The Seventh-day Adventist Church throughout its history has valued education as key to its prophetic mission. From the early years of the church, the spirit of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), which called for education to be primarily centered in the family, has been the prevalent underlying philosophy of Adventist education. Ellen White summarized this view by stating: “The education centering in the family was that which prevailed in the days of the patriarchs. For the schools thus established, God provided the conditions most favorable for the development of character.”

George Knight notes that the educational system was the last institution to be formalized in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (starting in 1872). The reason for this delay in organizing Seventh-day Adventist schools was rooted in the belief that the church’s focus needed to be invested in the second coming of Jesus above all else.

Early Adventist educators were not insensitive to the educational developments of their time. In fact, in an effort to overcome the bookish, traditional approach to education that had characterized the Western world, Adventist educators were influenced by educational reformers such as Horace Mann (1796-1859), whose social reforms were intended to make elementary education available to all children in the United States. Also, the promotion of manual labor in institutions of higher learning, as modeled by Oberlin College in the 1830s, was adopted by proponents of Adventist education. Pioneer Adventist educators were well acquainted with the relevant educational movements of their time and strove to develop a system of education in harmony with the demands of their contemporary society while maintaining an unwavering and uncompromising commitment to biblical truth.

Adventist education’s pioneers sought to emphasize the need for schools to be established outside of the cities, thus allowing students to be given “an opportunity to train the muscles to work as well as the brain to think.” In general, early church leaders believed that education would best take place...
in the home and in a rural environment. However, the realities of ever-increasing growth of cities\(^5\) have created a logistical dilemma for the leadership of the church. What should be done to provide a Christian education for children of families who cannot leave the cities?

**Proliferation of Cities in the Early 20th Century**

Education at the end of the 19th century and the turn of the 20th century was largely influenced and shaped by the social trends of the time: the changing role of schooling, the authority of the school in connecting the home and society, the development of cities, and the industrialization of Western nations. The proliferation of printing houses and improved transportation made education at all levels more accessible to the average citizen.\(^6\) (See Figure 1.) With the rise of industrialization in America, vocational training flourished in urban areas, while agricultural training was predominant in rural areas.\(^7\)

However, toward the end of the 19th century and the dawning years of the 20th century, there were factors that contributed to the deplorable conditions existing in many cities around the world, including poverty, lack of proper sanitation, and lack of proper health care. These factors were further exacerbated by the gradual moral decline prevalent in urban centers. In writing about the cities of her time, Ellen White noted, “The world is full of iniquity and disregard of the requirements of God. The cities have become as Sodom, and our children are daily exposed to many evils.”\(^8\) Her concern focused on the plight of the children of Adventist families whose hearts were easily impressed. She opined that unless their surroundings were of the right character, Satan would use the neglected children in the neighborhood to influence those who were carefully trained.

The warning to Adventist parents was that their children who attended public schools “often associate with others more neglected than they, those who, aside from the time spent in the schoolroom, are left to obtain a street education. The hearts of the young are easily impressed; and . . . [t]hus, before Sabbath-keeping parents know what is being done, the lessons of depravity are learned, and the souls of their little ones are corrupted.”\(^9\)

An alternative for these Adventist families needed to be provided by the church. “The church has a special work to do in educating and training its children that they may not, in attending school or in any other association, be influenced by those of corrupt habits.”\(^10\)

Church leaders were encouraged to recognize that much more needed to be done to save and educate the children of families who “at present” could not get away from the cities.\(^11\) The establishment of church schools in the cities was always intended to rely on the foundation of spiritual nurture in the home. This ideal must continue to be integral to Adventist education in the 21st century.

**Urban Realities Today**

Throughout the world today, life in cities is characterized by unprecedented economic disparities. While poverty is more rampant in some geographic areas of the globe, it also weighs heavily on the world’s wealthiest nations. Poverty has complex ramifications, often interfering with children’s access to quality education. Children living in affluent neighborhoods have far greater access to quality educational opportunities than do children growing up in disadvantaged neighborhoods. With such disparities be-

![Figure 1. The Urban and Rural Population of the World, 1950-2030](http://jae.adventist.org)
between the learning opportunities of rich and poor, the academic achievement of underprivileged children is greatly inhibited.

J. N. Kincheloe describes the realities confronting public education in the 21st century. Along with density of population, cities tend to contain a higher concentration of poverty, greater racial and ethnic diversity, larger concentrations of migrant populations, linguistic diversity, and high rates of student mobility. These lead to structural challenges for public education systems, which must combat persistently low student achievement, lack of instructional coherence, inexperienced staff due to high teacher turnover, dysfunctional practices in educational administration, and worst of all, low expectations for student performance.

