

Called to Lead, Nurture, Engage, and Serve

IN THE CITIES



The mission of our Seventh-day Adventist Church “is to proclaim to *all* peoples the everlasting gospel . . . *lead- ing* them to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and *to unite* with His church, and *nurturing* them in preparation for His soon return.”¹ Furthermore, the vision of our church for urban cities is “that *every city* will have an influential Adventist presence *actively engaged* in a comprehensive mission, *using Christ’s method of ministry.*”²

If we are to believe that our schools are also called to the fulfillment of this mission, then we too are called to *lead, unite, nurture, engage, and to evangelize or minister to all peoples with an influential presence in every city, utilizing Christ’s method of ministry.* What a tall order to fill! As we, as an educational system, begin to examine our role and responsibility in fulfilling this mission, a first good step is to lay a foundation by broadening our knowledge base and understanding of the complexities of urban education. This special edition of the JOURNAL on urban education has superbly laid the foundation, dispelled

myths about urban education, and provided varying approaches to better meeting the needs of children and youth who live in poor urban communities.

And now we must begin asking ourselves some questions. Questions can help shift the way we think about something and can serve as a catalyst to bring about change, writes Warren Berger in his book, *A More Beautiful Question*.³ Berger, a long-time journalist and author, has spent his career asking questions. He has interviewed and studied hundreds of the world’s leading innovators, designers, and creative thinkers to analyze how they ask fundamental questions, solve problems, and create new possibilities; and in the past few years, he has zeroed in on the power of questioning in other organizational structures such as education. Berger states that we can benefit by grappling with questions that encourage us to reconsider ways to reimagine our programs. Asking questions such as *Why, What If, and How*, in that order, can help one advance through three critical stages of problem-solving and can actually be

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equated with taking action.⁴ Thus, it is recommended that our next step in better understanding and meeting the needs of children and families in poverty-ridden environments should be to question our practices and engage in dialogue about where we go from here.

A few questions that I have pondered are as follows: As Adventist educators, do we fully understand the charge presented before us? Do we embrace and accept this charge? Are we prepared to lead this charge? More specifically, do we understand the life and struggles of the children we are trying to reach? Are we equipped with the resources and support needed to meet the extensive needs of these children and their families?

Sadly, the stories presented on pages 43 to 45 aren't uncommon, as we are living in a critical time in which the "least among us" (Luke 9:49, NIV)⁵ are growing at an alarming rate. As these stories illustrate, it's not just poverty that plagues and challenges children and youth in poor urban cities; poverty is oftentimes compounded by political uncertainty, war, violence, drugs, anger, hopelessness, dependency, and despair. The students we are commissioned to nurture, engage, lead, and serve have complex needs, and as we prepare for this ministry, we need to answer these questions:

- What is the charge presented to us as a worldwide Adventist educational system?
- How do we embrace and accept this charge?
- Are we prepared to lead this charge?

Imagine with me for a moment. What would it truly mean for your school community if the children mentioned in the boxes on pages 43 to 45 were accepted into your school? How would the learning experiences be different? How would the other students and parents respond to them? Does your school have the resources to meet their needs (safety, academic remediation/specialized instruction, assistance with drug dependency, release from a gang, adequate housing, spiritual development, counseling/therapeutic needs, etc.)? Even if their tuition is paid through scholarships or donors, how will the additional expenses be covered (field trips, mission trips, tutoring, extracurricular activities, school uniforms, etc.)? What "worldly" influences might be introduced into the school's culture (music, inappropriate language, violence, occult practices, etc.)?

Educating and Serving Inner-city Children and Youth

The purpose of this reflective summary is not to rehash the issues raised in the previous articles; rather, the intent is to move us onward toward compassion for and a commitment to educating and serving children and youth in poor, urban communities. As our faith is confronted with the reality of the urban poor, we are challenged to seek answers to the questions posed.

Is Our Mission Clear?

While we as a church may be aware of the needs in urban communities, are we clear on our role as an educational system within this mission? Do we believe that *all* children have a right

It's the first day of school, and I'm excited as can be. New book bag and new shoes. Mama kisses me goodbye as I run to catch the bus. I'm off to kindergarten, filled with potential and hope and big dreams. Fast forward. Now I'm headed to 3rd grade and the dreams began to fade. With my parents gone, I only have Grandma to love me. Life is hard, and I don't think it can get much better. It makes me sad listening to Grandma cry at night because she doesn't know how we'll eat or buy new pants for Sabbath. And I'm scared, too. Drug dealers greet me each day, and I see how they look at my sister. How am I going to protect her? And I can't even think about going to the police because I don't know if they are my friend or my enemy. Fast forward. Now I'm supposed to be in 6th grade, but I can't read, I hate writing, and I don't know why I need math except to weigh enough cocaine for a nickel bag. No, this wasn't what I dreamed of, but I learned the hard way, dreams don't live in my world. Fast forward. One day, Grandma was screaming and shouting about how God had answered her prayers. The church pulled together, and now I have a chance to do better. A scholarship to the Seventh-day Adventist school, where I'll be safe, well at least for six hours a day, anyway. This is an answer to our prayers. —An Inner-City Child, Anywhere Across the Globe.

