

quarterly resource for local church elders † april/june 2009

ELDER'S DIGEST

**GUIDING
PRINCIPLES
FOR SABBATH
OBSERVANCE**

SANTA
BIBLIA

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A REPUTATION TO GUARD

What kind of reputation do you have? Does it matter to you? Some today seem to feel, "I don't care what people think of me." However, the Bible says, "He [a spiritual leader] must also have a good reputation with outsiders" (1 Tim. 3:7). Solomon reminds us, "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold" (Prov. 22:1).

A good name—one's reputation—is better than great riches, and it is also a prerequisite for church leadership. A good reputation is essential. We should be concerned with what people think of us.

A good reputation isn't built overnight. Like a building, a reputation has to be put up brick by brick—one day, one action at a time. We must guard it carefully.

What was Paul's counsel about reputation? In 1 Timothy 5, he counseled young widows to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. He also made another very important point about reputation, saying that he cared very little if he was judged by any human court; indeed, he did not even judge himself. His conscience was clear, but that did not make him innocent. *It is the Lord who judges us.* He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of our hearts. Ultimately Paul recognized that his reputation before God was the most important of all. Yes, we must guard our reputations, but above all, we must remember that God knows our hearts. He sees who we really are.

You may work your whole life to be known as a good citizen, a good family member, or a good church leader. Even if you somehow

achieve this goal, the opinion of others matters far less than God's evaluation. God looks beneath your exterior and sees you for who you really are.

You may come to church every week with a smile, and everyone may believe you are a good Christian, but if, when you go home, you are rude to your spouse, look at pornography, or ignore the needy in your community, God knows. It doesn't matter if the church thinks you're the greatest Christian in the world; what matters is what God thinks of you. He knows if you're really a patient person. He knows if you're loving and forgiving. He hears your thoughts and words. He knows who you really are. The crucial question is: What is your reputation with God? Does God know you as a forgiving person or a slanderer? Kind or rude? Concerned about others or caring only about yourself? Brilliant or compassionate?

Ellen G. White says, "Mental ability and genius are not character, for these are often possessed by those who have the very opposite of a good character. Reputation is not character. True character is a quality of the soul, revealing itself in the conduct" (*My Life Today*, 267).

And how does our reputation reflect on God? Does our character burnish or tarnish God's reputation? The Lord has a reputation to uphold—as a God of mercy and a God of grace who keeps His word. God has a reputation for being faithful, loving, merciful, and dependable. He is known as the Savior of sinners, a God of grace. He will uphold His reputation through all generations. But will those who know that we are Christians believe God is faithful, loving, gracious, and merciful? Is this the picture of God that we exemplify? Do we safeguard both our own reputation and God's?



Jonas Arrais
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



COMMITTED TO CHURCH WORK

Trevor Ward is a local elder at the Lyttelton SDA Church in the Transvaal Seventh-day Adventist Conference/South African Union. His church has 88 members and 5 elders. He and his wife Dale have two children, Aaron and Matthew. May you be motivated and blessed as you read how God is moving in Elder Ward's church and life.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A LOCAL CHURCH ELDER.

I was not born into Adventism but became a Seventh-day Adventist in my 30's. In the past I had always declined the position of elder due to the enormous responsibility that this position held. When I was first elected elder in my local church in 2006, the task ahead seemed daunting; however, the Lord has guided me in ways I never thought possible. Working in my local church with its multicultural membership has presented challenges, but these have been overcome by following the example Christ set when He lived here on earth. It has also broadened my knowledge of people and brought me to a closer walk with God. Drawing on Christ's strength in making the right decisions on church matters has really been a life-changing experience for me. Being an elder is not a 9-to-5 job; rather, it requires me to be available to assist church members whenever needed. Church leadership is not for the weak, as I have discovered on several occasions. You need the patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon in dealing with church matters. But to my fellow elders, I say: Never give up, no matter how difficult the task ahead seems. When you think that all is lost and that you have endured all you can, go down on your knees and ask the Lord for help. You will rise a new person, filled with inspiration and dedication.

