

# PASTORS AND SCHOOLS— A DREAM TEAM

**P**astors can and do serve in many roles at Seventh-day Adventist schools. Board chair, speaker at week of prayer, counselor, transportation coordinator for service projects, softball pitcher at recess, Bible teacher, fundraiser for the worthy student fund, and director of Bible studies for baptismal class are only a partial list of ways that pastors contribute to their local Adventist school.

In preparation for writing this article, I asked educational leaders in the Pacific Union Conference to share what exceptional pastors do to support Adventist education. The following are their testimonies and tributes to involved pastors.

## **Pastor as Board Member**

“Pastor Rockney Dahl of the Lancaster, California, church came on board during a time when the enrollment was only 47 students. Morale was down, and support for the school was minimal at best,” says former associate superintendent W. R. Dennis. “Pastor Dahl became involved in helping restructure the board and its membership. In just a few years, the constituency built a new school, enrollment grew to 90 students, and the reputation of the school in the community



is excellent. He understands the symbiotic relationship between church and school. His support has been invaluable!”

According to Dennis Kingma, former principal of Miramonte Adventist School in Los Altos, California: “Pastor Curtis Church was phenomenal as far as helping children in his church obtain adequate funds for Christian education. He placed full priority on having his church children in school by finding money and assuring that the bill was paid. Pastor Church organized meetings with his colleagues to discuss financial plans for student aid, and encouraged them to raise their school subsidy. Pastor Church served

on the board and very rarely was absent from board meeting. He encouraged other pastors to attend.” Kingma went on to say that “most of the pastors [of my constituent churches] participated in providing devotionals for chapel. I also understand the Sunnyvale church subsidizes the salary of the youth pastor [taskforce worker], whose major responsibility is servicing the school.”

## **Pastors Put Children First**

Elder Joseph Krplek often said: “Bring the little children to me.” His son, Principal Don Krplek of Boise Valley (Idaho) Adventist School, recalls, “My dad would in-

**BY BILL KERESOMA**

struct the elders that anytime the principal wanted to feature a student in worship service, they were to step aside. He wanted to make every opportunity available for students to be involved in the worship service.”

Former Loma Linda Academy (LLA) principal J. Brent Baldwin says of Doug Mace, youth pastor at the Loma Linda University church: “Pastor Mace’s passion is sharing Christ with young people. What truly makes this evident is the time he spends on the campus of our school.

Pastor Doug led out in games on the senior class trip and runs the sound system at various student activities. He also sells vegedogs-on-a-stick at school events and visits with students on campus (even bringing them lunch). Pastor Doug is an avid supporter of LLA and Adventist education.”

When Principal Sarah Seaman came to Peninsula Adventist School, in Seaside, California, Pastor John Egan was one of

## This article suggests some ideas for developing a positive relationship between Adventist schools and their local pastors.

the first people she met. He invited her to call him whenever she needed assistance. Principal Seaman says: “Pastor Egan helps me with everything. He helped me move. He plays with the kids. He serves on the school board. He is always checking on me to see how I am doing. He repairs and fuels our school vans and maintains their financial records. He attends all our events and helps us clean up. He is on campus before and after each event. If we have a difficult board meeting, he sends me chocolates and an encouraging

note. He is the most humble person I have ever met.

“On average, Pastor Egan is on campus two to three times a week. If we do not ask him for help, he still comes and serves quietly. He arranges for chapel speakers and is willing to chap-erone when needed. Yet what I appreciate the most is that every Sabbath he is either talking about the school from the pulpit, or has news about what is going on at the school in the





church bulletin. Because of his serious involvement with the school, his church is actively supportive. His heart is in our school.”

Principal Alfred Riddle of Mesa Grande Academy in Calimesa, California, praises Pastor Eugene Bartlett, associate pastor for the Palm Springs church, for his involvement with student activities three to five times a week at the school—from providing music at sports events to organizing spiritual retreats for students. In fact, Pastor Bartlett has just been hired as the chaplain/Bible teacher for the 2008-2009 school year!