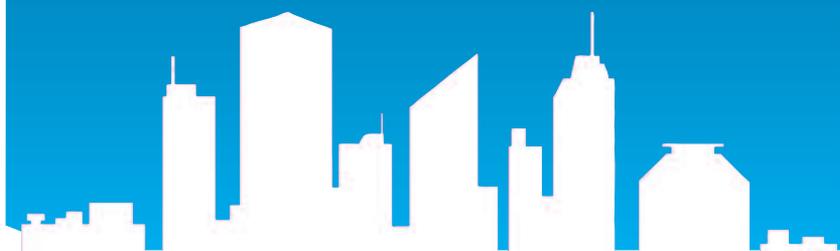
to a Seventh-day Adventist education? Are our educational institutions seen as significant and effective instruments for ministry? Research indicates that much more than curriculum or funding is needed to meet the challenges of poor urban children and youth—it's a school's culture that determines their future.⁶

If we are to be a part of the mission to the cities, our educational institutions must be recognized as more than establishments of academic achievement. They should respond to a higher calling. Our "first object of education is to direct our minds" and those of our children to God's revelation of Himself.⁷ Ellen G. White further suggests that "The great principles of education are unchanged . . . for they are the principles of the character of God. To aid the student in comprehending these principles, and in entering into that relation with Christ which will make them a controlling power in the life, should be the teacher's first effort and his constant aim."⁸ This should be our first and foremost priority: educating with the purpose of leading children and their families, including those in poor urban communities, to Christ. Our message is timely for poor urban communities, and our educational institutions can play an integral role in sharing this message of hope. However, before we can embrace this mission, we must (a) understand exactly what that needs of the poor urban communities are, and (b) collectively agree that we have a role to play in meeting the needs.⁹

Do We Have the Right Tools for the Job?

Once we have clarified and embraced the mission, we must then determine if our schools are equipped with the training, resources, and support needed to educate, engage, nurture, and serve. We give extraordinary attention to the pedagogical preparation of our educators; however, do we provide the necessary training needed for evangelism? Are our educators valued as evangelists or as ministers? Are our educators intentionally prepared not only to educate but also to minister through service or to share the love of Christ by reflecting the love of Christ? Additionally, since the needs of children, youth, and their families in poor urban communities are complex and extensive, we must determine whether we are equipped to meet the financial, social, psychological, educational, and spiritual needs of these students. How will they access our schools? How will they afford to attend? Will they have access to extracurricular activities? Will additional support such as tutoring, mentoring, or counseling be available? Do we have partnerships and relationships within the local communities as well as within the church so that services and resources are coordinated and streamlined?

I never thought this would be my life. One day I was happy, playing with my friends, planting a garden with my mother, riding in to town with my father. I lived an ordinary life, just like any other 10-year-old. And then everything changed. War broke out, and they were killing everyone around me. We had to flee, literally leaving with nothing, not even shoes for our feet. Me and my mother and baby brother made it out, but not my dad. I don't know if he's dead or alive. So now we live in this new land where everything is different—the food, the language, the smell, the sounds, the people—and I don't know how to fit in here. And I'm very, very sad because I loved my home, and I miss it very much, and I want my dad. My mom used to be a nurse, but she can't be one here so she cleans for other people. And tomorrow I start at a new school. It's a Seventh-day Adventist school, just like at home. I hope I'll learn the language, and I hope I can do well here.—A Refugee Child, Anywhere Across the Globe.



Who's on Board?

If we are clear on our mission and have the necessary resources, do we have strategic plans in place for getting buy-in from our students, parents, and constituents? How will we equip our students (those in the church not living in poor urban communities) so that they are prepared to minister? How do we assure parents and constituents that our Adventist values, standards, and principles will continue to be upheld? How do we assure them that our educational programs will continue to be of high quality and that this mission will be mutually beneficial?

Where Do We Go From Here?

As we strive to meet the needs of children and youth—and their families—we must first initiate the conversations and begin to explore how our educators can infuse ourselves into the mission. Here are a few suggestions for further consideration. Once again, more questions are raised than solutions; however, the questions posed can ignite the discussion and prompt us to engage collaboratively as we move forward into the ministry.

1. We must re-examine the funding structure of our Adventist educational system. How will our schools be accessible to children, youth, and families living in poor urban areas? How will we fund and provide for the additional resources and services needed (counseling, social work, tutoring, etc.)?

