Engaged in Mission

Through Adventist Education in the Trans-European Division



Through its ministry of education, the Trans-European Division (TED) Department of Education has creatively and relevantly shared the three angels' messages with the diverse nations and communities within its territory. Education is at the center of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:20) and is one of the gifts Christ has given to the church (Ephesians 4:11, 12). We are humbled to be a part of this grand work because we believe that "In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one."[1]

In the TED, three key values articulate the strategic goals for this past quinquennium: extending love to the whole person, growing disciples among all ages, and multiplying Adventist communities among all people groups. These values are encapsulated in the tagline "Engaged in Mission." Hence, this report shows how teachers and staff, higher education providers, and educational leaders engaged in mission. However, before we explore this, we will discuss our unique context and then examine how the educational leaders in TED navigated two recent unparalleled challenges.

Our Unique Context

The TED comprises 22 countries from northern, central, and southern Europe.[2] There are 20 official languages and numerous dialects spoken in the TED territory, and each country has a deep history, tradition, and culture. This territory is incredibly complex. For example, Poland is predominantly Catholic, Denmark is historically Protestant, Montenegro is mostly Orthodox, while the United Kingdom (U.K.) is largely secular. The last census taken in the U.K. in 2021, for example, revealed that for the first time ever, fewer than 50 percent (46.2 percent) of people identified as Christians, and 37.2 percent identified as non-religious. Some of the TED territories are post-Christian, while others are post-Orthodox. The Christian story no longer shapes or influences large parts of society, and the remnants of the story that do exist have been commercialized or marginalized. Institutions that were developed to express Christian conviction have rapidly declined in influence.[3] This means that there are no easy solutions, and we must think outside the box as we seek to communicate the three angels' messages. Despite these challenges, the shared history and experiences of Europeans have bonded them as a continent.[4] As of 2023, there were 62 institutions across the TED, including 32 primary schools, 25 secondary schools, and five higher education providers. There are 683 teachers who are supported collectively by more than 280 professional staff who teach and serve 4,329 students. There are five higher education institutions, one each in the U.K., Poland, Serbia, Hungary, and Croatia. The division's largest higher education provider is the Polish College of Theology and Humanities (PCTH), which had 694 students at the end of 2023.[5]

Navigating the Unprecedented

Our territory struggled to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and is now living with the impact of the Ukrainian

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war, the first major war on European soil since 1945. In October 2022, Adventist school communities throughout the division responded with Christian love, creativity, and intentionality during both traumatic events.

During the pandemic, our schools adhered to all recommended and mandatory protection measures prescribed by the Ministries of Health of the various countries. At the beginning of the pandemic, this meant remote learning. Our teaching and professional staff demonstrated a tremendous spirit of cooperation, sacrifice, and dedication as they made the shift to teaching online. Teachers provided students with virtual assistance, while school leaders maintained constant contact with the teachers, offering help as needed. If a student did not log in for a virtual class, the parents were contacted to ensure that he or she was well.

At our school in Maruševec (Croatia), tablets were purchased for a small number of students who did not have computer equipment at home. Teachers also took home school laptops so they could hold classes online. School personnel regularly monitored and maintained the remote learning systems.

In the U.K., the London School of Economics Centre for Economic Performance showed that the maximum number of classroom days lost over one calendar year was 110 (England); 119 (Northern Ireland); 119 (Scotland), and 124 (Wales).[6] This means most children in the U.K. missed more than half of their expected days in the classroom between March 2020 and April 2021. School leaders noted that the exam results following the pandemic were lower than usual, but given the absences, this was to be expected.

Later, when various Ministries of Health announced that students could return to their classrooms, Adventist schools in TED organized mandatory body temperature checking, hand disinfection, and masks; the teachers also wore visors. After classes, all classrooms and corridors were disinfected. Our students cooperated with mandatory testing for COVID-19 if they felt unwell, and our teachers had to be vaccinated or tested regularly. If someone tested positive, the entire class and the teachers who taught them went into isolation and switched to remote learning. Our school leaders and teachers went above the call of duty to ensure the safety and continued learning of our students.

