

Why am I Still Teaching in our Adventist School System?

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“Why am I still teaching in our Adventist school system? Is what I am endeavoring to do still valid? The needs and attitudes of students and parents, not to mention the requirements of the curriculum, have changed dramatically over the years. Perhaps I could be more effective elsewhere.” Have questions like these ever crossed your mind? I have noted the exodus of former colleagues from our ranks to those of the public system, and while I am not suggesting that they should still be with us since reasons for change vary, in talking with them I have been reminded that often their new duties require less effort. Course outlines and syllabi are usually provided. One preparation may suffice for several classes. Weekend expectations are negligible. Salaries, perks, and pension plans in public schools are negotiated to attract perspective teachers. Why, then, do I choose to remain where, particularly for high school teachers, opportunities and perks are limited? First of all, in the greatest sense, we are family. Secondly, I think the rewards far outnumber the drawbacks. Finally, we are told that the work of education and redemption are one. These are not the only reasons, but they are what keep me returning to Crawford Adventist Academy each September. You, no doubt, have personal reasons of your own.

We are Family

A song by Sister Sledge states, “We are family.” What does “family” look like? Crawford is a multicultural school, reflecting the makeup of Toronto. Racially, we are a mix, with the majority of students and teachers having roots in Africa or the Caribbean. Some of us are from the Philippines or Korea or elsewhere in Asia, some are Latino, and a very few in comparison are of European descent. A few years ago during class discussion, an eleventh-grader asked my feelings about teaching in a school where I am definitely in the minority. After a moment’s thought I pointed out that, although I have a very large biological family whom I dearly love, I am able to relate only superficially with many of them because most, although Christian, are not part of a church family. We do not share the same worldview. On the other hand, teachers and students at Crawford, no matter what the ethnic background, are “brothers and sisters in Christ.” Sometimes we feel closer to our church family than to our actual family. Our multiracial school reflects the effectiveness of our worldwide mission program. Basically, although we may look quite different, we share the same culture. We understand each other. We pray together. We anticipate a future in heaven.

The Rewards Far Outnumber the Drawbacks

Despite similar values, we may feel overwhelmed with expectations or time required to accomplish success. We wonder if we “live” at school rather than at home with spouse or family. Difficult students engender frustration. Concerned parents require more communication. Since we operate Christian schools, parents sometimes appear to expect miracles. Because we deal with the same age group year after year, we encounter the

same problems. We wonder at our seeming lack of progress. Why don't things get easier?

There are times, however, when we know exactly why we teach in private schools. One blessing in working with a smaller group of students is that our influence may be more far-reaching than we assume. While in university, I spent a year on the campus of *Seminaire Adventiste du Saleve* in France. My year away was so satisfying that I constantly encourage students to broaden their perspective by travel and study elsewhere, especially through our Adventist Colleges Abroad program. I've been delighted when former students keep in touch and enthusiastically share their insights. One former student sent a postcard from the Chateau d'If, the setting for Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which we had studied earlier. Another wrote letters to my current French class. Most thoroughly soak up the experience, then are happy to come home. One young lady, however, married an American fellow student and stayed with him in Geneva, working at the United Nations. They returned only after their boys were ready for academy. At least two girls married French theologians and persuaded them to come to North America. One young man married a fellow student from Germany and has remained there to raise his family. ACA is affiliated with schools in Europe, Australia and South America. Students gain a worldwide view of our church. Perhaps the enjoyment is not only in reliving vicariously my own experience in Europe, but also in observing the growth and development of other young people.

Another benefit of working in the Adventist system is that often, former students become colleagues. Since there are very few Adventist schools in Ontario, graduates with degrees in education are limited in their choices, should they desire to teach in our system. I have ceased to be surprised when I see a familiar face, choosing rather to rejoice in the fact that the Toronto Adventist District School Board has gained another teacher who is well acquainted with the system and with the school. This year, eight teachers at Crawford and the supervising principal, himself, are former students. I have been blessed by their enthusiasm, friendship and commitment to Crawford.

Equally amazing was the fact that some years ago I welcomed into my grade nine classroom the children of a girl whom I had taught years earlier. I find that similar experiences are happening more frequently. Recently I asked another new student if she was related to a particular individual. She looked at me in shock and said, "He's my father!" Rather than feel old, I am told I should feel nostalgic. Actually, I am joyful when former students choose to send their children to our Adventist schools. Contrary to what we sometimes hear, their experiences with Christian education in years past must have been more positive than negative.

The Work of Education and Redemption are One

Alumni Weekends can be exhausting as well as exhilarating. It is wonderful for class members to reunite, especially if several years have elapsed since the previous visit, but it can be rather taxing for teachers to equate adolescent faces in their minds with the adults who stand before them. It is always rewarding, however, to discover what has become of

former students, to be introduced to spouses and children, to catch up on events that have helped to shape lives. Now and then, in the course of conversation, individuals comment on teenaged misbehavior, shaking their heads and apologizing. I am almost always unable to remember the event in question, but I am reminded that the progress we sometimes feel is slow in coming, has taken place.

Some individuals follow unusual paths as they undertake their life's work. I've watched with admiration as one young man has spent nearly twelve years in Papua New Guinea with Adventist Frontier Missions. He and his wife have lived in a remote area under very primitive conditions, sending their children back to North America for schooling. They have adopted an abandoned little girl, struggled with tropical disease and battled loneliness. Despite setbacks they have stayed at their post, raising up Adventist churches and schools where there have been none. I would not have expected that from him as a student and I have been gratified and humbled, as well as inspired.

“In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one, for in education, as in redemption, ‘other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ’” (*Education*, p. 30). Teachers touch the future and that future reaches out to eternity, especially for those who claim Christianity. I am touched by encouraging comments from students, and as I watch young people enroll in Crawford, struggle to find themselves and their goals, graduate and leave to pursue careers and to enjoy life, I remember that we are children of the same heavenly Father. As the apostle Paul suggests, we are runners in the same race. We are striving to attain the final goal and the difficulties fade when we consider the prize. Together with my students I want to hear the words of King Jesus as stated in Matthew 25:34, “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”