2. As our church strives to define its role in urban ministry, it can refer to programs or models within our educational system that are already meeting the needs of children, youth, and families in poverty. Identifying these schools/programs and then conducting research to better understand the programs, their services, successes, and challenges could provide us with valuable information for developing guidelines, support, and programs.

3. As our institutions of higher education lead in research and train the future professionals who will meet the needs of poor urban children, youth, and their families, they can serve a major role in conducting research, establishing institutes/foundations on urban education, creating degrees/programs that specifically focus on urban education and ensure that the professionals they train are equipped to meet the needs of the poor.

Fulfilling Our Mission: Engage, Educate, Serve

“True education . . . has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers.”¹⁰ Such harmonious development is found in the study of God’s law, the Bible, nature, service to others, and “useful occupation.”¹¹ Hence, the “first object of education is to direct our minds” and those of our children to God’s revelation of Himself.¹² An education of this kind imparts far more than academic knowledge. It is a *balanced* development of the *whole child* with time dimensions that span eternity. Deprivation in any one of these dimensions has a deadening effect on the other dimensions, since all parts are interrelated and interactive. When we determine that our mission is to meet the wholistic needs of poor urban children and youth, we must make a long-term commitment, recognizing that this race will not be a sprint but a marathon.

The book and movie about the true life story of Antwone Fisher, a young man who confronts the hurt of his past in order to move forward into his future, is a true depiction of what life is like for some in poor urban cities. Fisher entered the Navy as an angry young adult but learned to express himself through poetry. Reprinted in the second column is his poem, “Who Will Cry for the Little Boy?”¹³

This poem is Fisher’s plea to the world and could easily be a plea to us: Will we cry for the little boys and girls who feel hopeless, aban-

*Who will cry for the little boy, lost and all alone?
Who will cry for the little boy, abandoned without his own?*

Who will cry for the little boy? He cried himself to sleep.

*Who will cry for the little boy? He never had for keeps.
Who will cry for the little boy? He walked the burning sand.*

Who will cry for the little boy? The boy inside the man.

Who will cry for the little boy? Who knows well hurt and pain.

Who will cry for the little boy? He died again and again.

*Who will cry for the little boy? A good boy he tried to be.
Who will cry for the little boy, who cries inside of me?*

doned, alone, and unworthy? Is the mission to the cities one that we understand and embrace within our educational system? Are we prepared to extend help without stripping those in poor urban cities of their dignity? Are we prepared to assist while empowering? Are we prepared to offer help while instilling hope? Are we ready to answer the call? ☞

Everything is so hard—math, science, reading—especially reading. I try and I try, but now I’m too tired to try anymore. Nothing I do helps me learn, and I don’t even know if it’s important anymore. I don’t want anybody to think I’m stupid, so it’s easier to be the “bad kid.” So I finally got kicked out of my school. They have no idea how behind I am, but at least I don’t have to be reminded every day just how stupid I am. And I thought I was home free. But now, my dad got me into this Seventh-day Adventist school. And I start on Monday! The other school couldn’t help me, maybe this one can?—A Child With a Learning Delay, Anywhere Across the Globe.



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3. Warren Berger, *A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2015).

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6. David Trumpie, "Urban Education: The Kids Are Alright... The Schools Aren't: Lessons Learned by an Ex-Politician in Inner City Detroit," *Dome Magazine* (September 16, 2010): <http://domemagazine.com/features/cov0910>.

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8. White, *Education*, *ibid.*, p. 30.

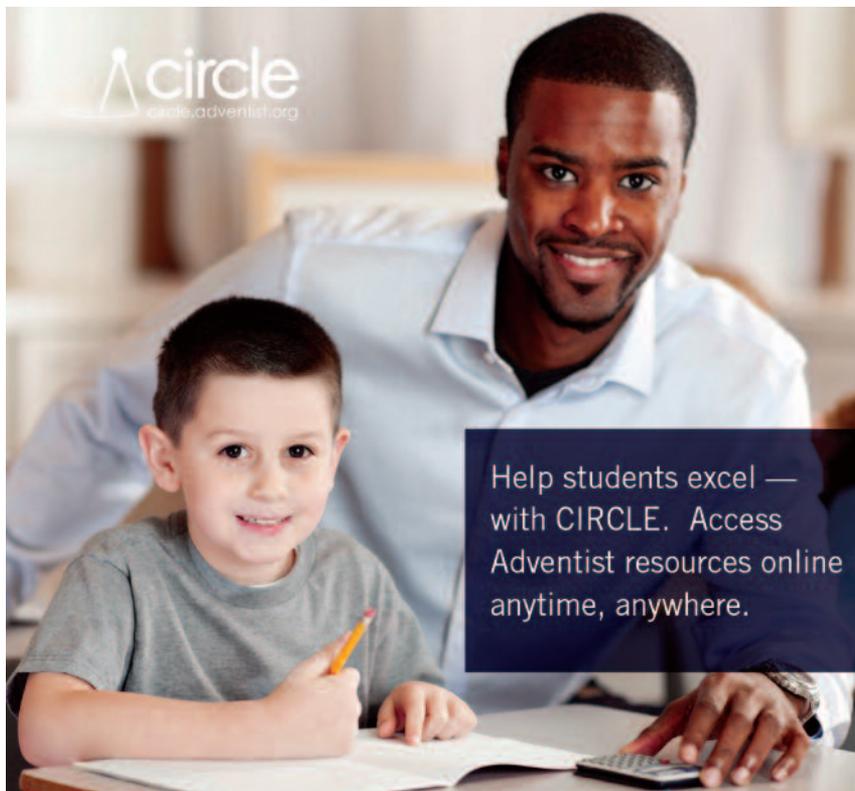
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13. Excerpt of 10 lines from "Who Will Cry for the Little Boy?" from *Who Will Cry for the Little Boy?* by Antwone Fisher. Copyright © 2003 by Antwone Fisher. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers and The William Morris Agency.



