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*International Forum*  
*Vol. 18, No. 2*  
*October 2015*  
*pp. 83-104*

**FEATURE**

**Integrating Faith and Learning in Distance  
Education in the Ghanaian Context**

*John Appiah & Safary Wa-Mbaleka*

***Abstract.** Seventh-day Adventist education is unique because it is holistic and redemptive in nature. All components of the curriculum are geared toward students' redemption by connecting them to Jesus Christ. Scriptures are expected to be an integral part of the academic programs to develop students' spirituality. Programs such as church services, group meetings, and weeks of prayer are organized to connect resident students to Jesus Christ. Distance learning students, however, do not benefit from these programs. This paper synthesizes the philosophy of Adventist education, defines distance education, and recommends ways to integrate faith and learning among distance education students to provide an opportunity for them to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. The paper can help other faith-based institutions to effectively integrate faith and learning in their curricula for distance learning.*

Keywords: Adventist philosophy of education, distance learning, integration of faith and learning, spiritual connectedness, curriculum, Africa, Ghana.

**Introduction**

In recent years, many factors have contributed to distance learning programs particularly in Ghana. Some of the factors that have made distance learning a preferred option among the working class in Ghana include limited sponsorship packages, the desire to maintain one's work while studying, and family commitments. In addition, the new salary structure in Ghana, popularly called Single Spine Salary Structure, has specifically put higher premium on higher academic qualifications. This new structure has further spurred many working Ghanaians to further their studies to improve their living standards. Furthermore,

some individuals would also like to progress academically in their respective professional areas. Moreover, higher academic qualification has become a necessity for most people to keep up with the ever-increasing demand in such a fast-changing economy and increasingly-complex society.

There is no doubt about an ever-increasing demand for distance learning (Brown, 2012; Ingerham, 2012; Stewart, Harlow, & DeBacco, 2011). Consequently, a Seventh-day Adventist university in Ghana has taken advantage of the high demand for higher education to introduce the distance education modality to try to capture the working class that seeks flexible higher education.

Distance education is a mode of education where instruction takes place while the student and instructor are separated by distance, time, or both. In most schools in Africa, instruction is done mainly through printed modules, in brick-and-mortar (or traditional) classrooms. Since the introduction of the distance learning modality in 2005 in an Adventist university in Ghana, the number of students in the program has soared. As of August 2014, about 10% of students were enrolled in the distance education programs of the university. The introduction of the distance education program has attracted personnel from the military, the police, the fire service, and people from the banking industry, who find it difficult to avail of a study leave. In addition, some private businesspeople have also enrolled in the university's distance education mode. This distance learning modality offers a golden opportunity to promote the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education, which is based on a holistic perspective of human development. A good distance learning program must promote mental, social, physical, and spiritual development of the students (Knight, 2010a; Rasi, 2009).

The main aim of the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education is to redeem and restore the lost (White, 2010) through the development and delivery of quality academic education. Redemption through education, therefore, becomes the mission and purpose of Seventh-day Adventist education (Rios, 2013). Ultimately, spiritual connectedness of students to Christ becomes the goal of Seventh-day Adventist education. Injety (2007) was right when he emphasized that "the health of Adventist education depends on its capacity to maintain its spiritual identity and its mission" (p. 94). Consequently, all components of the curriculum are to have Scriptures as an integral part to connect students to Jesus Christ.

Activities such as church services, group meetings, and weeks of prayer are organized for students on campus to ensure their spiritual connectedness. Distance learning students, however, do not benefit from these activities due to their physical absence. Unless concrete measures are taken, the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education might be compromised in the distance education programs. Carefully-designed curricula and specially-trained human resources

are, therefore, needed to ensure that students who opt for distance learning are spiritually connected to Christ.

Though literature on integration of faith and learning abounds (Gilder, 2011), it is skewed towards students in the face-to-face settings. Integration of faith and learning among distance learning students seems to be neglected. This paper discusses Adventist educational philosophy, distance learning, integration of faith and learning, curriculum, and spiritual connectivity of students in distance learning. It also proposes some practical ways to integrate faith and learning in distance education. These aspects could contribute to achieving the mission and purpose of Seventh-day Adventist education, which is redemption through education. Additionally, the paper examines ways to connect distance education students to Jesus Christ through the integration of faith and learning. It ends with some practical recommendations for implementation of integrating faith and learning in the distance learning environments in Adventist colleges and universities in Africa.

