



Gamaliel Flórez

In Inter-America, Adventist Education Is a Priority

It was time to close the office at a small Seventh-day Adventist school in Puerto Ordaz, Venezuela, when someone knocked at the door.

“Please, help me,” the man begged. “I need to enroll my children in this school.”

“Sorry, we are closed,” the teacher replied.

“Have you ever heard about Adventist University Institute of Venezuela?” the man asked.

“Of course,” the teacher said. “It is a very important Adventist school in this country.”

“Well, I finished my studies there, and I want my children to get a Seventh-day Adventist education.”

That man was the CEO of a well-known company who had just moved with his family to Puerto Ordaz. Even though he could afford to enroll his children in any school, he decided to enroll them in a Seventh-



Montemorelos University (Mexico) administrators and IAD officers attending a Higher Education Leadership Symposium sponsored by the IAD Department of Education. Photo courtesy of Montemorelos University.

day Adventist school. Why? Because he had experienced firsthand the blessings of Adventist education and wanted his children to enjoy those blessings, too.

Adventist education fulfills an important mission as part of the redemptive ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—our children’s and young people’s salvation. Adventist educators are inspired and moved by this statement by Ellen G. White regarding education: “It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the stu-

America with significant achievements. These include:

- Implementing the ideals of Adventist education;
- Enhancing educational quality;
- Increasing the number of college and university-level programs offered;
- Preparing people for Jesus’ second coming.

Implementing the Ideals of Adventist Education

The leaders in Inter-America are committed to ensuring that our schools, at all levels, bear the best possible witness by adhering to the highest educational quality standards held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We hold these standards in high regard since we believe them to be the imprint and visible aspect of the church.

Thus, in 2015, the IAD chose as one of its quinquennial goals to implement a renewed commitment to the ideals of Seventh-day Adventist Christian education. During this past quinquennium (2015-2020), the work of educational administrators, pastors, and experts was solidified in a document entitled “A Compass Toward Excellence,” which provides a conceptual framework for the development of Adventist education at the K-12 level. That document was adopted as a benchmark by the unions, which then adapted it to each country’s legal and cultural context to ensure the development of an educational program with a high-quality Adventist identity that will be acknowledged both inside and outside church constituencies. Annual workshops called “A Journey to Knowledge” offered training and inspiration to union educational directors, educational administrators, and teachers in several fields, and presented solutions to current issues in church schools by applying an Adventist philosophy of education.

To a large extent, higher education shapes the immediate and long-term future of the church, so constant attention to tertiary institutions is of utmost importance. IAD universities are linked through a consortium that allows a healthy sharing of experiences and best practices, and in addition, the opportunity to join in projects and extend support to one another when they are faced with challenges or difficulties.

The IAD Department of Education has developed



Lancelot Riley (right) holds the “Traveling” trophy and the prize check after Northern Caribbean University’s Beasc Technologies team won the top award at the International Model Competition held in Provo, Utah, United States. Photo courtesy of Northern Caribbean University.

dent for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.”*

The Inter-American Division (IAD) is one of the fastest-growing divisions in the Adventist Church. It faces major challenges due to the diversity of languages—Spanish, English, French, and local dialects. It encompasses 43 countries with various legal and cultural contexts.

But even amid such challenges, Adventist education in IAD fulfills its mission of offering Christian education in 959 schools with 150,046 students under the care of 9,856 teachers. These 959 schools include 15 colleges and universities, 324 secondary schools, and 620 elementary schools.

God has blessed Adventist education in Inter-

two initiatives to keep the tertiary institutions focused on Adventist educational quality:

1. **“Broadening University Borders.”** This initiative included the creation of criteria to use in assessing administrative performance and the implementation of best practices. Interschool visits and visits to major schools in other world church divisions were part of this process.

2. **“Inspired to Inspire.”** Information and encouragement were given to university leaders by division and other educational personnel relating to various specialized functions such as research, school efficiency, university pastoral ministries, student life, and missiology.

The IAD also established the *Adventist University Excellence Award* to acknowledge the students who best represent the ideals of excellence in each university throughout its territory.

