

# Editorial

## Alarming Trends

**F**irst, the good news. At the end of 1990 the Seventh-day Adventist educational system had the largest enrollment in its history—826,000 students worldwide. These students were instructed by more than 41,000 teachers in over 5,600 schools, colleges, and universities around the world.

Now, the not-so-good news. A year-by-year comparison of the number of church members with the number of students attending our schools reveals two significant trends:

- Despite the rapid increase in baptisms worldwide, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of students enrolled in our schools in relation to our global membership (now approaching seven million).
- There has been a general increase in the ratio of non-Adventist students enrolled in our worldwide system and, conversely, a decline in the ratio of Seventh-day Adventist students.

These are the main conclusions of a study recently completed by Reo Ganson and Agripino Segovia—associate directors of the General Conference Education Department—in consultation with Donald Yost, director of Archives and Statistics at church world headquarters. The results of this study, with statistics for each of the world divisions, were presented to church leaders during the recent Annual Council held in Perth, Australia.

The statistics and charts that appear on page 38 show the trends starting with 1975, the first year for which we have firm statistics for each educational level. A few general observations will help explain these figures.

Chart 1 compares the total number of church members with the number of Adventist students in our schools at each level (elementary, secondary, or tertiary) for the year listed. This chart shows that in 1975 there were 67 Adventist elementary students per 1,000 members, 21 secondary students per 1,000 members, and 10 tertiary students per 1,000 members. Fifteen years later, in 1990, the respective ratios were 41, 12, and 5 per 1,000. Graph 1 traces the trajectory of these ratios year by year.

Chart 2 compares the total number of church members with the total number of students enrolled in our schools (both Adventist and non-Adventist) at each educational level for the years listed. This chart reveals that in 1975 there were 104 elementary students per 1,000 members, 35 secondary students per 1,000 members, and 13 tertiary students per 1,000 members. In 1990, the ratios were 92, 22, and 6 respectively. Graph 2 traces the trajectory of these ratios through the 15 years.<sup>1</sup>

What are the factors behind these ratios and trends? Demographic changes in the society at large? Economic dislocations? Social shifts within the church? Inadequate methods of recording church membership? Unbalanced emphases in our programs and appropriations?

A comparison of the ratios of Charts 1 and 2 makes it clear that the overall quality of Adventist schools and the values they teach attract an increasing number of non-Adventist parents and students.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, our schools

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THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION (ISSN 0021-8480) is published bimonthly, October through May, and a summer issue for June, July, August, and September by the Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600. Telephone (301) 680-5075. FAX (301) 680-6090. Subscription price, U.S. \$14.95. Single copy, U.S. \$3.25. Second-class mailing paid at Silver Spring, Maryland, and additional mailing office. Please send all changes of address to Southwestern ColorGraphics, P.O. Box 677, Keene, TX 76059, including both old and new address. Address all editorial and advertising correspondence to the Editor. Copyright 1992 General Conference of SDA. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, P.O. Box 677, Keene, TX 76059.

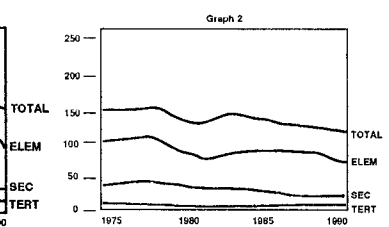
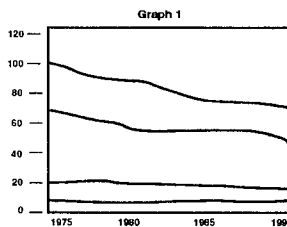
**WORLD TOTALS**  
**Comparative Statistics of Elementary, Secondary, and Tertiary SDA Students**  
**per 1000 Membership in the SDA Church**