In the Adriatic Union, the KAC Zagreb church members noticed that parents and children struggled to adapt to homeschooling amid the pandemic. They thus started the Prilaz School, a free after-school tutoring service to support families in their community. With funding from the Croatian Conference and the TED, this project became a bridge-building ministry that not only offered



TED Director of Education Kayle de Waal and several students lead out in the Revive Us Again series, designed to help students grow in their understanding and love of God.

children help with their homework, but also enabled them to establish friendships and partnerships with their neighbors.

The war in Ukraine has had a devastating impact on the people there. Our members, especially in Poland and Hungary, have responded with Christian love. In collaboration with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Adventist churches and schools worked closely to minister to and support Ukrainian families fleeing their country. The stories of service for Ukrainians by our educational communities in both Poland and Hungary are many and too lengthy for this report; however, here is one:

In November 2022, students from the Norwegian Junior College (Tyrifjord) welcomed a group of Ukrainian teenagers to play and celebrate Christmas with them. The event, organized by the local ADRA team, aimed to help refugees seeking asylum in Norway (more than 30,000 since the beginning of the war) feel welcome and loved. "We try to facilitate the building of friendships between local youth and those newly arrived from Ukraine to ensure they have a good network and support system,"[7] explained Frida Reierson Pascoe, ADRA Norway education advisor. So far, the team has supported more than 130 teenagers.

Engaged in Mission Through Service

Adventist education equips young people to grow in their comprehension and appreciation of the love of God, which leads them to unselfish service. Ellen G. White wrote: "Through unselfish service we receive the highest culture of every faculty. More and more fully do we become partakers of the divine nature. We are fitted for heaven, for we receive heaven into our hearts."[8] The Živorad Jankovic High School in Novi Sad (Serbia) from 2019 to 2023 received recognition from the provincial government of Vojvodina for exceptional results in the project For Cleaner and Greener Schools of Vojvodina. Previously, the students visited 36 Adventist churches and led out in the divine service. Our students also appeared on two local TV stations for their fantastic project idea, Fountains Again in the Parks of the City of Novi Sad.

In Denmark, at Vejlefjordskolen, students in the Social 10 class travel to Romania yearly to help and serve the Roma community. Ekebyholm Primary School in Sweden partners with ADRA for Operation Day's Work, where the proceeds from the students' day of practical work go toward supporting children and young people who need humanitarian support to survive. Suðurhlíðarskóli, a small school in the heart of Reykjavik, Iceland, is continuously serving the community in meaningful ways, such as environmental-protection projects, health-promotion activities, and spending time with the elderly. Adventist schools in the TED are actively engaged in service. We believe service builds our students' characters, deepens connections among staff and students, builds bridges to the wider community, and demonstrates the love of God in practical ways.

God has been blessing the spiritual work of our schools. Ellen G. White stated that "every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do."[9] Our pastors and chaplains have been engaged in a dynamic ministry to our students, deepening and expanding their understanding of God, His Word, themselves, and their families and communities. We had 23 education-related baptisms in 2020, 38 in 2021, 43 in 2022, and 33 in 2023. Each baptism reminds us of the active work of the Holy Spirit, who is the Chief Education Officer, leading our young people to fall in love with the Messiah, Jesus Christ (John 14:16, 17; 16:12-14).

Engaged in Mission Through Professional Development

During this shorter quinquennium, eight new headteachers/principals assumed their role in the British, Danish, Finnish, and Adriatic Unions. To support and provide resources for these new leaders and other new teachers, the TED Department of Education launched the Educational Leaders Network to provide a forum for professional development and networking.

