

A Quick Start GUIDE

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL FACILITATOR



A Quick Start Guide for the Adult Sabbath School Facilitator

Manuscript prepared for the Adult Ministries Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America

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Introduction

Can you recall arriving home on Sabbath being totally absorbed with some new thought or appreciation about God's love gleaned from Sabbath School? To reproduce this experience for others is your calling as an Adult Sabbath School facilitator. Whether you've just been asked to fill this role or you're an experienced facilitator looking for fresh insights, this Quick Start Guide can give you the information you need and the inspiration to apply it.

A Little Background...

Ever since James White organized the first Adventist Sabbath School in Rochester, New York in 1853, Sabbath Schools have played a major role in our church. The mission of the Sabbath School is to facilitate members and guests in the process of internalizing God's grace and truth while experiencing the goals of Sabbath School packaged in a relational way. It is a school of Christian living.

According to research from the North American Division Office of Information and Research, three out of four participants come to Sabbath School seeking personal spiritual growth. To facilitate that growth, the Sabbath School activities need to be carefully and systematically planned.

The four specific objectives of the Sabbath School are to:

1. Study the Word
2. Provide fellowship and nurture
3. Develop community outreach
4. Support world missions

Each of these objectives is important in specific ways and can be accomplished through wise planning and implementation.

- 1. Study of the Word** helps students understand the gospel and make a personal commitment to Christ. Bible study also helps Sabbath School members develop a devotional life and teaches them how to interpret and apply the principles of the Scriptures to their lives. All Sabbath School materials and activities need to be Christ-centered and Bible-based.
- 2. Fellowship and Nurture** fosters a sense of community among members by developing friendships through small group interaction both on Sabbath and throughout the week. Sabbath School is also a prime means for reclaiming inactive members and nurturing those who are newly baptized.
- 3. Community Outreach** trains members for service and inspires them to witness. Each group develops projects to involve members in soul winning activities. The group becomes a spiritual magnet to draw others to Christ.
- 4. World Mission Emphasis** presents a clear vision of the global mission of the Adventist Church. Sabbath School promotes a personal, systematic and self-denying commitment for the support of world missions and creates in members a desire to help fulfill the gospel commission.

Research and experience show that Sabbath Schools are not really successful unless they include elements of outreach and soul winning. "The Sabbath school should be one of the greatest instrumentalities, and the most effectual, in bringing souls to Christ." *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* p. 10.

Job Description

The role of the Adult Sabbath School facilitator is to guide a small group toward growth in the study of God's Word, in fellowship, in community service and in support of world missions. (The title Sabbath School teacher has been used for a long time, but this person really acts as a group facilitator.) For most of the Sabbath service people listen – to the prayers, special music and sermon. The main opportunity for fellowship and sharing comes in the Sabbath School. As a facilitator, you have a sacred responsibility to share your spiritual journey, as well as your knowledge, and to encourage others to share theirs.

The facilitator reports to the division leader. The assistants report to the facilitator.

“Those who teach in Sabbath school must have their hearts warmed and invigorated by the truth of God, being not hearers only, but also doers of the Word. They should be nourished in Christ as the branches are nourished in the vine...Teachers should be diligent students of the Word of God, and ever reveal the fact that they are learning daily lessons in the school of Christ, and are able to communicate to others the light they have received from Him who is the Great Teacher, the Light of the world.”

Counsels on Sabbath School Work p. 93,94

Time Commitment: approximately 25 hours per month

The time involved in weekly preparation depends on the background and training of the facilitator. Usually a successful facilitator will devote three to five hours in preparation during the week. He or she should also set aside two to four hours per month for facilitators' meetings. In some cases facilitators are also asked to attend monthly Sabbath School Committee meetings.

Desired Qualities

It is of utmost importance for facilitators to display a caring, accepting attitude toward all people, and have the ability to connect with people on a personal level. They must be kind and understanding, as well as able to lead spiritual discussions.

Duties and Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the facilitator to lead the Sabbath School group in a meaningful and redemptive study of God's Word through creative and effective teaching methodologies. The facilitator should encourage regular Bible study and seek to involve members in discussion and active learning.

Facilitators also need to be sensitive to the characteristics of adult learners and their current life issues and needs. Greet each person in the group warmly every week and ask them to share their spiritual journeys, both the joys and disappointments. If possible, invite members to your home and visit theirs. Spending time with a person in his or her home environment will accelerate the friendship and help you to understand each other better.

Sabbath School members enjoy the friendship and support that comes with being part of a close-knit group. This fellowship will be encouraged by a sharing time including announcements, prayer requests and updates on missing members. As members pray with and for one another, they will come closer to each other. Prayer is an incredible bonding force!

