

# TRAINING UP A CHILD IN THE RIGHT WAY

## *Stewardship for Adventist Students*

BY VIOLET WEISS

**W**hat do the students in grades 1-8 at Beltsville Adventist School in Maryland have in common with the Bible's good and faithful servant? They practice good stewardship.

These students use their time and talents in the Kids Serving Others (KSO) program. On one afternoon each month, Beltsville's 200 students take part in a variety of service activities.

- Upper-grade students commute to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency warehouse to sort and package materials for developing countries.

- A puppet ministry provides an outlet for other seventh- and eighth-graders.

- A group of junior high students, in fluorescent orange vests, pick up trash along a two-mile stretch of their adopted highway.

- Middle-grade students enjoy painting ceramics with residents of a nursing home.

- At another nursing home, primary-grade students chat, play games, or celebrate birthdays with residents who look forward to their regular visits.

- Tantalizing aromas come from the school kitchen where fourth-grade students make baked goods to share with others.

The principal and teachers at Beltsville know that now is the time to make stewardship a dominant concept in Christian education.

The dictionary describes a steward as a person who is "entrusted with the management of the household or estate of another." Stewardship is defined as "the position, duties, or service of a stew-

ard." To Seventh-day Adventist Christians, stewardship means "man's responsibility for, and use of, everything entrusted to him by God—life, physical being, time talents and abilities, material possessions, opportunities to be of service to others, and his knowledge of truth."<sup>1</sup>

### **Learning to Share**

Even our youngest students experience and recognize the love and generosity of God. It is crucial that they learn how to return this love and generosity to Him and how to share it with others. This is the essence of stewardship.

Financial pressures on families and churches are real today. Is it possible that a lack of early training in Christian stewardship has contributed to our current situation? The Scriptures tell us to "Train a child how to live the right way. Then even when he is old, he will still live that way."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most important lesson of Project Affirmation is that cooperation by home, church, and school leads to faith maturity. We cannot depend on the pastor's once-a-year stewardship sermon to motivate students to active stewardship. Relying on parents to do it seems risky when we consider

that many church members do not pay tithe or give offerings to the church. Christian teachers must take the lead in this most important area. However, they must enlist the aid of both pastor and parents to ensure effective learning.

### **What Is Stewardship?**

God gave us a body, abilities, time, and material possessions. He also gave us the responsibility to care for the world around us.

*Stewardship of the Body.* Our bodies belong to God because He created and redeemed them. Adventist health and physical education teaching should be built on this concept. God's health laws include (1) refusing to take damaging substances into our bodies; (2) refusing to engage in harmful activities; and (3) keeping our bodies clean and pure.

As Christian teachers we must demonstrate through our lifestyle the importance of healthful living. Our healthy lives will attract our students to Christ and His way of life.

When we teach students health principles, they learn that making their bodies a "temple of God" brings blessings: the enjoyment of life, peace of

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mind, and a long life. Studies show that many children in developed countries are overweight and undernourished. Television has turned them into "couch potatoes." Christian teachers need to demonstrate and teach the blessings of exercise, sunlight, water, temperate and drug-free living, rest, good nutrition, and recreation.

*Stewardship of Abilities.* God gave us a wide variety of talents and abilities. The Scriptures refer to the church as the body of Christ. Just as the human body has specialized parts with certain functions to perform, so the church is made up of individuals, each with his or her own special function or contribution to make to the rest of the body. Our talents and gifts enable us to minister to others on behalf of Christ.

Teachers can help students identify and use their natural talents. Ask students to make a personal portfolio about themselves and their talents. Have the class perfectionist plan the details and make arrangements for a service project. The extrovert can be assigned to handle the up-front public relations. Classroom artists can make posters to advertise an event. Writers can take care of correspondence and reports to the newspapers. Mathematics scholars can manage the financial aspects of the project. Everyone can help get the project going. When it is completed, the class dreamer can be creating ideas for new projects.

In addition to natural abilities, God gives our students spiritual gifts. Take time to help your students identify and use their spiritual gifts.