**Mission Focus**

In recent decades, increased interest in community service initiatives has propelled many church organizations to create partnerships with their surrounding communities. Research provides empirical evidence for the significant relationship between community service involvement and the spiritual growth of the volunteers involved in humanitarian projects. Findings reveal that not only does the community benefit from volunteer service, but the volunteers themselves also experience transformation that leads to spiritual growth. Thus, community-service ministries exert a positive impact on the recipients as well as on the service providers, resulting in a win-win situation.

In their report *Ministering With Millennials*, Dudley and Walsh suggested that one of the best ways the church can nurture young people’s spiritual growth is to become “a service organization.” “We should be known in our communities,” they stated, “as the church that feeds those who are hungry and clothes those who are naked. Mission programs with a practical focus rather than an evangelistic focus should be stimulated, encouraging our youth to build relationships and through these relationships share what difference Jesus is making in their lives.”

As part of the Adventist Church’s current global emphasis in reaching the cities with a message of hope and wholeness, greater efforts are being made to plant churches in major cities around the world. Traditional evangelistic strategies are used to establish churches in communities that have heretofore had little or no Adventist presence. In the midst of this rapidly orchestrated urban effort, the Adventist Church needs to provide Adventist Christian education for the children of members as well as the children of families who are being nurtured in the Christian faith through the presence of the church.

Unfortunately, too often our Adventist schools and teachers are ill prepared to meet the social, religious, political, and economic realities confronting the community at large and specifically, the needs of their urban students, families, and communities. In part, our churches and schools are hindered from achieving their full potential as transformational agents in the wider community because, despite their being planted in the community, they are not of the community. They are often seen as (using the botanical term) an invasive species attempting to break into the community that does not see itself as part of the community.

As Bell has pointed out, “Christian organizations find themselves designing and implementing practices that value comfort over change or service.” In most church plants, teachers and school staff members are not neighborhood residents and do not understand the cultural, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic realities of the local community.

Too often, a potential church or church school plant is not preceded by community assessments with known leaders in the community that help stimulate the passion of the church planters to meet the felt needs of the neighborhood. Community assessments help the church to identify the good things that are already being done and which organizations help provide stability in the neighborhood. Our churches and schools need to recognize and partner with these leaders since often they are the gatekeepers that see us as nameless intruders rather than passionate servants.

Since research has shown the value of connecting the school with the community, teacher-education programs must prepare pre-service teachers to create partnerships within the community. An example of this appears in Noel’s article in the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, which outlines a three-step “authentic community engagement” model for urban teacher education.

According to this model, the first step is to develop trust-based partnerships between the school and the community to ensure that community-service initiatives are not sporadic but continuous, becoming an integral part of the school curriculum. Second, teachers are encouraged to learn about and from the community and to assess the needs of the people in order to serve them better. Third, teachers are advised to be involved in authentic community-service activities.

Identifying fellow stakeholders who contribute to the much-needed positive social action of the community helps local churches and the schools they sponsor to identify needs that are not being met in the community at large and prevents the church from duplicating the good things that are already being done in the neighborhood. This helps to develop mutual respect and ensures that the full impact of the mission focus of the church and its school can be felt. The medical profession has a mantra that says, “Diagnose before you treat.” Maybe those seeking to bring hope and wholeness to the cities of the world should adopt this motto also.

Adventist teachers who immerse themselves in experiencing and understanding the community around the school will more readily grasp the bigger picture of the helping community rather than feeling overwhelmed that they have to do everything. By identifying partners in the community, teachers and school administrators will discover which agencies can help fulfill the needs of students and parents that are outside the scope or resources of the local church school.

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs,
and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” If we truly want to achieve the potential of Adventist education in urban neighborhoods, we must remember that the anchor of our mission is our love for the people we are called to serve. It is Christ’s love that constrains us to focus on mingling, desiring their good, showing genuine sympathy, and ministering to their needs (rather than selfishly focusing exclusively on our own needs). That will win their confidence sufficiently to give us the right, as loving neighbors, to invite them to follow Jesus.

When a church school is seen as an asset to the neighborhood, it earns the right to step forward boldly to provide its students and parents, as well as neighbors unconnected to the church, with spiritual and educational tools to nurture family life and provide children with strategies that will help them succeed in school and throughout their lives. Every church school that has developed social capital in the neighborhood should develop outreach ministries to help them collaborate in addressing safety issues, food insecurity that leads to poor performance in school, as well as language and ethnic barriers that prevent people from connecting with and caring genuinely for one another. Families with no church affiliation will begin to see the church as a place where they can meet, receive help, or be referred to existing resources.

Small church schools do not have the human resources to meet all of the local needs, but if they develop a network of professionals in the church and in the neighborhood, they, too, can make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of their community.