Don't allow all your energy to be expended on temporal things during the week so you have no strength to give to the service of Christ on the Sabbath.

10 Tasks for Sabbath School Facilitators

1. Be there every week (on time!) or make arrangements for a substitute.
2. Become acquainted with group members – their interests, spiritual journeys and needs.
3. See that members receive the Bible Study Guides (quarterlies) in the edition that will benefit them most. Choose from four editions: Standard, Teacher's, Large Print, and Easy Reading.
4. Watch for guests and invite them to join your group.
5. Welcome all members, introduce guests and help create an atmosphere of warm fellowship for everyone.
6. Assign a manager to take care of the attendance record, gather the offering and distribute materials.
7. Care for missing members in ways appropriate to their circumstances and needs, encouraging members to call, visit, send cards or provide practical assistance.
8. Involve the group in community outreach endeavors of the Personal Ministries Council and/or your own projects.
9. Find creative ways to encourage members to become involved with world missions.
10. Attend facilitators' meetings and training events.

The Sabbath School Class as a Small Group Family

The history of Sabbath School includes a time when small groups would gather to study the Word, pray for each other and provide a safe place for individuals to share their struggles and how the Lord blessed them. The Sabbath School "class" is really more of a family or small group experience, so classes are referred to as Small Group Families in this Quick Start Guide. As you lead one of these Small Group Families, please make sure it is a place where members and visitors can come and grow in their Christian experiences.

The Focus of Adult Sabbath School

The power of Christianity comes from the power of God. One of the ways this power is revealed to humans is through God's Word. Understanding Scripture was the power that launched the Seventh-day Adventist Church so many years ago. And it is the same power that will bring success to Adult Sabbath Schools today.

“When class leaders expose their classes to the love of God as revealed in Scripture, miracles happen. The power of God's love to change lives becomes the spirit of your class. And it's most contagious when focusing on God's love revealed through Jesus Christ... This is what puts power into adult Sabbath School – God's love as revealed in God's Word! Accept no substitute.” *Leading Adult Sabbath School* p. 3,4.

“You may not be a scholar, pastor or theologian. But you have access to a power beyond expectation.” *Leading Adult Sabbath School* p. 10

It's the facilitator's role to guide the discussion so the group does not “wander in the wilderness” of supposition and useless philosophy. Keep the spotlight on the Word of God. Read and discuss God's ideas and plans. This will lead you as a group into the other important areas of Sabbath School – fellowship and service.

Five Adult Sabbath School Audiences

Research has shown that a congregation usually has some combination of five basic audiences who attend Sabbath School. Each is a sociological group based on particular interests or preferences.

Each of these groups can be organized into classes so they attract people with similar interests. The result is that the Sabbath School grows in attendance. Depending on the space available, it is possible to have a number of Adult Sabbath Schools built around these audiences.

The basic five Sabbath School audiences are:

- Traditionalist
- Fellowship oriented
- Desiring in-depth Bible study
- Social action
- Multiple interest

Organizing a five-audience Sabbath School takes planning and work. Each group needs a leadership team composed of a facilitator, assistant, greeter and prayer leader. Each should have the corresponding spiritual gifts and meet regularly for prayer, planning and evaluation. Each leadership team makes sure the four purposes of Sabbath School are being fulfilled for their group.

**NAD Adult Ministries
Website**

Visit the North American Division Adult Ministries website at www.nadadultministries.org to find ideas for Sabbath School. Be sure to sign up for the newsletter!

The five-audience system will ideally result in a number of adult groups meeting throughout the Sabbath School time. Each group will have its own program format and style of classes.

The success of this system depends largely on three factors:

- The space available in the building
- The amount of work and planning put into the program
- The quality of the leadership team in each group

Natural Learning Cycles

When considering the five-audience model, leaders may ask, “Is there a learning model that enables a facilitator to reach all members?” Yes! Research indicates a wide range of unexpected benefits from a natural learning cycle approach.

Teaching is a two-way street. It can’t happen without learning. And people learn differently. How to facilitate learning in a setting of diversity is a major challenge Sabbath School facilitators face.

Different researchers use different terminology to define learning styles. But the basic facts are that some of us perceive things through sensing and feeling, and others through analysis. Some of us process new information by observing and reflecting, while others learn through activity.

Sabbath School facilitators can increase group learning by using a natural cycle that includes these four basic processes:

1. Connect learners to the central concept by creating an experience for them (or having them recall one) through which they can emotionally connect to the Scripture lesson.
2. Share with them expert information, logically sequenced, in as many modalities as possible (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.). Use media creatively.

