



# Leading Students To Christ Through True Education

Sometimes we need to look back to draw important lessons from our past so we can more effectively move forward into the future. The Seventh-day Adventist Church's co-founder, Ellen G. White, defined true education with the following words: "True education is the inculcation of those ideas that will impress the mind and heart with the knowledge of God the Creator and Jesus Christ the Redeemer. Such an education will renew the mind and transform the character" (*Review and Herald* [August 22, 1912]). In the Euro-Asia Division (ESD), we have made Adventist education one of our highest priorities. As we peer into the future with the eyes of faith, we see it filled with graduates from Adventist schools serving the Lord and sharing the gospel with their peers. We recognize the uniqueness of Adventist education and believe it embraces more

than just knowledge; its goal is to inspire a life-transforming redemption. Adventist education's goal must be to nurture wholesome Christians whose first desire is to cultivate a relationship with God.

These concepts are the foundation for our strategy in the ESD Education Department, which includes opening elementary and secondary schools throughout our territory, facilitating the development of our higher education institutions, and opening new English language centers as missionary projects. We want to see our church growing, filled with young adults, and united in fulfilling its mission!

While our mission faces many challenges, it has also achieved amazing successes, which should encourage education employees, leaders, and lay members worldwide. Providing quality Christian education is true evangelism, true redemption, true salvation, and eternal freedom!

## Conference Leaders Give Up Office Building

During the past quinquennium, the ESD opened seven new elementary and secondary schools. An inspiring example comes from Ukraine, where despite the political crisis, by God's grace, we were able to open new schools. In the city of Lviv, local conference administrators, realizing the potential of having an Adventist school in their city, decided to donate their conference headquarters building to become Lviv's first Adventist school. Children of church members as well as those who heard about our church from their friends and neighbors were invited to enroll. The community now has a school that provides a wholesome, Adventist Christian education for their children.

Another example comes from the Ukrainian city of Chernovtsy, where a decision to open a school was made in April 2014. Parents, grandparents,

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qualified workers, and sponsors participated in renovating and transforming the conference office building into a future school. It took less than half a year for the dream to come true! On September 1, 2014, 54 young boys and girls entered grades 1 through 5 for the first time at an Adventist school in this city. Church leaders, together with city administrators, attended the festive event, where prayers for the future of the Adventist school were lifted up in the presence of the many attendees.

### Stepping Forward by Faith

In late 2012, the Vinnytsia Adventist School in Ukraine started operations in a temporary room at a local conference church. The response was so overwhelming that the school staff had to purchase a new location: an unfinished building. Lacking resources or funds, the church called on their pastors for help. The pastors helped for several weeks, and now teachers and parents are collaborating to ensure that the children have a quality structure where



Above: Parents join with students and teachers of the Heritage Christian School in Tokmak, Kyrgyzstan, as a new school year is launched. Below: Theology students at Zaosky Adventist Seminary and Institute, Russian Federation.

they can receive the best education. But the greatest reward comes from the children themselves who say: “Schools like this change our lives!”

**Prepared and Committed to Fulfill the Mission**

Higher education is also a priority for the ESD Education Department. At Ukrainian Adventist Center of Higher Education (UACHE), Kyiv Region, Ukraine, the church recently opened a theological seminary, which has been accredited by the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (AAA) to offer a Bachelor of Theology program. Students may also choose new degree options such as journalism, teacher of physical culture, and cybernetics. Another new program, Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology: Children and Adolescent Ministry Emphasis, provides opportunities for professional growth.

New degree programs are being offered elsewhere in the ESD, as well. Zaosky Adventist Seminary and Institute (ZASI), Russian Federation, has initiated a new Pedagogy in Music de-

gree program, a yearly cohort to study for the Doctor of Ministry program, and a Bachelor in Information Technologies in Business program.

**Reaching Others Through English Language Centers**

English language centers provide a new opportunity for the ESD to build new bridges to the communities served by the Adventist Church. We are working to reach out to many who are interested in learning English and do it in a way

that helps them better understand God. For the ESD, the number of baptisms from the English language centers is not about quantity. Although few in number, the people baptized as a result of our special English language summer camps are precious in the eyes of the Lord!

