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How Adventist Education Molded and Shaped Me

Growing up in Korea, I spent my first two years in public school. Because of church, I did not go to school on Saturdays; therefore, every Monday morning, I would have to stand outside and get spanked. There were no Adventist schools within a two-hour drive of my house, so the next year, although I was only in third grade, I went to the Adventist boarding school, which began at junior high.

We eventually came to the U.S. with only \$100.

My parents did not speak English, but they sacrificed to keep my brother and me in Adventist schools. They worked as janitors, factory workers, and other jobs, sometimes two or three jobs at a time, to make sure we were never pulled out due to money issues. My parents made Adventist education a priority because they believed that it would continue to plant the seed of the gospel in our lives.

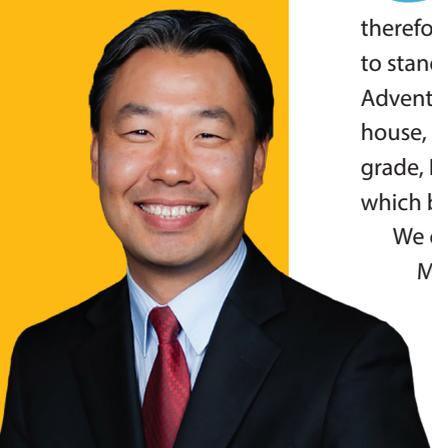
I learned about Jesus in my home and learned about Christian fellowship at my church. However, it was during my time at Adventist schools that I learned how to live and grow as a Christian. Teachers who mentored me gave me the opportunity to grow my leadership. Many activities went beyond the classroom and allowed me to have lifelong friends and memories.

I know from experience that Adventist education is designed as a holistic approach. It is more than just academic growth. It allows young people to experience physical, mental, and spiritual growth. It also helps students to acknowledge their identities as sons and daughters of God and to see their value in Christ.

Education should not simply be a means to success, in terms of wealth and honor; it should also be a means to becoming a person that lives to the fullest in Christ. Adventist education molds and shapes a person to be more and more like Jesus. It empowers, equips, and enables students to become difference-makers for Christ in the world. Still, Adventist schools and even churches are an extension of the Christian home. We, as parents, have the opportunity to instill Christian values and a sense of purpose in the lives of our children.

My parents, extended family, and the church invested in Adventist education for me. That experience helped me know Jesus and molded and shaped me as I received the call to pastoral ministry. I am who I am because of the sacrifices of my parents, church, and educators.

There are times when young people may venture outside of their faith and perhaps even leave the church. I believe that the Holy Spirit can use fond memories of their past with the church and the school to draw them back and once again connect with Jesus. As Ellen White reminds us, "In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one" (*Education*, p. 30).



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Jonathan Osorio is blessed during ordination prayer.

God Will Always Find You: SECC Ordinations in January

By Becky St. Clair

Jonathan Osorio

“God didn’t call me to ministry,” admitted Jonathan Osorio, pastor of the Yucaipa church. “He called me to Himself!”

Though he grew up a pastor’s kid, Osorio never wanted nor expected to step into pastoral ministry. Instead, he began walking away from religion and away from God during his first years of college, until one day, while walking on campus, he experienced a true God encounter.

“I kept hearing a voice,” Osorio recalled. “It was dark and I was alone, so it was a bit frightening until I suddenly realized it was God. He was saying, ‘Jonathan, I need you.’ As soon as I walked into my dorm room, I opened my Bible and started to cry. That started my journey with Jesus, because I just couldn’t believe that God wanted me when I hadn’t wanted anything to do with Him. At that moment, I knew I wanted to get to know Him better.”

Osorio has been a pastor for seven years, the first three in Houston, Texas, then two at Loma Linda University church and most recently at Yucaipa. Osorio was ordained on Jan. 8. His passion is to be an inspiration for the next generation, helping to awaken

the youth of his church to all that God has planned for them—to help them find their purpose and passion in Christ.

Ricardo Woolcock

As a high schooler, Ricardo Woolcock worked as a counselor and wrangler at Camp Wawona in Yosemite National Park. As the weeks went on, he kept hearing God’s voice telling him that this is what God wanted him to do: “Minister for me,”

the voice said.

“In my mind, it was fun, but not intentional,” Woolcock admitted, “but He kept saying it was my purpose and my calling. So I said, ‘OK, Lord, prepare me.’ And He did.”

Today, Woolcock is pastor of El Centro church, the only English-speaking Adventist church in the whole of Imperial County. His experience is primarily in chaplaincy, education, and healthcare, and his passion



Ministerial Director Jon Ciccarelli presents Ricardo Woolcock with his ordination certificate.

“My calling is the people. I relish the moment when they come to the realization that Jesus loves them.”

is ministering one-on-one.

