

FOSTERING KNOWLEDGE OF THE SCRIPTURES

THE ANDREWS UNIVERSITY BIBLE KNOWLEDGE AWARD

While “Thy word have I hid in my heart” (Psalm 119:11, KJV) is an oft-quoted Bible verse, in today’s post-modern society, it seems that weekly Sabbath school Bible gems and memory verse songs have all too often been replaced by movie quotes and popular song lyrics.

Madeline Johnston, a retired seminary secretary at Andrews University (AU) in Berrien Springs, Michigan, noticed the disturbing lack of memorization and wanted to do something about it. “I believe memorization is important,” she explains. “Both Ellen White and science have shown us the benefits of memorization for the mind. Memory stretches and grows if it is used, but atrophies if not. Also, Bible verses that we memorize stay with us and impact our lives.” Her passion for increased knowledge of God’s Word has resulted in the Robert M. and Madeline Steele Johnston Endowed Bible Knowledge Award.

Johnston received her inspiration for the award from attending Culter Academy, an evangelical school in Los Angeles. There, students who memorized and recited 500 verses received a special gold pin at graduation, which was exchanged for another pin if they did a second 500.

Madeline thought Andrews University would benefit from a similar award open to the entire university family. She shared her idea with friends and school administrators and received mixed feedback. Some suggested that a Bible knowledge award might be more appropriate than one focused on rote memorization. So Madeline began to look into the possibility of creating an endowment to honor both Bible knowledge and memo-

Madeline’s husband, Robert, pro-

fessor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at AU, had helped develop the seminary’s Bible Knowledge Entrance Test. During his years as a professor, Johnston had noticed a lack of basic Bible knowledge among his students. Occasionally, he would give bonus questions on exams: extra credit to any student who could write the Ten Commandments or name the books of the Bible in order. He discovered that only about 25 percent of the class could respond correctly.

Johnston discussed his concern with the other seminary faculty members, who agreed that the problem needed to be addressed. As several other seminaries had already done, they voted to require incoming Master of Divinity students to take a Bible Knowledge Entrance Test during orientation. All

students would have to pass the test before graduation. Those who failed it the first time would be required to take a remedial course in basic Bible knowledge.

As the chair of the Bible Knowledge Entrance Test Committee, Johnston created and administered the test until his retirement in 2002, when David Merling assumed this role. The test, which has now been given for almost a decade, consists of both multiple-choice questions and memorization. The multiple-choice section includes questions on the Old and New Testaments as well as general Bible knowledge. Students must answer questions on topics such as the major divisions of the English, Septuagint, and Hebrew Bibles; the stories and significance of Bible characters such as David and Solomon, Elijah and Elisha; the names of the 12 disciples; and the similarities and differences between the Synoptic Gospels and John. The memorization part requires students to quote all or



BY BEV STOUT

part of the 23rd Psalm, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Three Angels' Messages; to know where those are found; and to list the books of the Bible in order.

Students are given an opportunity to prepare for the exam. Seminary applicants receive a study guide covering what they are expected to know. The information, along with a sample test, is also on the Internet (<http://www.andrews.edu/sem/bket/bket.htm>).

When the test was first given, the pass rate was less than 50 percent; however, scores have improved greatly, and the effects are visible in the classroom. "Teachers can tell the difference in their classes now," states Johnston. "They can assume that most students have a basic knowledge in certain areas."

Working with Andrews' development office and general counsel, Madeline drafted a proposed endowment to reward both Bible knowledge and memorization. Part A awards \$750 cash each fall to the M.Div. student who, taking the Bible Knowledge Entrance Test for the first time, scores the highest. Part B focuses on memorization. Any student, faculty or staff member at schools connected to Andrews University (kindergarten through university level), or spouse thereof, who memorizes 500 Bible verses from a nonparaphrastic translation of their choice and recites them nearly word-perfect, 250 at a time, to a designated person, receives a high-quality leather Bible embossed with his or her name, a certificate, and a special



Madelyn and Robert Johnston.

bookmark/ruler to note the event.

The seminary dean's office sent a letter to Johnston's colleagues and former students, giving them an opportunity to contribute financially. The endowment was announced at Johnston's official retirement reception in September of 2002. Bob Kingman, then chair of the AU Physics Department, announced that the governing committee of Physics Enterprises, a department-operated

business that manufactures and sells physics teaching tools, had voted to give the Johnston Endowment a matching grant of up to \$10,000. This launched the endowment with seed money of \$20,000. Other parts may be added to the endowment, if funds become available.

The first Bible knowledge award was presented in the fall of 2003 to William Kasper, who scored 100 percent on the Bible Knowledge Entrance Test. In the spring of 2004, two participants claimed the memorization award: Susan Joshua, wife of seminary student Calvin Joshua; and Marvin Budd, then a contract teacher

at AU, now its database administrator.

The inclusion of InMinistry extension students began to be included in the testing in 2004, with \$50 of the award going to the off-campus student with the highest score. That fall, three M.Div. students tied with a score of 98 percent on the entrance test.



The Johnstons hope that this award will inspire students and faculty alike to follow the lead of the Psalmist by hiding God's Word in their hearts. *✍*

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Marvin Budd, Bible Knowledge Award Winner.



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