

# Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Education\*

## Policy FE05, FE10

### Premises

Seventh-day Adventists, within the context of their basic beliefs, acknowledge that—

- God is the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe—animate and inanimate.
- God created perfect human beings in His own image with power to think, to choose, and to do.
- God is the source of all that is true, good, and beautiful, and has chosen to reveal Himself to humankind.
- Humans, by their own choice, rebelled against God and fell into a state of sin that has separated them from God and each other, affecting the entire planet and plunging it into the cosmic conflict between good and evil. In spite of this, the world and human beings still reveal, albeit dimly, the goodness and beauty of their original condition.
- The Godhead met the problem of sin through the plan of redemption. This plan aims to restore human beings to God's image and the universe back to its original state of perfection, love, and harmony.
- God invites us to choose His plan of restoration and to relate to this world creatively and responsibly until He intervenes in history to bring about the new heavens and the new earth that is promised in His Word.

### Philosophy

The Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education is Christ-centered. Adventists believe that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's character and purposes can be understood as revealed in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, and in nature. The distinctive characteristics of Adventist education—derived from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White—point to the redemptive aim of true education: to restore human beings into the image of their Maker.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God is infinitely loving, wise, and powerful. He relates to human beings on a personal level, presenting His character as the ultimate norm for human conduct and His grace as the means of restoration.

Adventists recognize, however, that human motives, thinking, and behavior have fallen short of God's ideal. Education in its broadest sense is a means of restoring human beings to their original relationship with God. Working together, homes, schools, and churches cooperate with divine agencies in preparing learners for responsible citizenship in this world and in the world to come.

Adventist education imparts more than academic knowledge. It fosters a balanced development of the whole person—spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially. Its time dimensions span eternity. It seeks to develop a life of faith in God and respect for the dignity of all human beings; to build character akin to that of the Creator; to nurture thinkers rather than mere reflectors of others' thoughts; to promote loving service rather than selfish ambition; to ensure maximum development of each individual's potential; and to embrace all that is true, good, and beautiful.

### Aim and Mission

Adventist education prepares students for a useful and joy-filled life, fostering friendship with God, whole-person development, Bible-based values, and selfless service in accordance with the Seventh-day Adventist mission to the world.

---

\* *General Conference Policy Manual* (2003), pp. 221-228 (Education – Departmental Policies: FE 05, FE 10).

## **Agencies of Education**

### **Home**

The home is society's primary and most basic educational agency. Parents are the first and most influential teachers and have the responsibility to reflect God's character to their children. Moreover, the whole familial setting shapes the values, attitudes, and worldview of the young. The church and the school, along with society's other educational agencies, build on and supplement the work of the home. It is imperative that the home, in turn, supports the educational work of the school.

### **Local Church**

The local church also has a major assignment in the lifelong educational enterprise. The congregation as a community of faith provides an atmosphere of acceptance and love in which it discipless those within its sphere of influence in a personal faith in Jesus Christ and in a growing understanding of the Word of God. This understanding includes both an intellectual aspect and a life of conformity to God's will.

### **School, College, and University**

All levels of Adventist schooling build on the foundation laid by the home and church. The Christian teacher functions in the classroom as God's minister in the plan of redemption. The greatest need of students is to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior and commit to a life of Christian values and service. The formal and non-formal curricula help students reach their potential for spiritual, mental, physical, social, and vocational development. Preparing students for a life of service to their family, church, and the larger community is a primary aim of the school.

### **World Church**

The world Church at all levels has oversight responsibility for the healthy functioning of learning in all three of the above venues, including lifelong learning. With reference to the school as an educational agency, its functions are ideally accomplished by institutions established by the Church for that purpose. The Church at large should make every effort to ensure that all Adventist children and youth have the opportunity to attend an Adventist educational institution. Realizing, however, that a large percentage of the Church's youth are not enrolled in Adventist schools, the world Church must find ways to achieve the goals of Adventist education through alternative means (e.g., after-school church-based instruction, church-sponsored centers on non-Adventist campuses, etc.).

