



IN THIS
EDITION



Not Just for Them: Equipping Today's
Young Leaders for a Lifetime of Service

Conference

PRIORITIES

Welcoming Each Other Home

I loved going home on school breaks. I attended boarding school at San Pasqual Academy, and then I went off to Pacific Union College and Loma Linda for my college degree. On those breaks, I loved pulling into the driveway of our house, seeing the familiar yard and trees, knowing that my parents would be there to welcome me. My mother would have prepared my favorite foods, and my father would have put a bouquet of flowers in my room. My two sisters were often home at the same time, family friends were invited over, and I was surrounded by love and care. I was reminded that I was part of a community that shaped and formed me, then sent me to follow my vocational calling. But I could always come home.

These visits came to an abrupt end when my parents sold the house and accepted a call to serve as missionaries in Guam and later Taiwan. After that, it took planning, budgeting, and a passport to visit home—and when I got there, everything about it was unfamiliar. Familiar foods were no longer available, unless I had packed a few in my suitcase—but there were still flowers in the guest room. The lack of familiarity really did not matter, because I was with my parents, my family.

For the past 18 months, most of us have been away from our church homes. We still had our church

buildings, but we couldn't visit them. We couldn't gather as a church family and participate in the familiar greetings, hugging, lingering after worship to catch up, potlucks, and all of the things that our faith community means to us.

Those restrictions are now lifted, and we are home—back in the church buildings that hold memories of baptisms, funerals, weddings, baby dedications, and so much more. We are back to teaching our children and youth, lifting our voices in praise, and hearing God's Word proclaimed in person. The family has gathered once again, often with fresh flowers on the platform, the familiar aroma of food wafting the corridors as potluck is prepared, and the joy of greetings, catching up, and hugging.

But we are different now. The church is different. We quickly had to learn the importance of media, and we adapted to building community outside of the church building, our house. We have grieved losses and lost contact with many people. Now we must re-vision, reconnect, and prayerfully seek God's direction in the context of every community of faith as we emerge.

Now we are welcoming each other home, so that we can continue to be sent out to serve and invite others to come home.



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11330 Pierce Street
Riverside, CA 92505
951-509-2200
www.seccadventist.org

Sandra Roberts, President
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Atalia Estrada, 2021 Loma Linda Academy graduate, is one of two recipients of the Pacific Union Conference's education scholarship. This year, both awardees were from the SECC.

Not Just for Them: Equipping Today's Young Leaders for a Lifetime of Service

By Becky St. Clair

On their website, the Office of Education for the SECC states that they are Christ-focused and student-centered, striving toward success for every student. And in this context, one of the most important elements of "success" is individuals prepared for a life of service to others.



"I have what it takes."

Each year, the Pacific Union Conference awards scholarships to two distinguished students within the union who have committed to studying education in college. This year, two SECC students were the recipients: Atalia Estrada of Loma Linda Academy and Sydnie Jocaban of Redlands Adventist Academy.

"Receiving this scholarship was encouraging, because it solidified

for me that I'm on the right path," Estrada said. "It gave me confidence that I have what it takes to be a teacher in the Adventist education system."

Estrada attended public school from kindergarten through fifth grade and loved it, but when she switched to LLA her sixth-grade year, she immediately noticed a difference.



ABOVE: Atalia Estrada (left) and some Loma Linda Academy classmates record a podcast for Campus Ministries. LEFT: Atalia Estrada, alongside her fellow student association officers, welcomes Loma Linda Academy students back to campus with gifts and smiles.



“Everyone there was such a good person, and I could tell it was a good environment for me,” she remembered.

In his recommendation letter for Estrada, LLA chaplain J.O. Cordero wrote: “The Loma Linda Academy Campus Ministries team seeks to foster students who are Christ-centered, purpose-driven, and people-empowering. Atalia embodies these characteristics to the fullest.”

During her years at LLA, Estrada served as lead ministry director for the Campus Ministries technology and media team and as a student association officer, as well as being involved with a variety of extracurricular activities such as athletics and music. In everything she did, her teachers and mentors say Estrada stood out with a willingness to learn, strong work ethic, consistently positive outlook, and dedication to inclusivity and respect.

“Atalia has a heavy dose of patience, and an ability to see beyond herself,” commented Hans Figueroa, LLA principal. “A lot of students gravitate toward her because she is an excellent natural leader. All of these character traits will serve her well in the classroom.”

Estrada has always enjoyed being involved at church and working with kids; this, plus great experiences with her own teachers and her involvement in activities at the academy, made her realize how much she enjoys school.

“My teachers have inspired me so much, and I want to do for others what they did for me,” she explained. “Every teacher who knew I wanted to study education was very encouraging, offering



LEFT: Running Sabbath School and VBS for the children on a Redlands Adventist Academy mission trip to Kenya was one of the determining factors for Sydnie Jocaban's future. ABOVE: Sydnie Jocaban of Redlands Adventist Academy is one of two SECC seniors who were awarded the Pacific Union Conference's 2021 education scholarship.

advice, giving me an idea of what to expect as a teacher and what I could do to prepare. None of them ever doubted that this was my calling, and as a result, neither did I.”