### **Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Education**

A distinctive philosophy of reality, truth, and value provides the basis for developing the Seventh-day Adventist Church's educational system (Knight, 2010b; Fowler, 1988). The biblical framework of reality includes the following principles: (1) God exists, and He is the Creator; (2) God created a perfect earth and universe; (3) human beings were created in God's image and are accountable to Him; (4) Satan brought sin into a perfect universe; (5) Satan spread sin to the earth; (6) there is a cosmic conflict over God's character and law between Christ and Satan; (7) human beings cannot change their sinful nature without divine help; (8) God has initiated the salvation and restoration of human beings to their original state through the ministry of Jesus Christ; (9) God has revealed His character to mankind through the ministry of Jesus; (10) the Holy Spirit is active in restoring in fallen human beings the image of God; (11) Christ has commanded the Church to be socially active; (12) the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will end the earth's history; and (13) God will eventually restore the earth and its inhabitants to the original condition as it was in Eden.

Biblical metaphysics is the basis of Adventist education. It guides the principles of the selection of the components of the curriculum. Adventist education ought to consider all subject matter from a biblical standpoint (A Statement of Seventh-day Adventist Educational Philosophy 2001, 2006; Bahimba, 1988; Caesar, 2009; Fowler, 1988; Hughes, 1988; Knight, 2010c; Korchuk, 2007; Lee, 2007; Oliver, 2006). Christian epistemology identifies God's disclosure in the Scriptures as the primary source of knowledge and basic authority (Andreasen, 1991; Canale, 2009; Fortin, 2009; Griffiths, 1988; Knight 2010a). Biblical epistemology recognizes that (1) God has disclosed Himself

to human beings who can understand Him, though their understanding is imperfect; (2) God created mankind in His image, who can think rationally; (3) despite inherent limitations and inadequacies in human language, human beings can communicate with other intelligent beings and with God; (4) God has revealed Himself to humans and preserved the crux of the revelation to succeeding generations; and (5) the Holy Spirit guides humans to interpret Scriptures correctly to arrive at valid truth (Canale, 2009; Johns, 2012).

Moreover, the Scriptures recognize the existence of the gift of prophesy to guide God's people until Christ's second coming (Eph 4:8, 11-13). Therefore, God's people are to evaluate believers who claim to have the gift, using the Bible as the basis for evaluation (Isa 8:20; 1 John 4:1, 2; Matt 7:15-20; 1 Thess 5:19-21). After thorough investigation and testing with Scriptures, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has accepted Ellen G. White as a prophetess. Her prophetic gift has helped lead the Seventh-day Adventists to the Bible, and it guides the Church's leadership (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010; Hansel, 1959; Knight, 2010c). They do not, however, believe her to be equal to or above God. They still recognize her as a human being, who happened to be inspired to communicate some truth for clearer understanding of the Bible Truth. Seventh-day Adventists believe that it is only God who gives the prophetic gift to help His people understand and apply the Bible (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015; Hansel, 1959; Knight, 2010b).

The scientific study of nature is the next important source of knowledge for Christians (Clausen, B., 2001; Claveria, 2012; Fortin, 2009). God has revealed Himself to mankind though nature (Ps 19:1-4; Rom 1:20). Sin has affected the perfect creation of God (Gen 3). Without divine guidance, scientific knowledge is not a safe source since sin has adversely affected nature. The Holy Scriptures should, therefore, provide the foundation for scientific revelation (Clausen, B. L., 2009; Fortin, 2009; Gibson, 2007; Jones, 2012; Knight, 2010a; Smith, 1991).

The next epistemological source for the Christian is reason. Since humans were made in God's image and have the capacity to reason; they can reason from cause to effect. Without divine help, however, human reason is not a safe source of knowledge since sin has entered the world (Gen 3) and affected human reason adversely. The Holy Scriptures should guide human reason (Jones, 2012; Knight, 2010a; Fowler, 2007). Other epistemological sources are intuitive knowledge and knowledge gained from the study of authorities. Due to the Fall (Gen 3), knowledge gained through these sources should be evaluated based on the Scriptures. Drawing from the biblical truth, Knight (2010b) states that (1) God is the source of truth; (2) the cosmic conflict has affected epistemological evaluation; (3) fallen humanity can only appreciate a limited aspect of absolute truths in the world; (4) Scriptures picture truth as related to life; (5) though the Bible serves as the foundation for the several sources of knowledge available,

these sources complement each other; and (6) Christian epistemology and Christian metaphysics are mutually related (Jones, 2012).

