

An Adventist Essential

~ Dennis N. Carlson

Over the past year, a half dozen of my consulting assignments through the office of Dr. Lilya Wagner, Director of PSI, have been to Adventist academies and elementary schools. I have been impressed with the dedication of talent and leadership that administrators and teachers have shown to not only provide the best of Adventist education, but also to promote the benefits of an Adventist education and make constant efforts toward the goal of every student in a given constituency be actually enrolled in Adventist education.

Teachers shoulder a double role: educator and recruiter. And an additional part of the load that educators' shoulder is fundraising. But that shouldn't be the case. Other than providing a safe and superior classroom experience—which is the basis for both full enrollment and fundraising—my point of this note is that our teachers should be free to teach.

Enrollment and fundraising naturally fall in the responsibility of school administrators and the school board, and, of course, the entire constituency--and let's let the teachers teach.

As I grew up in the Adventist educational system, the impression I had as a young person was that every student in the church was in the Adventist school. When my father, Nobel A. Carlson, was principal in the mid 1950s and taught everything for grades 7-10 at Highland Lakes Jr. Academy near Avon Park, Florida, my memory is that every student from grades 1-10 was enrolled in the Adventist school. That was just the way it was. That was the expectation.

The same can be said for Tri-City Jr. Academy near High Point, North Carolina. My Dad was principal there in the mid 1960s and taught grades 9 and 10 (including me) and nearly all the students from four constituent churches came to the Adventist school. That was just the way it was.

And, if I reach further back in my memory to first and second grade in 1953 and 1954 on the campus of Southern Missionary College, I have to believe that all of us early baby boomer kids from Adventist families were in what became known as Spaulding Elementary School. We sure were crowded in. I must pay tribute to the memory of Miss Ruth Jones, our beloved teacher.

Likely teachers and administrators have always been involved in direct enrollment enhancement and direct fundraising, but it seems that that burden is greater today than in past decades. Our educational system is the responsibility of every member.

Major donors are needed to lead in fundraising. How great it would be if there was an endowment, or a donor base, large enough for each Adventist school; so that finances would be stable and everyone who should be in the Adventist school would be there. So many give so much to keep our schools open. Full appreciation for that dedication must be highlighted here. Let it continue and increase.

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Dr. Carlson is a fundraising and leadership consultant for non-profits, focusing largely on Seventh-day Adventist entities such as local churches. His experience in philanthropy includes four years as Vice President for Advancement at Walla Walla University and various fundraising initiatives within the church context during his years as a pastor and church leader. He served as Vice President for Administration in both the Washington and Upper Columbia Conferences and as President of the Minnesota Conference and the Mid-American Union Conference. He was chair of the board of Philanthropic Services for Institutions (PSI) during his time as Assistant to the President for Administration at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. He also served on the Advisory Committee for PSI. He earned a B.A. in Theology from Columbia Union College (Now Washington Adventist University) and a Master of Divinity degree from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He earned a Doctor of Ministry Degree from Northwest Theological Union.