From July 26 to 30, 2023, more than 150 teachers and staff members attended the TED Quinquennial Education Convention in Aranđelovac, Serbia, to sing, learn, network, and celebrate Adventist education together. In addition to the main presenter, Kevin Petrie, then vice chancellor of Avondale University (Australia), and General Conference (GC) Department of Education personnel attended and offered support. Deborah Smith, a dedicated science teacher at a state school, enthusiastically shared her thoughts, saying, "I've never been to a conference quite like this before. It's truly lovely to have the opportunity to connect with other Adventist professionals in the education sphere, exchanging ideas and finding inspiration together."[10]

The 16th biannual European Theology Teachers Convention (ETTC) was held in Budapest, Hungary, from March 22 to 26, 2023. Eighty-eight participants from four continents and 17 different countries attended; sadly, representatives from Zaoksky Adventist University [Russia] and Ukrainian Adventist Centre of Higher Education in Bucha, Ukraine, were not able to participate due to the war. The convention theme, *Ten-*

sions, Conflicts, Wars: "Storms" in the Bible, Church, and Society, was timely and relevant. Convention organizers and attendees were pleased with the high quality of the lectures, stimulating discussions and questions, and opportunities for strengthening Adventist education.

Engaged in Mission Through Support and Innovation

The TED believes passionately in supporting women and men who are called by God to the gospel ministry. There are currently 30 women who are either in the One Year in Mission and Service program (OYiMS) or in a BA, Graduate Diploma, or MA degree program at one of our theological institutions. The unions and conferences have systems in place to nurture and empower women graduates in their ministry. From 2021 to 2024, the division has provided a total of £848,216.15 (US$1,073,307.08) in sponsorship to students completing their MA or doctoral degree and £198,542.62 (US$ 251,269.58) in scholarships to OYiMS and undergraduate students.

Amidst the challenges of navigating the ever-changing U.K. educational landscape, Newbold College of Higher Education continues to thrive. The Centre for Ministry and Mission now has 117 students, which represents the largest Adventist theological program in Europe. This has brought new energy to the campus. New programs include postgraduate certificates in pastoral counseling, mission and youth ministry, and a graduate diploma in theology and religion. A new part-time clinical pastoral education program has commenced, which is validated by the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education, a global leader in this specialized field. The center is also active in the life of the church, in training and resourcing pastors for professional development, research and publications, and service to the wider church community. In addition, the college continues to run an effective Executive English program for professionals and executives.

Our school and institutional leaders continue to creatively respond to the challenges they encounter in the countries where they minister. The Polish College of Theology and Humanities (PCTH) continues to innovate with new offerings like sound production, health promotion, and psychology. The Kompas Education Center on the campus of PCTH caters to preschoolers and is the first of its kind in Poland. A niche market was found, and the demand was met.

The Hungarian Adventist Theological College launched its latest specialized training (Relationship Development Specialist and Conflict Manager) in September 2023. The Hungarian church financially supported the training, and ministers were encouraged to participate. In September 2024, 31 new students enrolled.

The South East European Union and the Baltic Union combined forces to offer a first-of-its-kind bachelor's degree program through the Belgrade Theological Seminary (BTS) to pastors and Bible workers in the Baltics. They are being equipped to serve more effectively and to sharpen the church in its mission.

The Norwegian Junior College (Tyrifjord) is creatively responding to its challenges with a fresh recruitment drive that resulted in the highest enrollment for the 1st grade in eight years. The school has shifted the culture in its dormitories from being rule-based to being value-driven, which has been welcomed. Some of the spiritual activities at the school have also been restructured to make them more attractive and relevant to a younger, secular-minded generation.



Adventist Secondary School in Marusevec, Croatia, in the Adriatic Union Conference.

Engaged in Mission Through Academic Excellence

The Stanborough Secondary School General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results were outstanding. The overall GCSE grades were 93 percent, while the national average was 67 percent. There was a 100 percent pass rate for Advanced Maths, Computer Science, Double Science, Arts, Business Studies, Chemistry, French, Geography, and History. Students received more than 49 Grade 9, 8 and 7 (9 = A*; 8 and 7 = A). One student secured Advanced Maths Grade 9 (A*), GCSE Grade 9 (A*), 6 Grade 9's (A*) and will be going on to medical school. The school has a vision for continued growth and achieving ongoing spiritual and academic success. In Finland, there is concern at the national level

about the low scores in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA),[11] which measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics, and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. The Tampere Adventist Christian School (Finland), affectionately known as Takriko, achieved excellent success in the 2024 PISA results. Students at the school ranked in the top quarter nationally in mathematics, reading, and natural sciences. For example, in mathematics, the average score of Takriko's students was 565 points, while it was 484 in Finland as a whole and 472 overall in the 27 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. One of the school's senior students, Elvira Himberg, won the Turpotietäjä competition aimed at high school students. The aim of the competition, which is held in Helsinki, is to increase knowledge of overall security and foster a sense of national security among young people. She will study at the University of Turku in the Faculty of Social Sciences, majoring in political history, as the result of her achievement.