Christian ethics assumes that (1) true Biblical ethics is inward not outward (Matt 5:1-48); (2) it is based on an intimate relationship with God, which reflects one's relationship with fellow humans (Luke 10:25-27; Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18); (3) it thrives on the consciousness that fellow humans are made in God's image, who can reason rationally and make right choices; (4) Christian morality is concerned with the welfare of people; (5) it promotes good life; and (6) its purpose is to redeem and restore the lost image in human beings (Galgao, 2005; Knight, 2010b; Taylor J. W., 2009).

Christian aesthetics seeks to cultivate the appreciation of beauty. It assumes that (1) humans are aesthetic beings, (2) sin has affected human creativity, and (3) one's appreciation of beauty and ugly affects his or her value system. Aesthetics, therefore, is basic to Christian life and religious system of education (Chavarrias, 2012; Knight 2010a). The ultimate goal of Christian aesthetics is the creation of a beautiful character. Knight advises that because values education is a basic reason for the existence of Adventist schools, Adventist educators need to be both informed and active as they endeavor to impart to their students a biblically-based approach to values to ensure effective implementation of Adventist philosophy of education (Chavarrias, 2012; Griffiths, 1988; Hamm, 1988; Knight, 2010c). Efforts should therefore be made to ensure that Adventist schools embrace a bible-based value system (Griffiths, 1988).

In traditional Adventist education, much effort is made to follow the philosophy of Adventist education as described here. Such effort can be seen in different curricular and extra-curricular activities that emphasize the spiritual domain of college and university students who study on campus. Little effort, however, is usually used when it comes to distance education programs. If all the components of the Adventist philosophy of education discussed above are true to traditional education, they must equally be considered for distance education programs in Ghana if these programs are to qualify under the umbrella of Adventist education.

### **Distance Learning**

Distance learning is a mode of education where the instruction takes place while the student and instructor are separated by distance (Bates, 2005; Baukal, 2010). Traditionally, this modality was done through correspondence courses (Schweitzer, 2009) which relied on using the post office services to send and receive instructional materials. Distance learning has been around for many years and in recent years, it has undergone a metamorphosis. Technology has provided distance learning with several options (Bates, 2005) that were unavailable during

the early days of distance education. In this paper, distance learning and distance education are used interchangeably to mean the same thing.

Based on educational development and technology used, Taylor, J. C. (1999) established the five stages of development in distance learning. They include (1) correspondence courses; (2) integrated use of multiple, one-way media such as print, broadcasting, or recorded media such as video-cassettes; (3) two-way synchronic tele-learning such as audio or video-conferencing; (4) flexible learning based on asynchronous online learning and interactive multimedia; and (5) intelligent flexible learning, which adds a high degree of automation and student control to asynchronous online learning and interactive multimedia. Taylor J. C. (2008) admitted later that, in practice, the classification of technology and educational development in distance education is complex. Looking carefully at the different technological and educational tools and means that have been used in distance learning, one can only conclude that Taylor, J.C. (1999) was not off the mark.

Many students opt for distance learning for many reasons. These include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) increased access to learning opportunities; (2) accommodation of different styles of learning; (3) alternative for students who cannot enroll in the traditional mode of instruction; (4) relatively low cost; and (5) attractive service to lower level learners (California Distance Learning Project, 2009). It is no surprise why distance education should be an attractive option to African students in general and, at the same time, a solution to the limited access to higher education that is commonly seen in the African context.