Estrada plans to attend Southern Adventist University in the fall as a double major in elementary education and biology.

“LLA really shaped who I am and was a pivotal influence in my decision to become a teacher,” she shared. “I can’t wait to have my own classroom where I can see the students grow into who they are and be as encouraging to them as my teachers were to me.”

“I’ve wanted this my whole life.”

Like Estrada, working with children and positive experiences with her own teachers were what inspired Sydnie Jocaban to consider teaching as a career. From an early age, Jocaban helped take care of her three younger siblings, often making them do schoolwork during the summer.

In third grade, she says she wanted to be just like her teacher, Katrina Miller. “It was her first year teaching, and she was

amazing. She was fun and spunky and had so many creative hands-on learning activities for us, and it was inspiring to me. I wanted to be that person for other kids.”

Over the years, Jocaban has been able to work with Miller in her classroom, watching her grow as a teacher. It was moments in Miller’s classroom that solidified for Jocaban that she wanted to study education.

“I’ve wanted to be a teacher my whole life, but I was waiting, realizing I hadn’t even considered other options,” Jocaban admitted. “I wasn’t sure if I should explore other careers, or just stick with what I’d always thought I wanted. This scholarship was an answer to prayer—it was God telling me to be a teacher.”

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“A lot of students gravitate toward her because she is an excellent natural leader. All of these character traits will serve her well in the classroom.”



Helping in the classroom of her third grade teacher, Miss Miller, solidified for Sydnie Jocaban that she wanted to commit her own life to teaching.

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Christine
Dudley, who
retired from

RAA last year, was Jocaban's teacher for three years and said it was obvious to everyone that teaching was the right path for her.

"When Sydnie told me she wanted to be a teacher, my immediate response was, 'Yes, you'll be a great one!'" Dudley said. "She is very organized, knows how to be firm and disciplinary when she needs to be, and is always loving. She just knows what to do, and the kids love her."

While on a mission trip one year, Jocaban ended up running a program someone else couldn't, as well as managing another Sabbath School and VBS.

"She saw a need and she stepped in and filled it," Dudley said. "Any time she can be a helper, she's there."

Jocaban filled a TA role during her time at the academy, attended mission trips, and was a class officer both her junior and senior years. She took any advanced course offered at RAA, maintaining a high GPA all four years. This fall she plans to attend Walla Walla University to study education.

"At Redlands, it's more than just the textbooks; faith is incorporated into everything we do," Jocaban commented. "Everything encourages us to draw closer to Christ and our calling. I can confidently walk away knowing my teachers will continue to support me in any way they can, because we're a family, and maybe we'll even be coworkers someday."

"Helping others changes you."

Emily Peralta, a member of the Oceanside Adventist church, has found her calling in service. Though she did not attend Adventist academy, through the church she was able to find community in mission trips and outreach programs. What fuels her love for service is the knowledge that she's making the world a better place.

"Not a lot of the people we go to help have heard about Jesus," she said. "They don't know the stories I was lucky enough to grow up with. Helping others and showing them Jesus is something I want



to do for the rest of my life."

Though they weren't attending church regularly, Peralta and her sister and mother decided to attend a mission trip to Mexico a couple of years ago, and it changed Peralta's life.

"Since we speak Spanish, we were able to be a real help at registration and throughout the trip," she recalled. "I've gone on a couple of trips now, and it's always such a blessing to everyone. During college I intend to keep my summers free so I can continue to participate and bring Jesus to people who don't know Him yet."

Peralta says her church family has been incredibly supportive to each other and to her, reaching out regularly and making sure everyone is included in activities, as well as offering help to anyone who needs it.

"They don't just stick to themselves," Peralta said. "They're all very friendly and are never too busy for anyone. They're really the reason I'm so excited about serving, because it's truly a family and we love being together."

Peralta is headed to University of California San Diego to study international business, a field she hopes will equip her well to continue serving others around the world.

"I want to go to more places and serve," she said. "Being able to help others changes you, and I don't just want that for me, but for all my friends, too. I hope in the future I can take them on a mission trip to experience the joy of service for themselves, because the more people we can get excited about serving, the better our world will be."

LEFT: Emily Peralta found community and her calling doing mission work with Oceanside Adventist church. ABOVE: Emily Peralta, Oceanside Adventist church member, spends time with the young people whose VBS programming she was in charge of during a mission trip to Mexico in 2019.

Dudley says Adventist education brings a lot of value to the table in terms of improving the world and sharing the love of Christ. Having taught for 46 years, she has seen students choose every profession imaginable, and yet the service component remains significant in their lives.

"Our schools teach students that living life on this Earth isn't just for them," she pointed out. "They learn to see what others need and what they can do to fill that need. Kindness is just something built into the curriculum at our schools. And it matters."

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