But remember that the average person can only absorb about 15 minutes of information per hour.

3. Ask them to apply what they've learned to their personal lives. Test to see if they understand what was taught in #2. This is where group members internalize what they learned.
4. Help them explore the new possibilities this learning creates in their lives. Develop ways for them to share the value of what they've learned with other members.

"The teaching of Jesus inculcated the weightiest ideas and the most sublime truths in the most comprehensible and simple manner, and 'the common people heard Him gladly.' This is the kind of instruction that should be given in our Sabbath schools." *Testimonies on Sabbath-School Work* p. 39,40

It is not the best plan for facilitators to do all the talking. Lecturing is the most abstract of all teaching methods, and the least efficient. In his book *Teaching Adult Sabbath School*, Charles Betz states: "The highest level of learning, the one we are seeking in our Sabbath Schools, is a transformation of character" (p. 29).

To achieve that goal the facilitator must engage the group and draw them into activity and discussion. Then with a brief, pointed remark or illustration, impress the lesson upon their minds and challenge them to apply it to their lives.

It is not as important to "cover the lesson" as it is to discover it.

Tips for Natural Learning

- Plan one central concept for each week.
- Start with a brief, attention-grabbing story that illustrates the concept, like Jesus usually did.
- Spend more time preparing for what the members will do in class (compare, contrast, identify, search, explain, analyze) rather than what you will say.
- Read passages directly from the Scriptures, or ask volunteers to read.
- Ask open-ended "how" and "what if" questions.
- Develop a tolerance for silence after you've asked a question. It's good to let people think!
- Always complete the learning cycle with a personal application step.

For more information on the natural learning cycle, check out *Leading Adult Sabbath School*. See resources on page 11 for more information.

“Let the teachers enter, heart and soul, into the subject matter of the lesson. Let them lay plans to make a practical application of the lesson, and awaken an interest in the minds and hearts.” *Testimonies on Sabbath-School Work* p. 12

Sabbath School Action Units

An action unit is a small-group Sabbath School (six to eight people) organized to provide time for sharing, Bible study and systematic outreach. Many Sabbath Schools have discovered that Action Units are an excellent way to provide nurturing fellowship because members bond more easily in small groups.

Each Action Unit has a facilitator. These should be loving, active members with a desire for sharing Jesus. They should also be tactful, enthusiastic, dedicated members who can cooperate with the Personal Ministries Coordinator.

Action Units are continuous training schools, providing weekly insights into the practical skills of Christian living. The leader’s main role is to give simple, on-the-job spiritual training to fellow class members. The facilitator encourages each member in personal Bible study, summarizes the lesson and asks questions about how to apply it to witnessing opportunities. See resources on page 11 for more detailed information on Sabbath School Action Units.

Motivating Bible Study

The need for daily feeding upon the Word of God is set forth in a most emphatic way in the Scriptures. No great degree of spirituality is possible without a daily relationship with God.

Motivating class members to study the Bible is a primary goal for all facilitators. Adults are motivated by content that is relevant, meaningful and meets their needs. Most adults also want to participate in the discussion. For these reasons, a life-related discussion of the topic may be one of the strongest motivators for study.

Members will always find greater purpose for Bible study if they are sharing their beliefs. If the class is conducted in such a manner as to welcome and nurture seekers, members will be eager to share meaningful thoughts.

As a facilitator, be a learner with your group rather than an expert authority figure.

Welcoming Guests

Warm and courteous attention should be given to all guests. Make them feel as welcome as possible. Provide them with Bible Study Guides and Bibles, and in a tactful way encourage their participation. This should not go beyond what is agreeable to your guests. They need to feel comfortable, free from embarrassment and genuinely welcome. Introduce them to other group members as appropriate and cordially invite them to come again.

If your church hosts a dinner, invite guests to attend. Or welcome guests to your own home for a meal. A feast isn't necessary; warm fellowship is what counts.

Quick Tips for a More Dynamic Sabbath School

- Build enthusiasm and loyalty in your group
- Set goals for projects and offerings
- Promote Sabbath School in the church newsletter and bulletin
- Pray daily for wisdom and energy for the Sabbath

Keeping Records

Each Sabbath School group should have a record listing the names of the members. The group should select a manager to keep the records in order, gather offerings and record progress toward your goals.

Anyone who desires may become a Sabbath School member (they don't have to be Seventh-day Adventist Church members). The group manager is authorized to add the names of those wishing to join. The records should be checked regularly so missing members can be visited and encouraged.