	Members	Elem St	El St/M	Sec St	Se St/M	Tert St	Te St/M	Tot Stu	To St/M
1975	1,835,158	123,659	67	38,624	21	19,859	10	182,142	99
1976	1,936,644	122,406	63	38,029	19	22,632	11	183,067	94
1977	2,039,227	116,654	57	45,883	22	23,955	11	186,492	91
1978	2,159,789	127,033	58	47,665	22	23,858	11	198,556	91
1979	2,299,630	139,115	60	48,273	20	26,569	11	213,957	93
1980	2,685,772	143,294	53	49,735	18	28,555	10	221,584	82
1981	2,791,601	151,372	54	50,762	18	29,061	10	231,195	82
1982	3,213,459	199,202	61	51,638	16	28,428	8	279,268	86
1983	3,385,137	219,089	64	51,952	15	27,115	8	298,156	88
1984	4,276,061	263,151	61	59,640	13	29,194	6	351,985	82
1985	4,564,171	281,461	61	64,873	14	30,576	6	376,910	82
1986	4,927,674	269,999	54	63,093	12	30,326	6	363,418	73
1987	5,269,628	288,917	54	66,030	12	31,083	5	386,030	73
1988	5,632,770	295,859	52	75,742	13	35,951	6	407,552	72
1989	6,062,173	299,174	49	82,868	13	35,084	5	417,126	68
1990	6,480,975	271,961	41	77,830	12	35,275	5	385,066	59

**Comparative Statistics of Total Elementary, Secondary, and Tertiary Students**  
**per 1000 Membership in the SDA Church**

	Members	Elem St	El St/M	Sec St	Se St/M	Tert St	Te St/M	Tot Stu	To St/M
1975	1,835,158	192,668	104	64,608	35	24,597	13	281,873	153
1976	1,936,644	204,415	105	71,017	36	26,104	13	301,536	155
1977	2,039,227	220,478	108	80,049	39	27,014	13	327,541	160
1978	2,159,789	247,906	114	83,377	38	28,334	13	359,617	166
1979	2,299,630	260,947	113	74,951	32	29,985	13	365,883	159
1980	2,685,772	278,076	103	79,099	29	31,840	11	389,015	144
1981	2,791,601	292,546	104	83,127	29	32,058	11	407,731	146
1982	3,213,459	393,523	122	95,659	29	30,501	9	519,683	161
1983	3,385,137	433,125	127	101,811	30	29,278	8	564,214	166
1984	4,276,061	518,364	121	120,699	28	34,358	8	673,421	157
1985	4,565,071	544,387	119	119,396	26	33,383	7	697,166	152
1986	4,927,674	547,155	111	118,143	23	36,113	7	701,411	142
1987	5,269,628	580,923	110	147,004	27	37,351	7	765,278	145
1988	5,632,770	574,688	102	131,464	23	41,523	7	747,675	132
1989	6,062,173	607,893	100	142,201	23	41,019	6	791,113	130
1990	6,480,975	601,869	92	148,230	22	41,340	6	791,439	122

Members: Reported SDA membership  
 Elem St: Reported number of elementary students  
 El St/M (Elem): Number of elementary students per 1,000 SDA members  
 Sec St: Reported number of secondary students  
 Se St/M (Sec): Number of secondary students per 1,000 SDA members  
 Tert St: Reported number of tertiary students  
 Te St/M (Tert): Number of tertiary students per 1,000 SDA members  
 Tot Stu: Reported number of total students  
 To St/M (Total): Number of total students per 1,000 SDA members



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seem less attractive or affordable to our own Adventist families and students. Chart 1 shows that in 1975, 65 percent of the students enrolled in our schools were Adventists, while 35 percent were non-Adventists. By 1990, the proportion of Adventist students had dropped to 48 percent, while the proportion of non-Adventists had increased to 52 percent. This means that today less than one-half of the students enrolled in our schools worldwide are Adventists or come from Adventist homes.

How should we relate to these trends? The leaders and representatives of our world church assembled in Perth were as sobered by these shifting ratios as we ourselves are.

These trends are alarming for at least two reasons. First, most of our denominational leaders and workers have been educated at one or more levels in our own schools. This has provided unity and a shared sense of direction for our worldwide denominational activities. Will we be able to maintain both with fewer Adventist students in our schools? Second, in some world divisions a sizable proportion of the church growth comes from the baptism of students from Adventist homes who attend our elementary and secondary schools. If the number of these students continues to decline, our church growth in those divisions is also likely to decline.