DO YOU WORK CLOSELY WITH YOUR PASTOR?

Our pastor is responsible for two churches, so that has given me the opportunity to work very closely with him. The pastor is available only every second week, so this means that I am very involved with the day-to-day operations of the church. This necessitates continuous communication with the pastor, keeping him up-to-date on church activities. I sometimes meet with him late in the evening, updating him on decisions from the elders and from Board meetings. An elder becomes the conduit between the pastor and the church members. The pastor remains the shepherd of the flock, and the elder acts as the assistant shepherd.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU PREACH?

With five elders in the church, I am not often required to preach. However, the occasion has arisen where the appointed speaker has canceled at the last minute, and an elder had to step in. Nevertheless, I try to preach at least once every two months. It is indeed an honor and privilege to stand before God's people and deliver the Word.

HAS THERE BEEN MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT IN THE PAST FEW YEARS?

This seems to have been a problem in our churches in recent years; not much ministry development has taken place.

This is evidenced by the fact that pastors have multiple churches to oversee. My personal view is that the problem has its roots in the lack of focus on our church youth. Teaching the baptismal class in our church for the past couple years has exposed me to the views and thoughts of our young people with regards to their faith. Because there is not much Bible study, their knowledge of church history and Bible truths is very superficial. There definitely has to be a concerted effort to increase ministry development over the next few years.

ANY SPECIAL PROJECTS?

At the beginning of 2008, a decision was taken to make it the Year of Evangelism for Lyttelton. Being located within a military base meant that the harvest fields were right on our doorstep. We realized that this was not going to be a short-term project but that 2008 would herald the beginning of a long-term goal to be faithful witnesses for Christ and win souls for the Lord. Various projects were assigned to different church departments. The Youth Department are raising funds to improve the appearance of the building and to purchase much-needed equipment. Much of this has already been done. We have a very active Personal Ministries Department, and they have embarked on a project to distribute as many Bibles as possible. The military hospital that caters to the Defense Forces' medical needs has ap-

proached our church to provide Bibles for their patients. To date we have donated more than 2,500 Bibles. Even though individual departments are responsible for these projects, every department has been encouraged to participate so that the projects become church-driven instead of department-driven.

WHAT ARE YOUR CHURCH'S MISSION, VISION, AND GOALS?

I think Lyttelton's mission is the same as the mission of the world church—to preach the gospel to all the world. However, our 'world' is the area immediately surrounding our church. Spreading the gospel to the community remains our primary mission.

There are many challenges to this mission, including poverty and alcohol abuse. This mission has determined our vision. We would like the Lyttelton church to become the beacon of hope in our community, a place of refuge from the ravages of this world, a source of encouragement in times of despair, and a place where friends can be found whatever the circumstances. Through our initial efforts in achieving this vision, we have become known as the "Saturday" church among sections of the local community. Our vision does not stop there; we would like to begin church planting in the area. In the book of Acts, we read of how Paul and Barnabas traveled around the countryside, encouraging people and spreading good news. I believe that Lyttelton has the same mission and goal.

HOW HAS YOUR CHURCH GROWN?

The church was established about six years ago and had 20 members. The Lyttelton church came into being as an overflow of the Sunnyside church in the Pretoria central area. The church building could no longer accommodate all the members, and it was decided that a number of smaller churches would be established. By the end of 2008, our church had grown to 88 members. While this growth has been exceptional, it has come about by members transferring into the church instead of via

baptism; in the past six years, we have baptized only two new members. Part of the difficulty in bringing new members into the church is the lack of suitable outreach programs, coupled with the church's location.

HOW DO YOU RELATE TO YOUR CHURCH MEMBERS?