Evaluating Your Ministry

Sabbath School facilitators will hear all kinds of remarks, from "I love this class!" to "I don't think that's what the quarterly meant" to "I'm never coming back to this class" to "Now I finally understand this subject!" If you allow remarks from members (or visitors) to form your entire evaluative criteria, you will constantly be on an emotional roller coaster.

Questions to ask yourself:

1. Do members know God loves them individually – and they are forgiven, accepted and empowered to share that love?
2. Does each person have an easy opportunity to join the discussion?
3. Do I present content in a clear and logical manner?
4. Do I use a variety of media and methods to present content?
5. Are the concepts made relevant to the educational, cultural and social parameters of the group's life experiences?
6. Do members have opportunities to share their personalized applications of Scripture with one another?
7. Do I look for ways to encourage members to test what they have learned?
8. Do members openly express their joy and valuing of God's Word at work in their lives?
9. Do I challenge members to try new resources and methods in studying God's word?
10. Do I network with other facilitators in mentoring relationships?
11. Do I take advantage of training opportunities for facilitators?
12. Do members want their friends and neighbors to join the group?

"When we get back to the original vision for adult Sabbath School, we will recapture that enthusiasm, that ever-fresh experience, that deepening knowledge of God's love, that ever-expanding fellowship of grace that God intended adult Sabbath School to be for us." *Leading Adult Sabbath School* p. 123

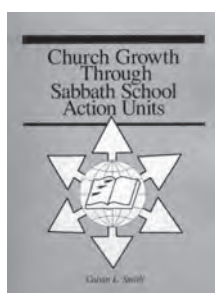
Conclusion

Personal spiritual growth; gathering light, strength and courage from one another; evangelistic and social outreach – this is what Sabbath School is all about. What an incredible adventure to look forward to each Sabbath. Praise God for the opportunity!

Recommended Resources

In addition to these resources, contact the North American Division Adult Ministries Department at www.nadadultministries.org. You will find many resources available on this site, including Sabbath School PowerPoint training resources.

The following resources are available from *AdventSource*. For a complete listing call 800.328.0525 or visit www.adventsource.org.



Church Growth through Sabbath School Action Units

By Calvin Smith

This comprehensive manual contains complete instructions on how to set up, implement and maintain action units in your church. Includes guidelines, presentations, samples, worksheets, tips on visitation and sharing, and ways to encourage discussion. Catalog #601612



Counsels on Sabbath School Work

By Ellen G. White

The author provides inspired instruction on the qualifications of a facilitator, appropriate attitudes, methods of teaching, discipline, gaining respect, encouraging generosity, meeting controversy and many other practical topics. Topically divided and indexed. Catalog #416180



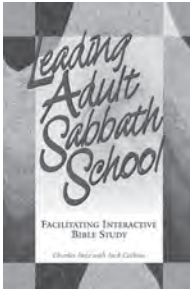
HIT the Mark

By Curtis Hall

HIT the Mark is a power-packed guide for Sabbath school facilitators at all levels. It will show you, step-by-step, how to become a great facilitator. Learn about finding the theme, creating talking points, developing take-aways, asking thought-provoking questions, dealing with difficult personalities and more.

Book Catalog #550982

CD Catalog #550983



Leading Adult Sabbath School

By Charles Betz with Jack Calkins

Powerful, spirit-filled classes that focus on Bible study and connect members as a community of believers provide the most effective means of growing disciples. Growing, interactive classes have leaders that encourage interaction and learning using proven strategies. *Leading Adult Sabbath School* is a complete tool you can use to stimulate and inspire members.

English Catalog #550010

Spanish Catalog #420605



Reinvent Your Sabbath School

By Chris and Yolanda Blake

Chris and Yolanda Blake show how to start a ministry-driven Sabbath School with sound bites from their class. Transform Sabbath School into the most delightful hour of the week by using five ministries as the core of your class.

Book Catalog #556249

DVD Catalog #420438

Book/DVD Set Catalog #420435

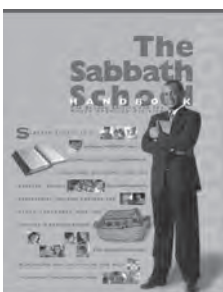


Sabbath School Teacher

Prepared by the GC Sabbath School Department

Whether you are a new or an experienced Sabbath School facilitator, this booklet has information you can use to run a successful class. Expand your teaching skills and learn how you can contribute to the spiritual growth of each Sabbath School member.