### Offices of Education Recognize Contributions of Pastors

Beverly Bucknor, an associate superintendent for the Pacific Union Conference, reports that “Pastor Anthony Paschal teaches physical education twice a week at Valley Fellowship Resource Center in Rialto, California. He has donated and raised money for running shoes and equipment for the students.”

Teryl Loeffler, Hawaii Conference superintendent of education says: “When I was principal of Sierra View Junior Academy in Exeter, California, Pastor Jim Milburn would come on campus one day a week offering his services. He would conduct faculty worships, class devotions, and shuttle students on field trips.”

**D**oloris Trujillo, a veteran educator and former education superintendent for the Hawaii Conference, remembers that Pastor Roger Cain would substitute when needed, eat lunch with the kids, play tag on the playground with the younger children, and help plan camping trips for students in the Mauna Loa School. Whenever he was in town, he would come to school at recess time and play whatever the students were playing that day. Former principal Alan Lipps adds: “Pastor Cain’s effect on the school was astounding. . . enrollment increased. When students really like their pastor and their church, it is easy to get them to consider baptism.”



**Without the intentional involvement of the pastor, a school’s ability to grow and be productive will be severely limited.**

Dr. Mario Negrete, associate superintendent of education for the Southern California Conference, says he has known pastors who were dedicated and willing to provide the financial means by truly going out of their way to ensure that all the children in their church are in an Adventist school. Negrete sums up their contribution in this way: “If they have to, they knock on doors to raise money for the child’s tuition. They do not miss board meetings and have invested in a long-term commitment to Christian education.”

### Priceless Time With the Pastor

“Pastor Jon Ciccarelli calendars a meeting with me every Thursday to see how I am doing. He prays for me and for our

school,” says Principal M. Kristine Fuentes of Escondido (California) Adventist Academy.

“I am thankful for Youth Pastor Pierre Steenberg,” says Principal Roymond Koubong of the Hollister Adventist School. “On average, he spends at least two-thirds of his week on campus. He is a mentor to me and schedules an appointment to visit, encourage, and pray for me. It is always at the right time and when I need it the most. Seventy percent of our students are non-Adventists. Pastor Steenberg also visits students in their homes. They consider him their pastor, even though they do not attend the Seventh-day Adventist church.”

### School and Church in True Partnership

I learned from Principal Cyril Connelly that Dan Smith, who was for many years the pastor of the La Sierra University church (Riverside, California), was always committed to La Sierra Academy (LSA). Connelly says: “In his busy schedule as senior pastor, he found time to visit campus and attend many of our events. Dan was visible. He was not a stranger to our students and faculty. He talked candidly with them, and they knew that he was approachable with a ready ear. If there was

## Teachers have shared with me how grateful they are when their pastor visits the classroom.

a rumor, he picked up the phone and called me to discuss our side of what he heard, which I really appreciated. He was passionate about our school. He took on a project to lead out in raising funds for the renovation of our cafeteria, and through his efforts raised more than \$20,000. He was supportive of the concept of local church financial support for education, and

a significant percentage of the church budget is earmarked for LSA. The church subsidy to our school has been increased over the past few years without any request from the school. An innovative scholarship program is in place that allows more than 60 students to attend the K-12 program. Dan has been affirming and supportive. Our school and church are in a true partnership thanks to his leadership.”

**F**ormer Principal Arsenio Hernandez says, “Pastor Robert Costa, while pastoring my church, Mercedes Spanish, in the Texas Conference, was always ready to assist the schools where I worked. His presence at the school, whenever needed, was just a telephone call away. On several occasions, he would go with me to visit a non-Adventist



student while the student was sick in the hospital. When a student needed a special visit for any reason. . .he was there. If a driver was needed. . .he drove. A teacher absent. . .he would teach. A chapel speaker canceled. . .he would speak. A teacher 'feeling down'. . .he would pick him or her up. If physical labor was needed. . .he would work. Robert was not only my pastor and one of my board members; he was my 'special assistant'. . .he showed me the love of God and demonstrated Christianity in action."

**P**rincipal Monica Greene reports that "In my 17 years at Hilltop Christian School, in Antioch, California, Pastor Ron Cook has been one of the most involved pastors I have known. He holds chapel every Friday and conducts a baptismal class annually. Pastor Cook and I visit each new student before he or she enters school. He has participated in most of our Outdoor Education trips. He is always promoting the school in church and attends every school board meeting. My students really love him!"

