models the love and joy of service. She spends many hours of volunteer time on the phone, driving the students to their destination, and participating in the activities. She sees the results of her planning and the impact of a structured service program on everyone involved. She too shares the rewards of serving.

Scheduling Activities

Not every school is able to obtain a coordinator for the Bible Lab program. Even without a coordinator, many activities are fairly easy to schedule. There are always cards to be made. My students have literally made hundreds of cards for the sick, discouraged, or mourning and for prayer pals.

Set up a schedule to visit a local nursing home using regular drivers. Or sponsor an orphan, as we do. Once a month the students bring a dollar they have earned. This provides enough money to pay for half a sponsorship for Milca, a little girl in an orphanage in Central America.

Whatever service activities you choose, do them with commitment and love. Help the students understand that they are spreading pictures of Jesus to the community by their actions. Start small; the Lord will bless your efforts and open doors for your students to serve. ❧

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