“My calling is the people,” he said. “I relish the moment when they come to the realization that Jesus loves them. I like helping people see church differently—see Adventism differently—and creating that special community we all look for in a church family.”

The El Centro church is certainly a special community. Though he’s been part of SECC since 2018, Woolcock was ordained on Jan. 15.

“I want us to be relevant in our community and bring people to Jesus as a result,” he said. “I want to make sure our church is something Jesus would be proud of.”

Linda Mendez

“I felt like Jonah. God was calling, and I was running.” Linda Mendez began directing the mentoring and tutoring program at Loma Linda University church (LLUC) since 2019, but she never wanted the title pastor.

“I thought maybe I could be a teacher or something else along those lines,” she explained. “I wanted to help people, but I absolutely did not see myself as a pastor.”

Mendez has served

in pastoral-like roles in the past, assisting her pastor husband, Miguel, with the El Centro district. Since her husband couldn’t be present at all of his churches, in his absence Mendez would preach or fill other roles the pastor traditionally would.

“We truly are a family dedicated to service in the church,” she said.

So naturally, it made sense for her to continue her studies and earn her master’s in theology, which she did in 2017. Her current title is Pastor of Outreach. And on Jan. 22, 2022, Mendez was ordained at LLUC. Her husband, her father, and her mentors all participated in the service.

“What I’ve learned through the process of getting to where I am now is that when you’ve been called by God,” she said, “He will find that space for you in His church. God is always going to find you, and He knows exactly how to use you.”

Didier Noriega

Didier Noriega began his pastoral ministry in Colombia, where he worked for four years before transferring to SECC. Since his arrival in Southern California, Noriega served at various churches, until he finally arrived at San Ysidro Hispanic church in 2019. It was there he was ordained on Jan. 29, 2022.

On this special occasion, Noriega was accompanied by his wife, Andrea Bautista, and their two-year-old son, Pablo Alejandro. Pastor Yohalmo Saravia gave a meaningful homily centered on Nicodemus, whose name comes from the



Linda Mendez shares at her ordination.



SECC officers present Didier Noriega Rivas with gifts at his ordination.

Greek root nike, meaning “victorious.”

“At the end of his sermon, Pastor Saravia gave me a pair of Nike tennis shoes, inviting me to run after the needy—to run after the people who need God,” Noriega explained. “It was an illustration that left an impression on all who attended.”

Noriega also experienced an inspiring moment when he received a message of congratulations that day from a friend who is not a Christian. In the message, the friend asked Noriega to “tell your God thank you, because after 14 years, my wife is pregnant!”

“I was reminded that God loves everyone—even those who do not believe in Him—and He is willing to help and save them,” Noriega said. “I am happy to be a part of that.”

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Million-Dollar Endowment Established to Help Black Students

By Reyna Escobar

James Vcelak made a sizeable donation to Southeastern California Conference (SECC) to fund the Vcelak Educational Endowment Fund. His donation of four properties valued at \$1.2 million will help Black students in grades K-12 obtain financial assistance while attending our SECC schools. Vcelak's gift was in honor of his dear wife, Beverly, who was called to rest in March of 2021. He knows this gift would have made Beverly very happy.

James and Beverly Vcelak met in 1970 in East Los Angeles and married in 1974. James worked as an auto mechanic and Beverly as a social worker for abused children. The two built a life together that centered around serving others.

They eventually moved from Los Angeles to the Pomona area. It was here where they ventured into real estate investing. This hobby eventually became a full-time endeavor that grew



SECC Treasurer Verlon Strauss presents Vcelak with a plaque.

over time. James believes the Lord richly blessed them.

Throughout the years, they made God the focus of their lives. Their gratefulness was shown through the creation of various ministries that benefitted the community around them. They started foundations, scholarships, and community parties to help children and their families with

school and art supplies and food.

Christian education was a high priority in the lives of James and Beverly, although they never attended a Christian school. They believed in their hearts that Christian education provided children the opportunity to get to know God.

This belief led James to make this generous donation to education. The Vcelak Educational Endowment Fund will preserve the principal and distribute a portion of the earnings to schools submitting applications on behalf of students meeting the necessary requirements.

The Planned Giving and Trust Services Department started working with the Vcelak family in 2014 and continues to aid Mr. Vcelak with his day-to-day needs. They too rejoice in seeing the fruit of their service come as a blessing to students in need of assistance.

When SECC President Jonathan Park thanked James for his gift, James quickly replied that thanks belonged to God for blessing them greatly. Park again thanked him for remembering the Lord's cause, and James replied, "What else would I do with it?"

On February 22, 2022, James Vcelak was presented a plaque in memory of Beverly and in recognition of the gift, which he hopes will make a difference in children's lives.

They believed in their hearts that
Christian education provided children the
opportunity to get to know God.



James Vcelak is recognized by SECC officers.