Schweitzer (2009) has listed three popular types of distance learning: (1) audio-based courses through radio broadcasting, phone conferences, pre-recorded audio and CDs; (2) video-based courses through satellites, cameras, and television or computer monitors that allow educators and/or students to interact with others in different locations; and (3) Internet-based courses through websites, emails, electronic bulletin boards, and messaging systems. Since the 1930s, the use of television as a learning tool has become popular since it is accessible in many parts of the world (Zuga et al., 2007). Television broadcasts, which provides only one-way information transmission, lacks the interactive discussion with an instructor or a remote co-learner. It also lacks flexibility to select a suitable period for learning. Zuga et al. (2007) indicate that lack of personal motivation and contact in traditional television broadcasts has led many students to drop out. It might also be one of the reasons why this type of distance education programming is fading away. No matter what type of distance learning chosen in any African Adventist college or university, the restoration and redemption of the students should be an overarching goal in delivering distance education programs.

Allen and Seaman (2007) defined online courses as “those in which at least 80% of the course content is delivered online” (p. 4). Different online education experts, however, seem to have different views about the percentage of what must be delivered online to be able to call a course an online one. Traditional classroom instruction includes “courses in which zero to 29% of the content is delivered online; this category includes both traditional and web-facilitated courses” (Allen & Seaman 2007, p. 4). Allen and Seaman (2007) describe “blended” (sometimes called “hybrid”) instruction to have between 30% and 80% of the course content delivered online (p. 4). Online delivery has become an essential tool in distance learning (Allen & Seaman, 2007).

A study revealed that building networks is a crucial strategy for online learning (Aviv, Erlich, & Ravid, 2005). Jones and Wolf (2010) describe the youth as the *generation of the Internet*, who enjoy networking with peers and therefore have the requisite technological skills to cope with distance learning via online delivery. Higher education institutions must therefore adapt to this type of learning environment, which is already common to the daily lives of today’s students. It must still be done, however, with proper care regarding the implementation of the philosophy of Adventist education.

Recent studies have shown that online learners need self-discipline, persistence, and determination in order to achieve success in the academic work (Lin et al., 2014; Shea & Bidjerano, 2012). For distance learning to succeed, learning institutions should adapt their programs to suit the needs of their students (Andronie, 2014). Some universities in Africa that are currently using some type of distance learning, use the hybrid or blended mode where students at appointed times go to the campus for tutorials and for exams. Research has shown that blended instruction is likely to produce more favorable outcomes than complete online education (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009). As will be discussed later, such a blended modality of distance education can also provide an important opportunity for spiritual emphasis activities for distance learning students.

Distance learning, like any educational program, has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include (1) students’ flexibility to complete a program and enjoy the convenience in scheduling one’s classes and class assignments; (2) students’ chance to take classes in the comfort of their respective home without commuting to the school premises; (3) numerous choices for schools as the students have a wide variety of schools to choose from; (4) higher affordability of education than in face-to-face programs in terms of fees, cost of access to classes, and accommodation; and (5) opportunity to acquire higher academic degree while working. Keeping one’s job gives them more access to financial stability, job security, and on-the-job training and experience (Bates, 2005).

Disadvantages of distance learning include (1) lack of or limited social interaction; (2) relative lack of motivation to study; (3) limited opportunities due to stigma attached to distance learning, especially in countries where it is not yet popular; (4) lack of motivation for students with low technology competence; and (5) limited opportunities to access hands-on and skilled-based programs like medicine and medical equipment technology, among others (Bates, 2005). It is usually up to the prospective students to decide whether the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. For some students, it might just be the only option they have to access higher education in general and Adventist higher education in particular.

With all these different types of distance learning, there is hope that education can finally become accessible to virtually most people in Africa. While the leaders of Seventh-day Adventist higher education institutions in Africa must keep all these options in mind when developing or leading distance education programs, they must also and even more importantly plan for the integration of faith and learning. Without proper expertise, proper training, and a clear vision for the implementation of the Adventist philosophy of education in distance learning programs, such programs may not be able to represent true Adventist education.

### **Integration of Faith and Learning**

Integration of faith and learning is a distinctive feature of Christian education (Wa-Mbaleka, 2013), and basic to Adventist education (de Korniejczuk, 2007a; Jeffrey, 2007; Thayer, 2009a). Adventist education is redemptive, and aims to restore the image of God in the student. It ensures a balanced development of the student—spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially (White 1943; 1968; 2010). The true educator inspires students with principles of truth, obedience, honor, integrity, and purity. Such an educator helps shape the character of the students by connecting them to Jesus Christ. The educator's main goal is to prepare the students for this life and for eternity (Clifford, 1988; Rasi, 2009; White, 2010), that is, for this world and the world to come.

