

Global journey of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

BY JIŘÍ MOSKALA

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary is to help our Church fulfill Christ's commission to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) by being the preeminent theological resource for the global Church and by preparing individuals to actively participate in the fulfillment of Christ's commission. We exist only because we serve the needs of the worldwide community of believers. This global perspective and engagement are expressed in our mission statement, in the programs we offer, and by the fact that we are the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Seminary. It is in our institutional DNA.

Each year, about 1,000 graduate students from all over the world enroll in our seminary, located on the campus of Andrews University in Michigan. More than 30 percent of our seminarians are international students, and our faculty is also very international—74 percent were born outside the United States in countries like Brazil, Germany, Mauritius, Mexico, South Korea, Romania, Burkina Faso, and Canada. Our seminary family embodies our global vision. According to the *U.S. News & World Report's* ranking of best colleges, Andrews University is nationally ranked number one for ethnic diversity (tying with two other US universities) and number seven for international students, with 20 percent coming from outside of the United States.



The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a worldwide Church organized in more than 200 countries including Argentina, India, Kenya, Spain, Indonesia, Jordan, and Australia, with its Divisions and Unions being responsible for an educational network that consists of schools, colleges, and universities (for details, see <https://www.adventist.education>). This well-structured world-wide ecclesiastical organization makes my life as a dean much easier, as it enables me to connect with partner institutions and to establish relationships and partnerships with them.

This infrastructure of educational institutions facilitates the establishment of affiliations, and I can efficiently engage in dialogue with Church leaders or college and university presidents to offer them our different master and/or doctoral programs. As dean, these are valuable



California, Texas, etc.) and in Canada where we offer MA in Pastoral Ministry and Doctor of Ministry programs both in English and Spanish. We recently inaugurated a Hispanic MDiv program in Florida, as the local conference desired to offer it to its Spanish-speaking pastors. Additionally, our MA (Religion) and Doctor of Ministry programs are offered internationally (e.g., in the United Kingdom, Thailand, Ukraine, Russia, Poland, and Taiwan). With our international network and an extensive pool of doctoral alumni, we can often

connections that open opportunities for us to develop a global capacity as we educate and train people in locations where we are invited. We were recently invited to conduct the DMin program for pastors in India, where Spicer Adventist University is established, as they needed our expertise on how to understand world religions and relate to people of other faiths—we opened a cohort with 30 students.

Global outreach forms an integral part of our activities. I deliberately contact countries where we anticipate potentially great needs. For example, I connected with our Ukraine Church leaders several years ago to see if they needed our assistance and a deep collaboration was established. Our constituency and the Seminary Executive Committee constitutes key leaders of the worldwide Church, including the top three officers of the Church's General Conference, the president of the North America Division, presidents of several Unions and Conferences, as well as leaders with educational and financial expertise.

Development of national partnerships

For years, we have served in many US states at established extension sites in North America (e.g., Florida,

provide teachers in locations where English is not the first language. Our online classes are also available to students around the world.

When there is a serious interest for our expertise in the areas of biblical, theological, historical, practical, and missiological studies, we collaborate with local partners to obtain the state's or country's permission to run a graduate education program in its territory and to obtain the accreditation approvals for the different institutions involved. The financial cost of this endeavor is minimal in low-income or economically challenged countries. We consider this work as our service and a missionary ministry to the world Church in these territories. We gladly collaborate with local, state, and Church institutions, universities, and seminaries by inviting them to different programs, engaging in dialogue, using their libraries and study facilities, and exchanging ideas.

One of our MA (Religion) students commented: "These classes were an eye-opener. I loved visiting different sites and dialoging with believers of other denominations and religions, having open conversations with them. It helped me to appreciate people with different perspectives and

value their opinions. It taught me how to meaningfully and sensitively witness about my faith in Jesus to them.”

Our philosophy is to diligently work in different sites to educate local pastors, Bible teachers, leaders, and administrators so that—after some years of our assistance—they are enabled and ready to continue their work without our engagement, freeing us to focus on needs in other parts of the world. In the process of education, we use qualified local faculty, making them our adjunct professors. This cooperation enriches our seminary faculty and guarantees that our programs combine global-quality biblical and theological education with local contextualization that is relevant and meaningful to the regional community. Our goal is to empower the local administration and educate their national faculty. We do not want only to give them a “fish” (i.e., education), but we seek to teach them “how to fish” by enabling them in the long term to educate their own people and to engage in global theological dialogue.

Lessons learned

Three important lessons we have learned:

1 Our approach to global education confirms the wise African proverb that it takes a village to educate a child or, in our case, a pastor, Bible teacher, or Church leader “to make disciples of all nations.” The sharing of resources through our extensive network of

institutions allows us to deliver programs that otherwise would not be viable. Time must be invested, however, in maintaining the health of the network as well as our own institution.

2 Local Christian communities sometimes thrive and sometimes struggle. Seeds we have planted abroad have ultimately produced a harvest strengthening the Church, both where the seeds were planted and our own faith communities here in the United States. By investing abroad, we are contributing to the long-term health of the Church in the United States.

3 Local Adventist communities face challenges particular to their settings whether of a political, cultural, or social nature. Our network enables the wider Church to help them find innovative approaches and methods to learn together how to respond with biblical-theological thinking to these challenging situations—successfully or unsuccessfully—thereby building resilience within our network.

Global collaboration will ensure a bright future. Educational needs of the world are enormous. It reminds me of Christ’s words when He pointed to the plentiful harvest but only a few workers: “Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into this harvest” (Matthew 9:38 ESV).



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