**Strengthening Family Units**

Over the years, religious educators have recognized that one of the best means of nurturing the spiritual growth of children and young people is to enlist the support of parents and primary caregivers as partners in planning school activities. Smith and Denton confirmed the findings of numerous studies in the sociology of religion that “the most important social influence in shaping young people’s religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents.”

Adventist church schools that seek to function successfully within the soil of the neighborhood must procure, facilitate, and/or provide essential education for parents both inside and outside of the church. By sharing skills and strategies for deal-
churches are located. The key goal is to create opportunities to whose children attend our schools as well as with those who live in our communities but are not yet connected to our church. to share Jesus and to explain the Adventist message to families.

American adolescents who report being Christian, etc., they will strengthen the fabric of the homes of their neighbors and church families, and make a significant investment in changing the world.

However, research findings indicate that in recent years, the number of American adolescents who report being Christian has been gradually declining, and religious participation declines with age. Studies provide evidence that the religious life of American youth is characterized by individualism, subjectivism, and a consumerist mentality. On the other hand, a greater number of American teenagers are becoming more religiously pluralistic. With the reality of an increasing number of young people becoming religiously disengaged, what approach can Christian educators take?

Adventist church school personnel must seize and create opportunities to teach families in the church and in the neighborhood how to live dedicated Christian lives that energetically pass the torch of Christian commitment from one generation to the next. Many families are hungry for living, biblically based instruction on how to live consistent Christian lives. They desire to learn how to internalize Christian values, model moral virtues, teach biblical principles, show discipline in daily living, celebrate life in Christ, make choices that glorify God, and serve joyfully and unselfishly. Our message needs to emphasize the fact that “Children must see in the lives of their parents that consistency which is in accordance with their faith.” Ministries such as those described in this article will result in the establishment of winsome influences that strengthen the church and enhance the world around it.

The leadership of the Greater Sydney Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (headquartered in Epping, New South Wales, Australia) understands that education is a form of evangelism and recognizes the importance of reaching the family. As a result, they have implemented an approach to collaboration between the conference office, Adventist schools, and local churches with the objective of growing disciples and delivering evangelistic ministries to the local communities where their schools and churches are located. The key goal is to create opportunities to share Jesus and to explain the Adventist message to families whose children attend our schools as well as with those who live in our communities but are not yet connected to our church.

Although essential to the wellbeing of local communities, certain ministries are too complex and costly for a single church school, or even a school system, to provide. In such cases, the Adventist Church administrators for the local area can partner with other agencies to provide essential development services through education. An example of this is a project that the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is currently implementing in Somalia. After assessing communities in Mogadishu (population 1.6 million) and in Galmudug state, ADRA Somalia, in partnership with the European Union (EU), the Comitato Internazionale por lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP), the CBT Education Trust, Save the Children, and the Somali Educational Directorate of the Ministry of Human Development and Public Service, is providing Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) to help individuals and families improve their socio-economic future; thus creating more stable communities and opening avenues to strengthen ties with local entities. More and more urban centers desperately need vocational education that will lead to stable communities and pave
1. The Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Day Service at Hills Adventist College in Sydney, Australia, 2015. ANZAC Day commemorates and recognizes all armed forces who have fought on behalf of Australia and New Zealand.

2. Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Wahroonga Adventist School expansion held at the Wahroonga Adventist Church in Sydney, Australia, in July 2015. Established in 1905, the school currently serves grades K-6. The high school program will commence in 2016.

3. The Sydney and New South Wales Spiritual Retreat, 2014. La Dean Malifa, departmental assistant for the Sydney Adventist Schools, along with band members from “Endless Praise,” helped lead praise and worship services.
the way for generations of families who can think beyond mere subsistence in order to focus on nurture and service.

In an increasingly post-Christian world, Adventist education—particularly in the urban setting—must position itself to lead families toward realizing their rightful role of establishing nurturing homes, which will draw on the DNA of the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Remember that “the well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences.”

Isaiah 58:12 sheds light on the impact that service can have on the lives of people beyond our inner circles. It reads: “Your walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you

This article has been peer reviewed.

Gaspar F. Colón, Ph.D., M.P.H., works in the Office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland, as an Educational Resource Developer at the Global Mission Urban Center.

Andrea Nagy, Ph.D., is an Associate Editor of the Junior PowerPoints Bible Study Guide in the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference.

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27. Deuteronomy 6:4-9, NIV. All Bible verses in this article are quoted from NIV. Scripture quotations credited to NIV are from The Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

2. A woman undergoing tailoring assessment in the Nasteh Adult Learning Centre, Berthinie, Puntland State.
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