The steadily increasing ratio of non-Adventist students shows that, in some places, the nature of our schools is changing. As educators, we must recognize what is happening and respond intelligently. Rather than the changing ratio being a problem, it may offer us an evangelistic opportunity. For this to occur, the school administration and faculty must pursue a proactive strategy that attracts the non-Adventist student and his or her family to Christ and to our church. Such a strategy requires (1) a faculty committed to both academic excellence and Adventist mission; (2) a curriculum that deliberately integrates Christian faith, values, and learning; and (3) qualified chaplains/Bible teachers who reach out to these students and their families, with the support of other teachers and students.

The trends listed above must be further analyzed by Adventist educators and church administrators. This study must lead to constructive plans and decisive action. To start with, each world division should survey its school-age youth to es-

tablish more reliable ratios, to learn why fewer of them are enrolling in our own schools, and to recommend methods to reverse this trend.

Our church cannot allow these declines to continue. If current trends are not reversed, some world divisions will have dangerously low numbers of Adventist students trained in our own schools. This, in turn, will imperil the viability of the church and jeopardize the future of its Global Mission.<sup>3</sup>—H.M.R.

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### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. At the elementary level, we have listed as Seventh-day Adventist students those who are themselves baptized members as well as those who come from a home in which at least one of the parents is a church member. For the secondary and tertiary levels, we have counted as Adventists only baptized students. Fractions have been rounded to the nearest lower figure.

2. The ratios for non-Adventist students in our schools can be obtained by deducting the figures of Chart 1 from those of Chart 2 for the corresponding year and educational level.

3. Readers interested in the study "Enrollment Trends in Adventist Education," on which this editorial is based, may request a copy from the education director of the respective world division or from the General Conference Education Director, c/o THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, at the address listed in the masthead.

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## TEACHING ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY STUDENTS HOW TO CARE FOR THE EARTH

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with habitat restoration and wilderness preservation.

*Garbage: The Practical Journal for the Environment*, published monthly by Old House Journal Corp., 435 Ninth St., Brooklyn, NY 12215. Practical articles deal mostly with recycling, recycled products, toxic waste, and related topics. Printed on recycled paper.

### Videos

*Race to Save the Planet*. A 10-part series from the Annenberg/CPB Collection. Covers all aspects of environmental science. Most useful at the high school level. Distributed by Intellimation (1-800-346-8355), it sells for \$275.

*The Worlds Below*. A 20-min. video showing the subtidal life along the California coast. Not overtly environmen-

tally oriented, but could be used in conjunction with discussions on oil spills or water pollution. Primary focus seems to be grades 6-12, but may also be used for other grade levels. Produced by Sea Studios, Monterey, CA 93940.

*Return of the Great Whales*. A well-done presentation of marine mammal and bird protection. Focuses on the whales and birds off the coast of Northern California. Excellent photography and informative narration. A bit old (1984) but still very timely and a bargain at \$24.95. Distributed by Home Vision (1-800-262-8600).

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### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The author wishes to thank Nancy Miller for use of her project for Human Ecology class, "Getting Green: A 12-Day Ecology Unit," and Ian Bothwell for reviewing the manuscript.

2. Taken from the pamphlet, "1990 World Population Data Sheet," prepared by the Population Reference Bureau, Inc.

3. Genesis 1:28, RSV. 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. Used by permission.

4. Many states have an adopt-a-highway program that encourages private organizations to become involved in litter removal. Commonly a stretch of highway is adopted by the organization (e.g., a school) and they pledge to pick up all the litter three to four times per year. In return, the state highway department places a sign by the road acknowledging the organization.

5. S. Marbert, "Cafeteria Ecology," *The American School Board Journal*, 178 (January 1991), pp. A17-A20.

6. Anonymous, "The Time Has Come to Talk Trash," *It Starts in the Classroom* (September 1990), p. 6.

7. Two articles that can provide additional ideas and resources specifically designed for church schools are D. Dale, "Think Globally, Act Locally: A Curriculum in Ecology for the Church School," *Church Teachers* (June-August 1990), pp. 205-207; and D. P. McQuirk, "Learning How to Be a Steward of the Environment: Activities for a Short-Term Study for the Summer," *ibid.*, (June-August 1990), pp. 210, 211.

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## LETTERS

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