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nicity, cultural identity, and religious discrimination in both developing and developed countries. We invite you to respond to the “Call for Papers” at the bottom of this page to report successes and lessons learned from initiatives that schools (pre-kindergarten through postgraduate) in your conference, union, or division have implemented in urban centers. Ultimately, our goal is to inspire action through education that takes seriously Adventism’s mission to the cities.

The authors of this guest editorial served as co-coordinators for this special issue on urban education and Adventist schools. Dr. Ella Smith Simmons serves as a General Vice President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland. Dr. Davenia J. Lea serves as an Associate Director of Education for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland. The JAE editorial staff express heartfelt appreciation for the many hours Drs. Simmons and Lea devoted to selecting topics, obtaining peer reviewers, providing input on article content, as well as their prompt response to the editor’s questions during the planning and production of the issue.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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5. Jennifer L. Hochschild and Francis X. Shen, “Race, Ethnicity, and Education Policy.” In *Oxford Handbook of Racial and Ethnic Politics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
6. “Mission to the Cities” is the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s holistic approach to sharing the gospel among the growing populations the world’s large cities. Initiatives include the establishment of Life Hope Centers, neighborhood events, seminars, small groups, and evangelistic meetings. Inaugurated in 2012 with support from the worldwide church leadership, the initiative was launched in 2013 in New York City followed in 2014 with each of the church’s 13 world divisions focusing on at least one large city in its territory. For 2015, each union will focus on a city in its region: <http://missiontothecities.org/>. See also Ellen G. White’s *Ministry to the Cities* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 2012).

C A L L F O R P A P E R S

Population growth among the world’s largest cities continues to expand, and with this expansion comes unique opportunities for Adventist education. The *Mission to the Cities** initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has propelled the establishment of centers of influence, community events, seminars, and small group and evangelistic meetings. *This special edition is designed to showcase how Adventist schools, from early childhood through post-graduate levels, are making an impact in urban classrooms and communities through school-based programs and research.*

We invite papers that describe how schools and communities are working together to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of students through research, training, and service. Each paper should clearly delineate the purpose of the initiative, the process of implementation, as well as challenges and successes, provide data to support impact on the school and community (qualitative and/or quantitative), and recommendations for good practice. Ultimately, each paper should address how Adventist Christian elementary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions are successfully creating learning environments in under-resourced urban settings.

The Journal of Adventist Education Special Issue Guest Editors: Ella Smith Simmons and Davenia J. Lea Topic: Urban Education, Part II

Deadline for Submission: December 15, 2015

To further explore ways that Adventist education is making an impact in urban centers in the 21st century, the special issue of the JOURNAL will focus on the following topics:

- Professional development models, collaborative endeavors with church organizations and community partnerships;
- Workshops/conferences that train teachers and educational administrators;
- Outreach or mission programs (i.e., school-based domestic and international service-learning projects; “centers of influence, life, hope”);
- Curriculum and instruction resources designed to engage students and their families, and enhance the learning environment in under-resourced urban schools;

- Research specifically studying Adventist urban school populations.

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Review Process

Format: Articles, including references, charts, figures, and tables, generally should not exceed 10 pages. Papers should be double-spaced, using 12-point type, and standard margin and paragraph indentation. For additional information, visit <http://jae.adventist.org/authors.htm#form>.

Notification of receipt will take place upon submission; notification of acceptance will take place after the submission deadline. All papers will undergo double-blind peer review.

*To read more about the goals and accomplishments of the *Mission to the Cities* initiative, visit <http://missiontothecities-org.lifehopecenters.org/>.

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