Being a founder member of the church, I don't see myself as a church officer and the laity as ordinary church members. We are one family who has embraced the concept of being brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not a group that gathers only on Sabbath and then are strangers during the week. Elders are considered the undershepherds of the flock, and as such, they must know all their sheep. Getting to know my fellow members outside of the church setting is a priority. I think that once you get to know members on a personal level, the relationships grow to a higher level, and it makes it that much easier to relate to members on church matters.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE IN READING *ELDER'S DIGEST*?

The information contained in *Elder's Digest* has been a source of inspiration for me. The diversity of topics and letters of encouragement serve to provide a renewed sense of energy and confidence in carrying out my duties. Knowing that there are colleagues out there who are living the same experiences as I am and overcoming all obstacles proves to me that the Lord truly lives within our hearts if we let Him. The articles are relevant to our times, and the advice gives elders the assurance that whatever questions they may have, those questions will be more than adequately answered.

HAVE YOU LEARNED ANYTHING SPECIFIC FROM *ELDER'S DIGEST* THAT YOU DID NOT ALREADY KNOW?

Not having any formal training on how to conduct myself as an elder, there were certain aspects of church protocol which I assumed would be the same as the protocols practiced in business. However, I soon realized that

the business ethic of winner/loser does not transfer well to church situations. Dealing with church matters is altogether different in that there cannot be any losers. Conducting Board meetings was a challenge in the beginning as I had to stop viewing Board members as employees but rather as fellow brethren who had the same objectives and goals of winning souls for Jesus as I had, even though we had differing views on how this should be done. *Elder's Digest* has been an excellent resource for ensuring that I can deliver my best as an elder, not forgetting that the Lord leads the way.

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO CHALLENGES WITHIN THE CHURCH FAMILY?

The challenges are just as varied as the church member. It is difficult to ensure that a balanced view is taken of these challenges and a solution found that is acceptable to all. As I mentioned earlier, Lyttelton is a multi-cultural church, so the challenges that present themselves are sometimes unique. Due to their differing backgrounds, church members see the same problem from different perspectives and therefore have different interpretations of the problem and its solutions. As an elder I have to be cognizant of these facts and respond appropriately. Before tackling issues, I often ask myself, "What would Christ have done in this situation?" This brings a totally different perspective to the problem.

ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE?

Being an elder in your local church should be a humbling experience. Matthew 23:11-12 says, "Whoever is the greatest should be the servant of the others. If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honored" (CEV).

Being an elder is a huge responsibility because the Lord places His sheep in our care, and we are expected to care for them in the same manner as He would care for them.





THE MINISTRY OF THE DEACON AND DEACONESS

You may be reading this because you have been asked to serve your local church as a deacon or deaconess. Or perhaps you serve on a church Nominating Committee and are wondering what a deacon or deaconess is expected to do. In either case, if you understand the church as the body of Christ, and understand the call to ministry as experienced by each member, this will help you see the role the deacon and deaconess fill within a local church.

BIBLE PRINCIPLES

As Jesus gives insight into the nature of His Church using the symbol of the body in 1 Corinthians 12, so it is that when we join the Church we become “members” of the body of Christ and are equipped for specific functions by the Holy Spirit. God wills that the various “body parts” (members) function effectively toward the common goal of the Church, making disciples for Jesus Christ.

It is an erroneous concept that only the clergy have a “sacred calling” and the general membership have merely a “secular calling.” This concept impedes the progress of the church by leading some to believe their contributions are less important. In fact, the New Testament teaches that all members of the body of Christ are ministers of Jesus Christ. There are necessary differences in function, but the status of all leaders is the same.

You have been called to function as a deacon or deaconess in your congregation. The God who calls is able to sustain you as you cooperate with Him.

While in many instances the work of the deacon and deaconess overlap, distinctions will be described. Though deacons have traditionally been men and deaconesses, have been women, in some Adventist churches today both men and women serve in both roles. We derive both English titles from the same New Testament Greek word.

THE ROLE OF THE DEACON AND DEACONESS

Deacons and deaconesses are concerned with the material needs of the congregation, including the comfort of worshippers; security and upkeep of church property; ministry to the sick, shut-ins, widows, and orphans; and specific responsibilities during the Communion Service and Baptismal Ceremony.