Enhancing Educational Quality

The Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (AAA) has provided great support for the development of Adventist education in Inter-America. Standards used to assess a school’s educational quality contribute to the various aspects of training the students. Higher education institutions throughout Inter-America have maintained AAA accreditation, and several of them have also earned other institutional or professional accreditations. Likewise, 85 percent of IAD’s schools offering secondary education have been accredited by the AAA.

Significant achievements have been made in the area of secondary education. Religion textbooks are being written for those grades that don’t currently have them. At the primary level, the Inter-American Division Publishing Association (IADPA) launched a project to write original textbooks. Students already have copies of language-arts textbooks through 4th grade. Teachers and students are pleased that these textbooks are based upon the principles of the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education, providing effective integration of faith and learning.

Increasing the Number of College and University Programs

IAD’s tertiary institutions offer 115 academic programs, 46 at the Master’s level and nine at the doctoral

level. University students across the division are distributed among the various areas of knowledge as follows:

- Theology, 2,592
- Education, 2,745
- Administration, 2,574
- Humanities (Arts), 630
- Health, 3,920
- Pure and Natural Sciences, 881
- Applied Sciences, 523
- Other, 5,105

During this past quinquennium, IAD’s universities



A sample of the elementary-level textbooks developed by the Inter-American Division Department of Education. Photo by Keila Trejo/IAD.

increased their educational offerings, opening 54 new programs. Five of our universities have established extension campuses within the territory of their union constituencies, and Montemorelos University, in Mexico, has extended some of its programs, especially at the graduate level, to various other countries throughout Inter-America and other divisions that have requested these programs. The Inter-American Division is one of two world church divisions that have been authorized by the General Conference International Board of Education (IBE) to process, within its territory, the approval of various undergraduate programs other than theology, education, and health, by following a process approved and supervised by the IBE.

Preparing People for Jesus’ Second Coming

Our educational institutions must offer quality academic training accompanied by duly accredited credentials from relevant government entities, as well as our church educational accrediting authority. These credentials give students access to higher educational levels and enable them to engage in professional practice in the areas for which they have been trained.

The main objective of Adventist education is *educating to redeem*. With this goal in mind, the IAD has

baptized during the past quinquennium.

For more than 10 years, our schools and tertiary institutions have celebrated an annual “Day of Prayer.” On that day, parents, community residents, and local officers are invited to join prayer sessions at local schools. This activity offers new opportunities for witnessing and enables students to experience the blessings of prayer.

Wishing to support the missionary development of our higher education institutions, the IAD board of trustees has voted a project that provides an investment of US\$100,000 in each institution to establish centers of influence. Mobile clinics, healthy-life centers for the community, and music schools, among others, are examples of the projects being developed by the schools. Most of the colleges and universities are also using their funds to add to the amount provided by the division. Both faculty and students have joined this project so that others may get to know more about God’s love.

The Inter-American Division goes beyond being a mere administrative organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is the sum of men and women of various cultures, age groups, and varied ethnic backgrounds who all embrace the same faith. It is a territory where faithful people work hard to achieve the best for their children and youth. It is the reason that *in Inter-America, Adventist education is a priority.* ✍



Terry John, senior pastor and vice president for spiritual development, and Ronald Daniel, professor and associate pastor of the University church, conduct a baptism at the University of the Southern Caribbean in Maracas, St. Joseph, Trinidad. Photo courtesy of the University of the Southern Caribbean.

promoted enrollment in Adventist schools through Sabbath school Bible study guides, at events for lay members, ministerial conferences, and through visits to local churches by teachers and students who are already involved in Christian education. This has resulted in an average of 41 percent of eligible Seventh-day Adventist students enrolled in the division’s educational system. We’ll keep praying and working to increase that percentage.

Elementary and secondary schools, as well as tertiary institutions, have promoted spiritual growth and service through the distribution of the IAD’s missionary book of the year. And every year, schools become evangelism centers for our students and their families, with approximately 4,000 students

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* Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), 13.