Our school in Novi Sad (Serbia) received the maximum grade of 5 (100 percent) at the last government inspection. Our students won first place in the competition of the Ministry of Trade on the topic "Know the Rights of Demand," first and third place in the biology competition, and second prize in the German language competition. In 2024, the school was granted the status of a "Superschool" at a special ceremony in the presence of the Minister of Education (Serbia), the head of the European Union (EU) delegation, and the German ambassador to the Republic of Serbia. The Superschools program supports the peacebuilding and reconciliation process and intercultural learning and dialogue among schools, students, and their communities. It is co-financed by the EU and the German government.

There are currently two TED-organized Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree cohorts for pastors, one on Growing and Multiplying Churches and the other on Leadership. These are offered in partnership with Andrews University and Newbold College of Higher Education and will raise the missional capability and leadership expertise of pastors in the division.

Conclusion

Even though many of our schools are small, God continues to bless Adventist education in the TED. Our school in Maruševec (Croatia) had 202 students in 2023, in contrast with 126 in 2010. This school is in a village of 460 people and has 6,400 in the local vicinity! On a recent Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (AAA) visit to our school in Novi Sad (Serbia), a non-Adventist teacher asked if she could *literally* take our Adventist students to other schools. "They need to meet our students and see them," she said. The AAA team all smiled because they saw the power of Adventist education at work—transformed students who know Jesus—and others, who did not have what they had, but wanted to share what they had! There are times when those in the harvest can see what the workers have and long to share it with others.

We are deeply grateful to the Holy Spirit who inspired our service and gifted us for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). We praise God for the positive contribution all our schools make to their communities. Because of passionate and dedicated leaders, teachers, and professional staff, and God's blessing, our schools continue to be beacons of service, learning, worship, and growth.



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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), 30.

2. Countries in the Trans-European Division are as follows: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovenia, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Greenland, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Cyprus Region, and the Faeroe Islands. See https://ted.adventist.org/territory/.

3. Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange World* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2004), 19.

4. Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Europe: A History of Its Peoples*, translated by Richard Mayne, trans. (London: Viking, 1990), 19, 20.

5. Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR), *2024 Annual Statistical Report New Series, Volume 6: Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists' 2023 Statistics* (Silver Spring, Md.: ASTR, 2024); Adventist Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities, "Tertiary Institution Accreditation Status" (October 21, 2024): https://www.adventistaccreditingassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/Tertiary-Institution-Accreditation-Status.pdf.

6. Lee Elliot Major, Andrew Eyles, and Stephen Machin,

Learning Loss Since Lockdown: Variation Across the Home Nations (London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2021), 1. https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-023.pdf?_gl=1*1s8jbyx*_ga*OTA4NTkzMjQxLjE3NDU5NTk3Mjc.*_ga_LWTEVFESYX*MTc0NTk1OTcyNi4xLjEuMTc0NTk1OTc0MC42MC4wLjA.*_gcl_au*Mjc3NjYyNTI0LjE3NDU5NTk3NDA.

7. Tiani Præstiin, "Tyrifjord and Ukrainian Youth Celebrate Christmas Together: Building Friendships Across Borders," *ted NEWS* (December 12, 2022): https://ted.adventist.org/news/tyrifjord-and-ukrainian-youth-celebrate-christmas-together/.

8. White, *Education*, 16.

9. Ibid., 17.

10. Personal communication, July 2023.

11. Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an initiative by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Every three years, it measures how 15-year-olds in member and non-member countries perform in math, science, and reading. For more, see: https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/pisa.html.