The head deacon and head deaconess supervise the work of the two groups and report to the church board. The deacons and deaconesses, being a part of a team ministry, report to the head deacon or head deaconess.

TIME COMMITMENT

Including Sabbath duty, most deacons and deaconesses will need to plan on two or three hours per week to carry out their duties. Another one to four hours a month are needed for visitation and special projects. Head deacons and deaconesses will need to invest more time.

APPROPRIATE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

God supplies each person in the church with the resources for ministry—scripture, spiritual power, God’s character and spiritual gifts. While no one should feel that they must exhibit all of the spiritual gifts mentioned here to be considered qualified to perform the ministry of a deacon or deaconess, these gifts are related and helpful:

Helps or Service: The ability to unselfishly meet the needs of others through practical help. The exercise of this gift often assists a person with a gift of teaching or evangelism and releases them to present the Word of God.

Administration: The ability to organize and manage, working with and through others to achieve goals.

Hospitality: The capacity to provide an open house and graciousness to those in need of food, lodging and fellowship,

so that guests are refreshed both physically and spiritually.

Mercy: The capacity to feel sympathy with those in need (especially those who are suffering and miserable), and to manifest this sympathy in some practical way with a cheerful spirit so as to encourage and help those in need.

ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

The deacon and deaconess ministry is a particularly effective way to train younger members in your congregation for wider church responsibility. As they team with individuals who have carried out the duties of deacon and deaconess in the past, the church continues to be enriched with the experience and tradition of what has gone before while at the same time it is imbued with the vigor and freshness of the young.

The deacon and deaconess ministry helps to bring growth to the congregation by providing a clean, orderly, attractive and warm, personable atmosphere in and on church property, as well as helping to visit the members and care for their practical needs. This ministry exerts a powerful influence on individuals making decisions for Christ and His church.

This ministry may take you to the homes of sick members or shut-ins to help with housework or the children, or to bring encouragement by your fellowship.

Maybe there are senior citizens in your church family who need small home improvements done that you can care for or arrange to have done.

The widows in the early Christian church were mentioned as needing special help and attention. And this ministry is still needed for those who are left alone and need the love and care of the church family. But our churches today have another group who need special attention and care. They are the individuals who are struggling in one-parent households who need the support of their church family to include them in Sabbath afternoon activities or the sharing of hobby skills and friendship during the week.

The organization and leadership of a “work bee” at the church is a service you can perform. Your tools and experience will be needed, and if you are not skillful with mechanical things, your enthusiasm and presence will help make the event successful.

Not only is there a need for the physical plant of the church to be kept in repair, but the finer elements of interior decorating will need to have attention from this group. Arranging for flowers each week and overseeing the special effects needed for various programs and events is a role you might fill.

Many congregations have the custom of “sitting with” and helping those who are bereaved.

Your ministry to individuals in the congregation will not only reflect the love of the church family for them, but will offer helping hands to lighten the burdens they carry.

The deacons have also, as a general rule, been responsible for receiving the church offering and working with the treasurer to guarantee the security and proper handling of the money on Sabbath. Churches are, however, free to work

out the most appropriate procedure to suit the size of their congregation and the personnel available.

HOW TO PLAN

In order to have an organized ministry that runs smoothly, it is essential that the deacons and deaconesses in a congregation meet together in planning sessions. This is also an opportunity to clarify the understandings of individuals and develop agreement about specific assignments. In many congregations there are monthly or quarterly meetings of a Board of Deacons and a Board of Deaconesses for this purpose. Small churches may have only one meeting a year.

Your church may want to consider the plan of having a yearly Sunday morning prayer breakfast soon after the church elections. At this event new workers can be introduced, the pastor can bring a spiritual message, visitation teams can be formed, a schedule devised, and a “walk-through” of church property and equipment completed.

In planning for specific events, decide what needs to be done to make the event successful. Determine the order of preparations and write these items on a calendar. Assign a person to be responsible for seeing that each task is carried out and to report to the group. Follow this procedure through to the conclusion of the event.