Principal Ken Preston of Paradise (California) Adventist School says, "Ben Maxson is an incredible pastor. He accepts the responsibility to lead the church into positive ownership of the school. He marshaled the congregation to participate and complete the school building program. He is not just talk; he is a man of action! His philosophy is: If you do not have a thriving school, you will not have a thriving church. A large share of the church budget is committed to the school. In our church, at least two Sabbaths a year are dedicated to Adventist education. Regularly from the pulpit, Pastor Maxson promotes the excellence of Christian education by acknowledging and affirming the students and staff."

### **I.E.P. (Involved Exceptional Pastors)**

Principal Alexis Emmerson of Pleasant Hill (California) Adventist School told me that the pastors who made a difference were the ones who connected with students at school functions. One of Emmerson's senior pastors made it a point to work with junior high students even though his own children attended the elementary school. Emmerson said, "One of our pastors taught Grades 3 and 4 archaeology for a couple of weeks. All the pastors can relate to youngsters because they are so accepting. Our pastors have so many interesting hobbies of which teachers are eager for them to share in the classroom."

"Many pastors are involved at least once a month," says M. Kristine Fuentes, principal of Escondido (California) Adventist Academy. "They are on a rotation schedule to conduct worship for the students. Pastor Jon Ciccarelli has taught a class on worship, instructing students how to lead out in worship." Echoing this sentiment, Principal Greg Coryell from Napa (California) Christian School, says, "Some schools I have been involved with had for each classroom a pastoral representative partici-

pating weekly or monthly. Some pastors would be responsible for two to three classrooms as spiritual advisors, presenting worships, or teaching a class. I relied on them as spiritual advisors for our campus. Pastors make an unbelievable difference. It is huge!"

Vic Anderson, principal of Pine Hills Junior Academy in Auburn, California, says: "We have two youth pastors who are on campus two to three times per week, and average two weekends during the school year. Throughout the year, they take students out for a weekend, training them to participate in 'power week,' a spiritual activity for the school. They also organize a spiritual retreat at the beginning of the year. We appreciate our senior pastors, who attend board meetings regularly."

### **It's All About T.E.A.M.**

I have had the privilege of working with many dedicated pastors. Pastor Jose Luis Argumedo is a champion for Adventist education. Working with his La Habra Spanish congregation, he has inspired them to place their children in West Fullerton (California) Seventh-day Adventist School. The church holds numerous fundraisers ranging from selling tortillas and other foods, to doing various jobs in the community in order to raise money for the church education fund. Pastor Argumedo visits his church families and shares the importance of Adventist education. In his eyes, a Christian education for each of his church children is an absolute must!

At Napa Christian School, one pastor approached Principal Coryell and said: "I am your school pastor and will do whatever you want me to do. Use me in any way that will serve the school." Coryell says, "We started carving out ideas regarding her involvement. She is on the campus two to three times a week. I love it!"

Here in the Southeastern California Conference, we have adopted the acronym T.E.A.M. signifying "Together Educators And Ministers collaborating to build children into spiritual champions." We are in the process of building up our S.E.C.C. T.E.A.M.

**Many [pastors] would get more involved if they had an idea of what is needed and what a difference they can make.**

**O**n October 29, 2007, the conference dedicated the day to furthering the process of nurturing "relationship and collaboration" for T.E.A.M. Pastors and educators worshiped and fellowshiped together and spent productive time in discussion groups responding to three questions drawn from surveys that had been administered to seminar participants:

1. In an ideal world, what does a strong T.E.A.M. of churches and schools look like?
2. What are some of the reasons our young people disconnect from the church?
3. How can we work together to do a better job of keeping our youth connected to God and our church?

We are in the process of disseminating the responses from



our group meetings and surveys. The next steps are to determine the directions in which to proceed in order to continue the “building of our T.E.A.M.” and deploying them for positive action!