*Stewardship of Time.* Time is a gift from God. Each moment is precious. God tells us to "do our best work, 'redeeming the time.'"<sup>3</sup> At Creation, God gave us six days of every seven to do our work. He reserved the seventh day as a special time for us to spend with Him.

Teachers can help students learn to use their time wisely. A timer may be helpful in encouraging some students not to waste school time. Talk with students about how many hours there are in a day or a week. Then ask, Why do some people accomplish more in this time than others? Keeping a daily or weekly log may help students identify time-wasting activities.

Through personal example, and by providing opportunities, you can encourage students to spend time each

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week in Christian service.

*Stewardship of Material Possessions.* Money and possessions are assets to be managed for God. Remind students often that God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift and that He provides us with the power to get wealth.<sup>4</sup> To help us remember that He is the source of all our blessings, God designed the system of tithes and offerings. Giving and sharing express our love to God and others. They are necessary elements of a well-managed, happy life. We were made in the image of God, and God is a giver.

Money management should be taught as a part of the regular educational curriculum. Since many of our textbooks are developed by non-Christian publishers, we must look elsewhere for

curriculum materials that reflect the Adventist viewpoint. Fortunately, two excellent sources are available. Teaching units for grades one through eight, called "Partners With God," have been developed by the Southeastern California Conference.<sup>5</sup>

The *Christian Life Management Series* also contains excellent materials. It features lessons on tithing, the value of saving, budgeting, debt management, honesty, the work ethic, and viewing success and prosperity from a Christian viewpoint. Every church school teacher should have access to these two sets of materials.

Even young children can tell the difference between wants and needs. Ask students to think about what they own, and the choices they can make about what to do with their possessions.

*Stewardship of the World.* Almost daily the media carries news of an oil spill, an endangered species, landfill problems, or acid rain. Take advantage of teachable moments to link the students' knowledge of environmental issues to the need for responsible stewardship.

This concept provides marvelous opportunities for developing critical thinking skills. Ask students, What does it mean to be in charge and "have dominion"? What does being in charge of the

universe mean in relation to mineral resources, care of forests, rivers, oceans, seas, or interplanetary space travel? How might our actions toward the earth change if we were to treat it as God's garment? Why did the Israelites have a Sabbath, or Year of Jubilee, for the land? What does it mean to "redeem the land"? Why does the land "mourn" (Hosea 4)? What should be the Christian's response to environmental issues? (See the insert in this article on "Science Activities" and Bryan Ness's article on page 13 for ideas.)

As Laodiceans, we have come to think complacently of our riches, including the earth's resources, without realizing we are indeed "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17, NIV).<sup>6</sup> God made the earth and He has not abandoned it. He put us in charge, and appointed us to care for all creation.<sup>7</sup>

#### When to Teach Stewardship

Stewardship lessons must be taught daily throughout the year. How is this possible when the schedule is already so full? Fortunately, the concepts of stewardship permeate every area of the curriculum. It is not necessary to add another subject area. The sample activities listed under various subjects at the end of this article illustrate the flexibility of stewardship instruction. You may, however, choose to teach special stewardship units, such as those outlined in the *Christianomics* or the *Christian Life Management Series* (see Resources). An easy way to find time for these special units is to present them during the classroom worship period.

#### How to Teach Stewardship

Education learning theorists tell us that a multisensory approach is most effective for the majority of students. An old Chinese proverb says the following:

*I hear and I forget;  
I see and I remember;  
I do and I understand.*

Stewardship instruction must place the student in an active learning environment. The sample activities presented under the various subject areas will spark your imagination, and the resources included at the end of this article will provide you with a variety of helpful ideas.<sup>8</sup>

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#### REFERENCES

1. *SDA Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), p. 1425.
2. Proverbs 22:6. International Children's Bible, New Century Version.
3. Colossians 3:23, 24; Ephesians 5:15, 16 (ICV).
4. James 1:17; Deuteronomy 8:18.
5. *The Journal of Adventist Education* (December 1988/January 1989), p. 34.
6. From Holy Bible: New International Version, Copyright © 1978 by the New York International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