In planning the weekly duty schedule, the deacons and deaconesses should agree on the various tasks to be performed. A team can be established, corresponding with the number of tasks to be performed, and deacons and deaconesses divided into teams. Each team serves in a regular rotation every four to six weeks, on a schedule which should be agreed upon by the persons involved. With the head deacon and head deaconess serving as general coordinators, team leaders can be selected for each Sabbath.

COMMUNION HELP

One of the responsibilities of the deaconesses is to prepare the grape juice and unleavened bread used in Communion. The following recipe is one that can be used for baking the unleavened bread.

COMMUNION BREAD

- 1 cup finely-ground flour (preferably whole grain)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 Tablespoons cold water
- 1/4 cup olive or other vegetable oil

Sift flour and salt together. Pour the water into the oil. Add to the dry ingredients and mix with a fork until all the flour is dampened. Roll out between two sheets of waxed paper to the thickness of thick pie pastry. Place on an ungreased, floured baking sheet. Mark off into bite-sized squares with a knife, being careful to prick each square to prevent blisters during baking. Bake at 450° for approximately 10 minutes. Watch carefully and do not brown. Makes bread for about 50.

Suitable, unfermented grape juice can be purchased in

most grocery stores. It should be of the highest quality available; under normal circumstances it should not be diluted.

It is also the responsibility of the deacons and deaconesses to care for the bread and grape juice after the Communion Service is over. Often the pastor or elders will need a small portion to take to shut-ins so they can have the Communion experience in their homes. Any grape juice remaining from that which was blessed is to be poured out. Any bread remaining of that which was blessed should be burned.

THE CARING CHURCH STRATEGY

The ministry of the deacon and deaconess is vital to accomplish the mission of your local church.

A balanced church program is just as important as any of the individual offices or functions of the church. Your ministry is given meaning and effectiveness as you fit into the overall mission that Christ has for your congregation. The Holy Spirit calls you to teamwork and cooperation with the other leaders in your church, according to a united plan of action.

What are the essential elements of a healthy local church? There are at least four fundamental activities that must be present in any Adventist church for it to be successful:

1. *Reaching the community.* Healthy churches discover the kinds of people who live in their area and understand the needs of the people, so that they can provide activities de-

signed to meet these needs and create a strong public awareness of the church.

2. *Winning people to Christ.* Healthy churches cooperate with the Holy Spirit in establishing meaningful relationships with those attracted to Christ, provide opportunities for them to become acquainted with His Word and His fellowship, and challenge them to become His disciples.

3. *Nurturing the members.* Healthy churches provide for the continuing spiritual growth of all their members through enthusiastic worship, interesting Bible study, supportive friendships, and opportunities for significant service.

4. *Inspiring leadership.* Healthy churches have pastoral and lay leaders who help the congregation to identify the needs in the church and the community, clarify goals, gather the necessary resources, and implement effective action.

"Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'" (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143).

ED

This article was excerpted from the practical resource, *The Responsibilities in the Local Church*. Edited by Monte Sahlin. Published, by Adventist Source, 1997.



Local Church Elders: TEAM LEADERSHIP

Most Adventist pastors around the world lead multichurch districts that vary in size from 5-30 congregations. What challenges these leaders have in providing adequate pastoral care! The district leadership must develop skills in delegation, training, and administration to maximize lay leadership, particularly that of local church elders.

The training of local elders can be accomplished in many ways. Most important is the modeling of the pastors themselves. With God's help they must be what the elders should become, manifesting a burden for preaching, nurturing, evangelism, Christian education, and the care of church property.

SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTION NEEDED

Local elders also need specialized instruction in every aspect of ministry, including:

- How to conduct a committee meeting
- Sermon preparation and preaching
- Personal and public evangelism
- How to make visiting more effective
- How to strengthen the departments of the church
- Care of church property
- A deeper understanding of the Adventist message
- Nurture of new converts

TRAINING SEMINARS

The 1991 General Conference Annual Council recommended that local conferences/missions conduct a minimum of one training seminar each year for pastors and local elders. Churches should cover the travel expenses of their lay leaders who attend this meeting.