**Our Challenges**

Adventist education changes lives for eternity. Yet, it does face challenges such as lack of funds, difficulty in obtaining government accreditation, and



Above: Students listen attentively as the first lesson is taught at Vinnitsia Adventist School, Ukraine. Below: A group of students at Ukrainian Adventist Center for Higher Education enjoy studying outdoors.

inadequate support from parents. Despite the challenges, we know that it will all be worthwhile when we see our children gaining true knowledge, and becoming wholesome Christians and exemplary members of the communities in which they live. That is what moves us and gives us strength!

Our biggest challenge is convincing local church leaders, pastors, as well as parents, that our educational institutions have high academic standards. We have evidence that our students outperform their peers from other schools in many ways. An independent committee of experts evaluated all the higher educational institutions of Ukraine, excluding medical and military institutions. Using the Bologna system, the team assessed 78 tertiary institutions. The Ukrainian Adventist Center of Higher Education in Kyiv Region, Ukraine, placed sixth on the list.

Another example of the excellence of our educational offerings is seen at Zaoksky Christian School, Russian Federation. Regional results of the country-wide school contest were made available to the community in late 2012. At the municipal level, our school in Zaoksky placed first with 1,035 points, while the school in second place had only 475 points, more than 560 points behind our school. Points were given for academic success in various subjects (mathematics, chemistry, history, biology, geography, etc.).

### United in Support of the Sabbath

The following year, in reaction to the outcome of the assessment, local authorities scheduled most subject tests on Saturdays, knowing that students from the Adventist school would not appear. And they were right—our students did not take the subject tests on Sabbath. Moreover, even many of our students from non-Adventist families, after a discussion with their parents, decided not to participate in any subject tests on Saturdays. What a powerful witness! Thus, the number of students

participating was half as large as from some other schools, but despite this fact, our Zaoksky Christian School took second place, being just a bit more than 100 points behind the school at the top of the list. Praise the Lord for our teachers, administrators, and dedicated school employees who spend their lives serving our children and young adults.

### Growing Demand for Adventist Education

The number of Muslim parents who desire an Adventist education for their children continues to grow in Tokmak, a town in Kyrgyzstan. There is a waiting list for most primary and secondary schools in this region of Central Asia. In December, the schools stop enrolling students for the next school year, which begins in September of the following year. Many government officials and local business professionals want their children to study in our schools. What a powerful witness! The success already achieved is inspiring the ESD to expend greater effort in this sphere. We believe we are called to participate in the salvation of God's children and the best way we can do this is through true education.

### Appreciation of God's Blessings

We are thankful to the Lord for the support received from the General Conference (GC) Department of Education. The International Conference on the Bible and Science in St. George, Utah, U.S.A., in August 2014, reaffirmed our schools' commitment to creationism and enriched our professors' teaching methods. We are thankful for the wisdom of the GC educational personnel and the practical assistance they have provided. John Wesley Taylor V, GC associate director of education, served as one of the main speakers at the International Scientific and Practical Conference for educators, which had as its motto: "In the Footsteps of the Great Teacher." This con-

ference occurred in June 2014 at the Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Science (UIAS) in Bucha, near Kiev. We also express our gratitude to Mike Lekic, GC associate director of education, for his guidance in dealing with multiple issues related to education in our territory. We are thankful to the Lord for our faithful ministers, union, conference, and mission leaders and education directors, as well as lay members who support education throughout the vast territory of the Euro-Asia Division.

### Vision for the Upcoming Quinquennium

During the next quinquennium (2015-2020), our highest priority will be to continue opening and developing schools at the elementary and high school levels. We believe that this will also support our higher education institutions, and our churches will grow and be filled with young people eager to finish God's work!

Training new teachers to bless thousands of children is our goal as well. At ESD, we seek to apply the advice of the Spirit of Prophecy: "As the highest preparation for your work, I point you to the words, the life, the methods, of the Prince of teachers. I bid you consider Him. Here is your true ideal. Behold it, dwell upon it, until the Spirit of the divine Teacher shall take possession of your heart and life. 'Reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord,' you will be 'transformed into the same image' (2 Corinthians 3:18, E.R.V.). This is the secret of power over your pupils. Reflect Him" (*Education*, p. 282). ☞



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