Catalog #556293



The Sabbath School Handbook

Prepared by NAD Adult Ministries

The Sabbath School Handbook outlines and explains the structures that support this important ministry. How was Sabbath School introduced to the Seventh-day Adventist Church? What are the mission and vision of the Sabbath School? How should local church Sabbath Schools be organized and operate? What are the ministry responsibilities of Sabbath School personnel? How should children's Sabbath School be administered? This book is a must-have reference tool for Sabbath School superintendents, secretaries, division leaders and other personnel involved in Sabbath School.

English Catalog #550000

Spanish Catalog #550005



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Adult Sabbath School Facilitator Ministry Description

Introduction

In no other part of the church's Sabbath morning activities is the ministry of the laity more vital than in the Sabbath School class.

In the class setting there is an interchange of ideas that is non-threatening, a sharing of faith and biblical instruction. Friendships are made in the circle of fellowship; a sense of community is built up. Questions are asked and answered in an informal setting.

For most of the Sabbath service the visitor or member listens – to the prayer, special music, and the sermon. He or she may participate in the congregational singing, but the main opportunity for sharing comes in the Sabbath School class. As a Sabbath School class facilitator, you have a sacred responsibility to share your personal experience, as well as knowledge. “Those who teach in Sabbath School must have their hearts warmed and invigorated by the truth of God, being not hearers only, but also doers of the Word. They should be nourished in Christ as the branches are nourished in the vine” (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, page 94). You can't share with others what you have not experienced yourself.

Duties of the Adult Sabbath School Facilitator

The duties of an adult Sabbath School facilitator or class leader are:

- 1. Preparation.** Before opening God's Word to teach, there should be more preparation than a brief perusal on Friday night. A good habit to establish is to spend a concentrated hour on Sabbath afternoon becoming familiar with the main points of the new lesson. During the rest of the week you can dig for more material.
- 2. Helping everyone feel welcome.** At the beginning of each class meeting, it is essential to make newcomers, as well as regular members, feel welcome. A simple question like “What has your week been like?” can help everyone to feel cared for so they can let go of the worries of the week and concentrate on Bible study. A good question with new people is “Where is your church home?” It can give you a lot of information and help you to know how best to minister to them. Keep some extra quarterlies on hand to give to those who may not have one and invite newcomers to participate in the lesson study. If your church has a fellowship dinner, invite them to attend. A good missionary

project for your family would be to invite visitors to your home for Sabbath dinner. A sumptuous feast isn't necessary to make the guest feel at home. The fellowship and sharing will do that.

- 3. *Serving as the “undershepherd” of the class.*** The Sabbath School class is the most important fellowship unit in the church. For most of your class members it is the primary place where they receive support and friendship. It is your responsibility as the facilitator to enable this to happen. It is recommended that you have a “shepherding time” or “sharing time” preceding the lesson discussion. Announcements can be made regarding plans. You can ask about missing members. Often those in the class will have information about these persons and some can be asked to make personal visits. In cases of illness, arrangements can be made to visit the person, perhaps to supply a warm meal or volunteer to help with housework or childcare. This time of sharing opens the door for better participation in the discussion part of the class.
- 4. *Prayer.*** The opening of hearts to the Holy Spirit is essential to each successful class meeting. And as the class members pray for one another, they come closer to each other and are enabled to bear one another's burdens. It is important to take time to ask for the prayer requests of those present. You should offer prayer at the beginning and end of each class, ask a class member do so, or ask the group to pray together in twos or threes. In smaller classes it may be appropriate at times to have a season of prayer in which everyone has opportunity to pray.
- 5. *Guiding class members to learn and grow.*** The most important thing for your class members to learn is the practical application of Bible truth. Sabbath School is not so much a place to learn facts and abstract doctrines, but to grow in Christian living. Help them to make specific applications of the lesson each week in the practical issues they face everyday. Key discussion questions are: “What difference does this topic make in how you live your life?” and “How would you explain this truth to a friend who does not attend any church?”
- 6. *Starting on time.*** Nothing is more discouraging for a Sabbath School class than to be assembled and wonder where the facilitator is. You should be one of the first to arrive at the classroom. This gives you time to greet individuals and see that everything is in readiness. In case of emergency or illness, preparation should be made for a substitute facilitator. You have the responsibility to see that the Sabbath School superintendent is notified and that a substitute has been provided if you must be absent.

Adult Sabbath School Facilitator

This Quick Start Guide for Sabbath School Facilitators is full of important information to help you start or revitalize a Sabbath School class in your church. This guide contains a job description, instructions for getting started, tips for maintaining a successful ministry, troubleshooting suggestions, recommended resources, and more. Whether you're new to this ministry or a seasoned volunteer, this Quick Start Guide will inspire you with lots of great ideas you can immediately put to use in your church.

Other titles in the Quick Start Guide series include:

- Sabbath School Superintendent
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