

CONFERENCE

Connections

Teachers Are Kingdom Builders

My daughter, Evelyn Park, teaches at one of our academies. Sometimes she talks about what it is like to be a teacher. I know it is not easy. There are challenges and difficulties, but I see my daughter light up when she talks about the children she gets to impact each day. It was from our talks that I realized that she was not just teaching them academically but was helping to prepare them for eternity.

As I watch her, my appreciation and respect for teachers continues to grow. Teachers help students grow in knowledge, but they also help students grow in faith. They have a strong influence on young people and help to shape our future. Even though I serve as the conference president, I don't think I can match the influence teachers have for the kingdom of God.

We often talk about how our pastors build the kingdom, but I believe that teachers also build the kingdom. Building the kingdom is not just about adding numbers to the kingdom of God but also about helping people deepen their relationship with God. Our teachers do that. They spend more time with young people than most administrators and pastors and, sometimes, more than parents.

My life was influenced by my parents, pastors, friends, books, media, and much more. But one group of influencers that I cannot forget is my teachers. The reason why I am a life-long

learner is because of my teachers. The reason why my worldview expanded is because of my teachers. I am a pastor because, along with others, teachers helped to nurture my spiritual walk with Jesus.

It wasn't just academic learning with my teachers, who loved and cared for me. Their investment in me extended beyond classrooms, and I believe that is something that Adventist schools and teachers can provide.

In order for our young people to have a great Christian Adventist school experience, our teachers need to be happy, healthy, and holy. They are our evangelists and disciple-makers for our children. And just like I did, our young people need happy, healthy, and holy teachers who will be great role models.



Students listen to a story at El Cajon SDA Christian School.



Jonathan Park
SECC President

Students pose at a window in the rugged coast of Central California.



Mesa Grande Academy Students Prepare for Morro Bay State Park Biology Trip

As the cool February air descends on Morro Bay State Park, 30 students from Mesa Grande Academy's biology class prepare for the annual five-day journey that's been enriching young minds every February since 1995.

Along with science teachers Joey Steffen and Andrae Chambers, Alfred Riddle, principal, plans a yearly trip for 20 to 30 sophomore students ages 14-16 into a world of scientific discovery.

"We camp in tents at the Morro Bay State Park group sites," said Riddle, long-standing orchestrator of this immersive field trip. "Parents from our community help with transportation and food preparation. We have lights for the canopies and a generator to ensure that our students can complete their studies each day before they hit the sack."

Riddle reflected that these trips were inspired by his college experience in Belize, studying the second-largest barrier reef in the world.

"This hands-on experience is just another way of learning about the incredible life God has provided us in this world," he shared. "To see our students make discoveries and expand their worldview about this creation we call Earth is one of the moments you live for as an educator."

"Students study changes in salinity from fresh to salt water in an estuary environment, tidal flow, aquaculture, ornithology, marine intertidal life, and the unique flora and fauna of this area," Riddle explained.

Students also observe and record their findings, engage with experts, and—perhaps most thrillingly—take a kayak trip into the estuary, where the diversity of

life is as vast as the ocean itself.

"Each year, we discover species we have never seen before," said Riddle. He vividly remembers last year's trip, where they spotted a lemon dorid for the first time.

For Riddle and his science instructors, these trips are a cornerstone of Mesa Grande Academy's strategy to provide unique academic opportunities beyond conventional education.

"Our students greatly benefit from experiences outside of the four walls," said Riddle. "It broadens their learning perspective."

"When students overturn a rock in an intertidal zone and see a monkey-faced prickleback wriggling while trying to get away, see a beautiful opalescent nudibranch swimming in shallow water, or identify a species from among the myriad of crabs, they are observing and experiencing the processes of discovery that scientific learning is all about."

By Danni Thaw



Students encountered this cluster of monarch butterflies at Morro Bay.



LEFT: Filip (far left) and Rade (far right) Milosavljevic smile together with Rade's wife (second from right) and Joshua and Rebecca's family. BELOW: Joshua and Rebecca are baptized.



Engaging in Personal Evangelism

Over a year ago, my wife and I decided to go on a walk after Sabbath lunch. We thought of going all the way to Big Bear, but we sensed the Holy Spirit leading us to go to a nearby park. There, we passed by a bench and noticed a young adult reading what looked like a Bible. My wife jumped in, asking, "Are you reading the Bible?" He looked up, surprised, and responded, "Yes, I am!" We had a lovely dialogue, and I invited him into a deeper understanding of God's Word. With my son, Filip, young adult pastor at Loma Linda University church (LLUC), I continued to give Bible studies every week to this young man, Joshua, and later on his then-fiancée, Rebecca.

Six months later this amazing couple was married, and on a beautiful Sabbath morning soon after, Filip and I baptized them together in unison at LLUC. Joshua and Rebecca have repeatedly stated how blessed they feel at our church. As Joshua said, "I have been called like Abraham to leave behind the many gods I once served. Now I love the Lord and serve Him and only Him."

Rebecca added, "While I was born and raised in a church my whole life, I always felt like I was missing something. My childhood church turned me away from God. Joshua asked if I would like to attend the Seventh-day Adventist Church with him. I was hesitant at first, because I had never heard of an Adventist before. But I decided to join him. I never expected to find so much peace, hope, joy, and assurance of God's love for me like in the Adventist Church."

Their feelings are founded in how much they have sensed God's mercy over both of their lives. They have a new family hobby: serving! Every Wednesday last year, they helped serve at the "Dinners at LLU-C's" for several hundred young adults on campus, along with helping the children's ministry. Currently they are preparing for ordination to serve as deacons.

Every day God has opportunities, so do not hesitate when the Spirit is nudging you to share the good news with someone who then might reach thousands!

By Rade and Filip Milosavljevic



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Practice Makes Worth It

Angelica loved playing the piano, but she wasn't very good at it. She hated it when she spent hours practicing a song and then still messed up. "Practice makes perfect!" Her teacher would encourage her. But practice didn't make perfect for Angelica. She was really nervous about her upcoming recital.

After another unsuccessful practice session, Angelica was ready to give up. "Maybe I shouldn't bother playing the piano if it can't be perfect," Angelica moaned to her dad.

"Nobody's perfect," her dad replied. That wasn't very helpful for Angelica. "But the hard work you put into playing the piano makes it all worth it."

"What do you mean?" Angelica asked. What was the point if her song couldn't be played perfectly?

"I am proud of you because I see your love for the piano, and I see how hard you practice," her dad explained. "The important part is to always have fun. If you can play a song and enjoy yourself, then to me, that's perfect."

So, Angelica kept practicing. The day of her recital, she was still nervous, but she was more excited. She loved her recital piece, and she knew she had worked hard on it. Angelica took



a deep breath and began to play. The song wasn't perfect, but when she finished and took her bow, Angelica saw her dad jump up in a standing ovation. Practice doesn't make perfect; it makes worth it!

By Megan Jacobs

Spot the Difference

Can you spot the 10 differences between these two photos?



Answers

1. The drawings on the table switched places.
2. The robot is turned the other way.
3. The clock time is changed.
4. The picture on the wall is a regular tree.
5. The bouncy ball on the floor is now purple.
6. The number blocks are rearranged.
7. The girl isn't holding her phone.
8. The walls aren't striped.
9. The basketball and pirate ship switched places.
10. The backpack is turned the other way.