Integration of faith and learning can help prepare students for future leadership roles. Lau's (2012) study revealed that faith and character development, spiritual maturity, and willingness to serve are basic in effective leadership development. Rios (2013) found that Seventh-day Adventist integration of faith and values in learning has received widespread recognition. Adventist education promotes the kind of philosophy that directly fits what is expected of leaders. Therefore, proper integration of faith and learning can help prepare tomorrow's leaders.



### **Spiritual Connectivity**

Gilder (2011) presents a strong connection between spirituality and higher education. As their worldviews begin to change, college students embark on a spiritual journey (Johnson, 2009). College and university campuses should become avenues for spiritual development of students “both inside and outside of the classroom” (Gilder, 2011, p. 44). Although students are interested in their spiritual development, administrators of student affairs seem to have neglected it (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). Spiritual matters in higher education should remain at the center of all Adventist institutions (Asafo, 2009; Thayer, 2009b).

Gilder (2011) agrees with Love and Talbot (1999) about the value for holistic development of students in education. Gilder (2011) admits that there is increasing research in students’ spirituality and spiritual development in academic circles. Gilder (2011) and Scott, Buehler, and Felder (2001) believe that students’ worldviews are shaped by their spirituality and spiritual identity. Gilder (2011) additionally stresses the need to create well-rounded graduates. Several studies have emphasized the wholistic development of students (Büssing, Föller-Mancini, Gidley, & Heusser, 2010; Eberhardt & Dalton, 2007; Gilder, 2011; Love & Talbot, 1999), as promoted in the Spirit of Prophecy. To ensure spiritual connectivity of students in distance education in Africa, curriculum design, which serves as the road map of the educational system, must be aligned with the integration of faith and learning and the implementation of the philosophy of Adventist education. Distance learning programs should not be focused solely on the mental aspect of human development. They should be wholistic in nature, just like traditional programs offered face-to-face.

### **Curriculum**

The development of curriculum, consistent with the Seventh-day Adventist educational philosophy, should aim to redeem and restore students by connecting them to Jesus Christ (see Oliver, 2006). The curriculum should ensure a balanced development of students—spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially (Andreasen, 1991; Clifford, 1988; Knight, 2010b). Moreover, the content of every course should emphasize the existence of God as the Creator, and His purpose for human beings (Andreasen, 1991; Knight, 2010c).

The curriculum should factor in the unique Adventist philosophy of education in the opportunity offered through distance learning. Wa-Mbaleka (2012, 2013) encourages modifications of existing instructional design theories and models to ensure the integration of faith and learning by Christian educators. In designing online courses, which is one type of distance learning, Wa-Mbaleka (2013) advises course designers to (1) do systematic analysis of the instructional needs of the learners, (2) design and develop distance learning courses according to sound learning and teaching theories, (3) write relevant learning objectives and select or

develop relevant instructional materials and learning activities, (4) design assessment activities that will help evaluate the learner's acquisition, (5) navigate the course to assess its workability, (6) make needed modifications, and (7) continue to update the course as the need arises over time. Integration of faith and learning must be intentionally planned throughout all these stages of course development or preparation of materials for distance learning.

Both Wa-Mbaleka (2013) and Jeffery (2007) emphasize that course designers should make provision for integration of faith and learning in distance learning courses. Wa-Mbaleka (2013) specifically suggests that facilitators should begin each course module with a devotional thought. Facilitators should also "include the Christian perspectives in the discussion questions, and [integrate] a spiritual component into each of the assignments, projects, and papers" (p. 54) of a distance education course. Wa-Mbaleka advocates the use of textbooks and instructional materials written from the biblical perspective. Last, he recommends the development of Christ-centered curriculum to ensure that Christian educators integrate faith and learning. It is by this intentionality of integrating faith and learning that Adventist schools can truly claim to be offering Adventist education as expected in the Adventist philosophy of education. Without this intentional effort, Adventist education would be no different from other types of education.