### The Pastor’s Vital Contributions to Church Schools

Without the intentional involvement of the pastor, a school’s ability to grow and be productive will be severely limited. Most educators welcome having their pastors engaged with the school. Teachers have shared with me how grateful they are when their pastor visits the classroom. One said: “I appreciate the time they spend with my students, yet what I value the most is when they pray for me. My pastor makes a big difference in my educational ministry and understands the magnitude of educational evangelism.”

### Helping Your Pastor Get Involved

Pastors are incredibly busy people. Some are assigned to oversee multiple churches and must deal with the physical constraints of being unable to visit each church regularly, let alone spend large blocks of time at the local church schools. Still, many would get more involved if they had an idea what is needed and what a difference they can make. So don’t be afraid to ask your pastor to help out, and be sure to make him or her feel welcome on campus. Here are a few ideas for developing a positive relationship between your school and the local churches:

1. Ask the pastor to establish prayer teams in his or her church(es) that have a designated time each day when they pray for the school and staff.
  2. Suggest that the pastor deploy local elders to dialogue with the school on how church can provide support, even if resources are limited. This could include work bees, assisting in the classroom, or recruiting students.
  3. Invite the pastor to join the students for lunch on a certain day each week, or to help supervise sports or field trips.
  4. Ask the pastor to find creative ways to involve students in church leadership, worship services, and overall church life.
  5. Offer the teachers and principal as possible worship and prayer meeting speakers at the local church(es).
  6. Work with the pastor to arrange for the students’ artwork to be posted in the church atrium, and for school events to be featured in the bulletin.
5. Regularly send notes from students and staff affirming the local pastors’ ministry and telling them that you are praying for them.

A study conducted by George Barna found that a person’s moral foundation is in place by the time he or she reaches 9 years of age, and spiritual beliefs are irrevocably formed by age 13. Those who are active in church life in their 30s and 40s have likely been involved in active training as children. The probability of a person making a permanent commitment to God between ages 5 and 13 is 32 percent, between ages 14 and 18 is four percent, and the chance of such a decision after age 18 is only six percent. Barna said, “Having spent the first two



decades of my ministry engaged in research and leadership that targeted adults, the Lord has recently accomplished an extraordinary thing in my life. He changed my mind about the nature of effective ministry in our nation today. . . .*God opened my mind and heart to ranking ministry to children at the top of the priority list.*” “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6, NKJV).<sup>3</sup>

I would like to hear about activities in which pastors are involved. Please e-mail me at [Bill.Keresoma@seccsda.org](mailto:Bill.Keresoma@seccsda.org), and I will share this information with pastors and educators in order to continue to strengthen the relationship between the church and the school.

**I** believe that educators and pastors must nurture one another. Borrowing the phrase by the late Dr. Martin Luther King. . . “*I have a dream*” that pastor and teacher walk as one in providing the spiritual direction for our precious children. Without each other, we are nothing. “*I have a dream*” that church and school collaborate to surround our children with direction, mentorship, and scholarship. “*I have a dream*” that principal and pastor make it their highest priority to execute the ways and means to enhance both institutions. “*I have a dream*” that pastors and educators become “one and the same” in the eyes of our children. “*I have a dream*” that pastors and educators become the “Dream T.E.A.M.” that will be second to none!

Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Master, you know I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15, Message).<sup>4</sup> Isn’t it interesting that the first community of people Jesus instructed us to take care of are our children! ***T.E.A.M., Together Educators And Ministers, collaborating to build children into spiritual champions! Go T.E.A.M!*** ✍



**Bill Keresoma** is currently Associate Superintendent of Education at the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Riverside, California. He holds a B.A. in Religion and a M.A. in Counseling, and has served as a youth pastor and senior pastor, taught academy-level religion classes, and served as a guidance counselor and academy and college dean of men. He can be reached by e-mail at [Bill.Keresoma@seccsda.org](mailto:Bill.Keresoma@seccsda.org).

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. My thanks to Pastor Bert Anderson for introducing the acronym T.E.A.M.
2. George Barna, *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2003), pp. 12, 13.
3. The Scripture passage credited to NKJV is from the *New King James Version*, copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers. All rights reserved.
4. Texts credited to Message are from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1996, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.