## **The Role of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges and Universities**

The agencies of Adventist education listed above are in place and operative. The remaining sections of this document develop implications of the Adventist philosophy of education only for schooling. Implications for other agencies remain to be developed.

### **Key Components**

#### **The Student**

As a child of God, the student is the primary focus of the entire educational effort and should be loved and accepted. The purpose of Adventist education is to help students reach their highest potential and to fulfill God's purpose for their lives. Student outcomes constitute a significant guiding criterion in assessing the health and effectiveness of the school.

#### **The Teacher**

The teacher holds a central place of importance. Ideally, the teacher should be both a committed Adventist Christian and an exemplary role model of the Christian graces and professional competencies.

## **Knowledge**

All learning is grounded on faith in a certain set of presuppositions or worldview. The Christian worldview recognizes a supernatural as well as a natural order. Adventists define knowledge more broadly than that which is merely intellectual or scientific. True knowledge encompasses cognitive, experiential, emotional, relational, intuitive, and spiritual elements. An acquisition of true knowledge leads to understanding, which is manifested in wisdom and appropriate action.

## **Curriculum**

The curriculum will promote academic excellence and will include a core of general studies needed for responsible citizenship in a given culture along with spiritual insights that inform Christian living and build community. Such citizenship includes appreciation for the Christian heritage, concern for social justice, and stewardship of the environment. A balanced curriculum will address the major developmental needs in the spiritual, intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and vocational realms. All areas of study will be examined from the perspective of the biblical worldview within the context of the Great Controversy theme, as it promotes the integration of faith and learning.

## **Instruction**

The instructional program of the classroom places appropriate emphasis on all forms of true knowledge, purposefully integrating faith and learning. Instructional methodology will actively engage the needs and abilities of each student, giving opportunity to put what is learned into practice, and be appropriate to the discipline and to the culture.

## **Discipline**

Discipline in a Christian school is built upon the need to restore the image of God in each student and recognizes the freedom of the will and the work of the Holy Spirit. Discipline—not to be confused with punishment—seeks the development of self-control. In redemptive discipline, the student's will and intelligence are engaged.

## **School Life**

A blended emphasis of worship, study, labor, and recreation, and relationships will characterize the total learning environment, with careful attention given to balance. The campus community will be pervaded by joyful spirituality, a spirit of cooperation, and respect for the diversity of individuals and cultures.

## **Assessment**

The Adventist school, college, or university gives clear evidence that it subscribes to an Adventist philosophy of education. Such evidence is found in the written curriculum, in teaching and learning activity, in the campus ethos, and by the testimony of students, graduates, constituents, employees, and the community at large. Assessment—whether of individuals or institutions—is redemptive in nature and always seeks God's high ideal of excellence.

## **Responsibilities and Outcomes**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has made a commitment to provide a broad education and spiritual formation for its children, youth, and young adults within the context of the Christian worldview. The Church extends this same opportunity to other children and youth of the community who share similar values and ideals. Adventist education seeks to maintain academic excellence in all teaching and learning activities.

## **Elementary Schools**

The Adventist elementary school offers students (1) a climate in which they can understand God's will, commit their lives to Him, and experience the joy of helping others; (2) an organized program leading toward spiritual, physical, mental, social, and emotional development; (3) a basic core of skills

and knowledge for everyday living appropriate to their age; (4) a wholesome appreciation and respect for the home, the church, the school, and the community.