Wa-Mbaleka (2013) also stresses the need to train course designers and course facilitators in distance education theories and principles, together with other staff members that are involved in developing and delivering quality distance learning programs. Moreover, Oberholster (2005) and Rios (2013) underscore the importance of human resources when they recognize that the success or failure of the implementation of Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education depends on the people. Another study by Gregori, Torras, and Guasch's (2012) has revealed that instructional design and instructional delivery factors have an important influence on students' performance in distance learning programs. They must therefore be taken into serious consideration.

Course facilitators in distance learning programs deal with students who have diverse needs—socially, mentally, and spiritually (see de Korniejczuk, 2007b). This reality must be taken into account in the African context, given its rich cultural setting and its social and religious diversity. The facilitators should therefore be trained and encouraged to utilize various teaching strategies to promote effective learning of all students. Moreover, facilitators should be encouraged to adapt their teaching to ensure integration of faith and learning (de Korniejczuk, 2007a; Merga, 2012; Rizado & Vyhmeister, 2010). Fukofuka (2010) emphasizes that "the teacher's role is to connect students to society's expectations, values, and traditions; to connect students with their inner selves; realize students' potentials; to connect students to each other as social beings" (p. 94) in the work of preparing them for their life in this world and the world

to come. If this is what is expected from an Adventist school, then the role of the integration of faith and learning in the curriculum design of the African Adventist educational system cannot be underestimated. There is just too much at stake.

### **Proposed Guidelines for the African Context**

Without qualified human resources, the work of educating students for this life and the life to come is done in vain. African Adventist higher education institutions should employ qualified people to manage the distance learning programs (see Coulson, 2007; Rowe, 2003). Administrators, staff, and faculty involved in distance learning programs should have proper training before they are involved in the work of quality distance learning. Mentoring programs should be encouraged to help with effective training of everyone involved in developing, delivering, and managing distance education programs. Additionally, they all must continually seek wisdom from above and be committed to the divine principles so that they can share them with their students. They should, therefore, be offered different opportunities for personal spiritual growth. Administrators, faculty, and staff in a state of spiritual death may not have much to offer for their students' spiritual growth.

It is not uncommon to find facilitators of distance learning courses who have never received proper training in instructional design and delivery. This lack of proper training easily results in poor quality programs; a factor that quickly becomes a major source of frustration for both the course facilitators and the students in distance learning courses. The resulting effect is of a tarnished image of distance education because of the flaws in its design, delivery, and management. Leaders of higher educational institutions in Africa should not venture into distance education without a clear plan of training the staff and faculty involved in the distance education programs. They should also emphasize their spiritual growth as part of ongoing personal and professional growth.

To be more specific, everyone must be involved in promoting Christian values in developing and delivering distance learning programs. Prospective faculty of distance learning courses must be trained in the integration of faith and learning, in addition to receiving training about quality instructional design and delivery. Distance learning program leaders must be trained in how to develop and manage programs that truly meet the needs of distance learning students in the African context and promote a Christian atmosphere in those programs.

Staff involved in dealing with distance learning faculty and students need to learn to communicate appropriately, both professionally and Christianly. Such communication could have a positive impact on both the faculty and the students. When students notice that both faculty and staff are emulating the character of Christ, they are more likely to believe what they are learning through the integration of faith and learning in their courses.

Students in distance learning programs must receive proper orientation on how to study successfully in the distance learning modality that the higher education institution is offering. They need to be trained in effective distance learning strategies and in imitating and demonstrating Christian values when they interact with other students, their course facilitators, and the staff. No work should be left to guessing if leaders would like to see positive results in Adventist distance education in Africa.

There should also be regular and conscious training of facilitators of distance learning courses. Periodic seminars and training programs should be organized to upgrade and update the implementers of the distance learning programs. The facilitators should be encouraged to utilize various teaching strategies for the effective learning of all students (Rizado & Vyhmeister, 2010). While specific training must be required before any faculty member begins designing or facilitating any distance learning course, training must be ongoing to keep facilitators up-to-date with current distance learning tools and strategies.

To ensure successful connection of distance learning students to Christ through integration of faith and learning, both the curricular and extra-curricular activities of Seventh-day Adventist higher educational institutions in Africa should be consciously planned with the philosophy of Adventist education in mind. The face-to-face meeting days of distance learning students in the blended mode should include some days of spiritual emphasis. Facilitators of the distance learning courses should endeavor to integrate faith and learning during these days, in addition to the integration of faith and learning found in the courses. Prayer, short devotionals before the beginning of every lesson, Bible studies, and group fellowship should aim at connecting students to Christ and one another during the time these students are on campus.

The Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, located in the Philippines, conducted an experimental online Week of Prayer in 2015. It required thinking outside the box but it was successful. Online students, who had never had such an experience and who belonged to different religious, socio-economic, and geographic backgrounds, felt spiritually blessed the whole week. It involved quite some important planning that included having different preachers and Adventist world leaders share in prayer and sermons on different issues. More creativity needs to be used to meet the spiritual needs of distance learning students in the African higher education institutions.

Plans should be made to have distance learning students associated with halls of residence, and they should be encouraged to participate in hall spiritual activities, especially when they are on campus for their short face-to-face activities. Additionally, the school chaplain should also reach out to distance learning students through telephone calls and other means of communication, to facilitate their spiritual nurture.

The religious or spiritual department of the higher educational institution should intentionally plan to meet the spiritual needs of distance learning students just as they would for students on campus. Different means, however, must be utilized for this effort given that this group of students are rarely, if ever, on campus. Creative ways should be utilized (see Garilva, 2007).

The university should take advantage of the face-to-face meetings of facilitators and students in the blended mode to integrate faith and learning. These meetings should begin and end with prayer. The facilitators should also embrace the challenge of connecting their students to society's expectations, values, and traditions that reflect the character of Jesus. Christian educators should intentionally and continually connect their students to Jesus.

The designing process of the modules should involve the faculty in consciously integrating faith and learning in the course contents (Wa-Mbaleka, 2012, 2013). Integration of faith and learning in distance learning course modules must be intentional and well planned. Every unit should be planned to achieve this objective. Illustrations and contents of the units should connect the student to the Bible. Biblical ethics should permeate the entire content of each and every module. At the end of the course, students should have a strong Biblical foundation to guide them in daily living.

The recommended books and materials should be Christian literature (Wa-Mbaleka, 2013). This aim is still quite a challenge in many Adventist higher education institutions because few faculty members actually write and publish instructional materials. Facilitators should make conscious efforts to select Christian literature in their recommended materials. Where materials do not exist, Adventist scholars are highly encouraged to produce them. The reading of these materials will ensure integration of faith and learning and further distance learning students' connectedness to Jesus.

To end with, more collaboration is highly encouraged among Adventist higher educational institutions in Africa. Expertise and resources for quality Adventist distance education is spread all over the continent. Collaboration between the institutions, using the channels of the three existing divisions as of 2015, can create some synergy that will make distance education even stronger academically and spiritually. After all, all these institutions share the common goal of redeeming and restoring the students in preparation for eternity. Working together can do much good in trying to address the issues that distance education currently faces.

### **Conclusion**

Several factors have contributed to making distance learning a preferred choice in Ghana in particular and Africa as a whole. Many individuals have embraced distance learning due to its numerous advantages. As a result, a number of higher education institutions in Africa have taken advantage of this opportunity to establish distance learning centers to capture their share of the market. The Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education puts premium emphasis on students' spirituality and connectedness to Jesus. While capturing the market may be a good financial strategy, such a practice would be a total lack of vision if it continually misses the important implementation of the philosophy of Adventist education. Adventist higher education institutions in Africa, through their distance education curricular and extra-curricular activities, must aim to integrate faith and learning and connect their students to Christ. Since students in distance learning programs do not benefit from most of the on-campus spiritual programs, efforts should be made to connect them to Christ, using creative means and tools appropriate for distance learning.

In this paper, it has become clear that integration of faith and learning has been mainly practiced in face-to-face educational setting, but given less attention in distance learning programs. Higher education institutions running distance programs are encouraged to put much more emphasis on integrating faith and learning. This paper has offered some practical guidelines to improve the quality of the integration of faith and learning in distance learning programs. This paper intends to open the door for more enriching discussion that can help improve the implementation of the philosophy of Adventist education in higher educational institution's distance education programs in Adventist Africa in general.

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*John Appiah, PhD Candidate*  
*appiaj@aiaas.edu*

&  
*Safary Wa-Mbaleka, EdD, PhD*  
*Wa-mbalekas@aiaas.edu*

*Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies*  
*Silang, Cavite, Philippines*