***Students completing the elementary level at an Adventist school should—***

- *Have had the opportunity to commit their lives to God through conversion, baptism, service, and a desire to do God's will in every area of living.*
- *Demonstrate competence in thinking, communication, and quantitative skills, along with other academic areas foundational to schooling at the secondary level.*
- *Manifest interpersonal skills and emotional growth necessary for healthy relationships with their peers, family, and community.*
- *Know and practice basic principles of health and balanced living, including a wise use of time and entertainment media.*
- *Develop an appreciation for the dignity of labor along with a general awareness of career options appropriate to their interests and God-given abilities.*

**Secondary Schools**

The Adventist secondary school builds on what has been achieved at the elementary level with a focus on values, choices, and Christ-like character. It offers students (1) a formal and informal curriculum in which academic study, spiritual values, and daily life are integrated; (2) a broad academic and vocational program leading to productive living and satisfactory career choices; (3) avenues whereby Christian faith is made relevant to their emerging needs, leading to more mature relationships with others and with God; and (4) an opportunity to develop a Christian lifestyle of values, service, and witness.

***Students completing the secondary level at an Adventist school should—***

- *Have had an opportunity to commit their lives to God and therefore manifest a maturing faith in Him characterized by personal devotion, public worship, and service and witness to others in fulfillment of the Church's mission.*
- *Demonstrate competence in communication, quantitative skills, and creative thinking, along with other academic areas that are foundational to excellence in tertiary education and/or the world of work.*
- *Demonstrate maturity and Christ-like sensitivity within the family circle, in the choice of friendships, in preparation for marriage, and in broad anticipation within their church and community.*
- *Make good decisions and wise choices in ways that demonstrate their belief in the body as a temple of God. This includes careful use of time and discriminating selection of music, media, and other forms of entertainment.*
- *Have developed a strong work ethic, functioning competently in everyday life as well as within entry-level work experiences appropriate to their interests and God-given abilities.*

**Tertiary Institutions**

Adventist institutions of higher education provide students a unique environment needed in pursuit of learning in the arts, humanities and religion, sciences and various professions, within the perspective of the Adventist philosophy of education and spiritual commitment. Adventist higher education (1) gives preference to careers that directly support the mission of the Church; (2) recognizes the importance of the quest for truth in all its dimensions as it affects the total development of the individual in relation both to God and to fellow human beings; (3) utilizes available resources such as revelation, reason,

reflection, and research to discover truth and its implications for human life here and in the hereafter, while recognizing the limitations inherent in all human endeavors; (4) leads students to develop lives of integrity based upon principles compatible with the religious, ethical, social, and service values essential to the Adventist worldview; (5) fosters—particularly at the graduate level—the mastery, critical evaluation, discovery and dissemination of knowledge, and the nurture of wisdom in a community of Christian scholars.

***Students completing the tertiary level at an Adventist institution should—***

- *Have had the opportunity to commit themselves to God and therefore live a principled life in accordance with His will, with a desire to experience and support the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.*
- *Exhibit proficiency in critical thinking, stewardship, creativity, appreciation of beauty and the natural environment, communication, and other forms of academic scholarship toward fulfillment of their vocations and lifelong learning.*
- *Manifest social sensitivity and loving concern for the well-being of others in preparation for marriage and family life, citizenship within a diverse community, and fellowship within the community of God.*
- *Maintain a consistent lifestyle that demonstrates a commitment to optimal health practices essential to effective adult living. This includes careful use of time and discriminating selection of music, media, and other forms of entertainment.*
- *Answer God's call in the selection and pursuit of their chosen careers, in selfless service to the mission of the Church, and in building a free, just, and productive society and world community.*

**Lifelong Learning**

Education goes beyond formal schooling. Lifelong learning should meet the needs of both professionals and non-professionals. (1) Among professional responsibilities are opportunities for continuing education for certification and career enrichment for educators, clergy, business and health-care personnel, and others. (2) In the non-professional realm, opportunities exist for programs in such areas as local church leadership, family life, personal development, spirituality, Christian growth, and service to the church and the community. Programs need to be developed that utilize both traditional teaching techniques and extension learning through media technology. Formal schooling combines with the other agencies of education in preparing the student "for the joy of service in this world and the higher joy of wider service in the world to come."