Locally, the pastor should plan a monthly or bimonthly meeting with all local elders of the district. In addition

to training, the pastor can make plans with the elders for the district as a whole as well as for each congregation. These plans include evangelism, visitation, sermon topics, and district and local congregational goals.

QUARTERLY DISTRICT MEETINGS

The quarterly district meeting is very successful in parts of Asia and Africa. Where convenient, the entire district membership meets in one of the churches. This provides opportunities for worship and fellowship, forming a spiritual bond between the pastor and the church members. At these quarterly meetings, the lay leaders of the district can also meet with the pastor to formulate plans for coordinated evangelism, including entering unreached villages in their territory.

These times together should not be dominated by the pastor. Lay elders in large districts are used to being involved in leadership, and the quarterly meetings should recognize their capabilities.

THE ADVANTAGES OF LAY LEADERSHIP

While the pastor who serves multiple congregations faces many challenges, there are some decided advantages in the need to depend on the ministry of local elders. For example, in some world divisions, there is a striking correlation between the growth of the church and the number of churches the average pastor serves.

Without a pastor living in town, elders and other members must take the initiative in local soul-winning. When pastors are able to visit, they often find candidates thoroughly prepared for baptism. Such is the fruit of active lay leadership.

ED

Walton Whaley with J. H. Zachary
This article was first printed in *Ministry*, September 1993.

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Boring board meetings?

REMOVE BOREDOM AND INCREASE EFFICIENCY

Recently I was a member of a delegation who presented a petition at a city council meeting. I was amazed at the volume of business handled in the two-and-one-half-hour sitting of the council.

As I drove home that evening, I reflected on some of the long and often tedious church board meetings I have attended over a lifetime of ministry. In contrast, it seemed to me that the city council's secret of success was largely a result of adequate preparation, orderly presentation, and consideration of all matters of business listed for attention.

Two weeks before the meeting, both the council members and the constituency they served had been given details of the meeting's agenda items. Those with petitions were notified that they would each be allowed five minutes to present their material to the

meeting. When the time came for their presentation, they were kept strictly to their allotted time.

The meeting opened with the singing of the national anthem, followed by a prayer offered by a local Baptist minister. Following the reading of the agenda, the council devoted the next 30 minutes to the presentation of six petitions. It was only then, when all matters before the council had been introduced, that the council proceeded to discuss each item and take appropriate action.

WHAT OF THE CHURCH BOARD?

What of church board meetings? Paul reminded the Corinthian church, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). Ellen White tells us that "God is a God of order. Everything connected with heaven is in perfect order; subjection and thor-

ough discipline mark the movement of the angelic host. Success can only attend order and harmonious action."¹

I was on a committee to review our denominationally-accepted rules of order and procedures for committee meetings and councils of the church. From materials already available to the church, we prepared a 27-page document.² The following is a summary of two areas that may be helpful in your local situation.

IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF MEETINGS

- Make adequate preparation for meetings. For example, make sure every item up for discussion has been processed sufficiently by the relevant persons before placing it on the agenda.
- Notify all members about when the meeting will convene.
- Adopt objective problem-solving techniques to develop proposals to be submitted for the consideration at the meeting.
- Provide an agenda with supporting papers along with the notice of the meeting.
- Where appropriate, brief those who have special considerations to make during the meeting.
- Encourage members to participate in the decision-making processes of meetings, and in the implementation of decisions.
- Transact business by having a clear motion before the meeting (the golden rule of discussion).
- Establish a subcommittee when a matter cannot be conveniently dealt with by the formal procedures of discussion at a regular meeting.
- Keep accurate, concise minutes of meetings.
- Accept the majority decisions in a Christ-like manner and implement them.
- Evaluate the success of meetings.

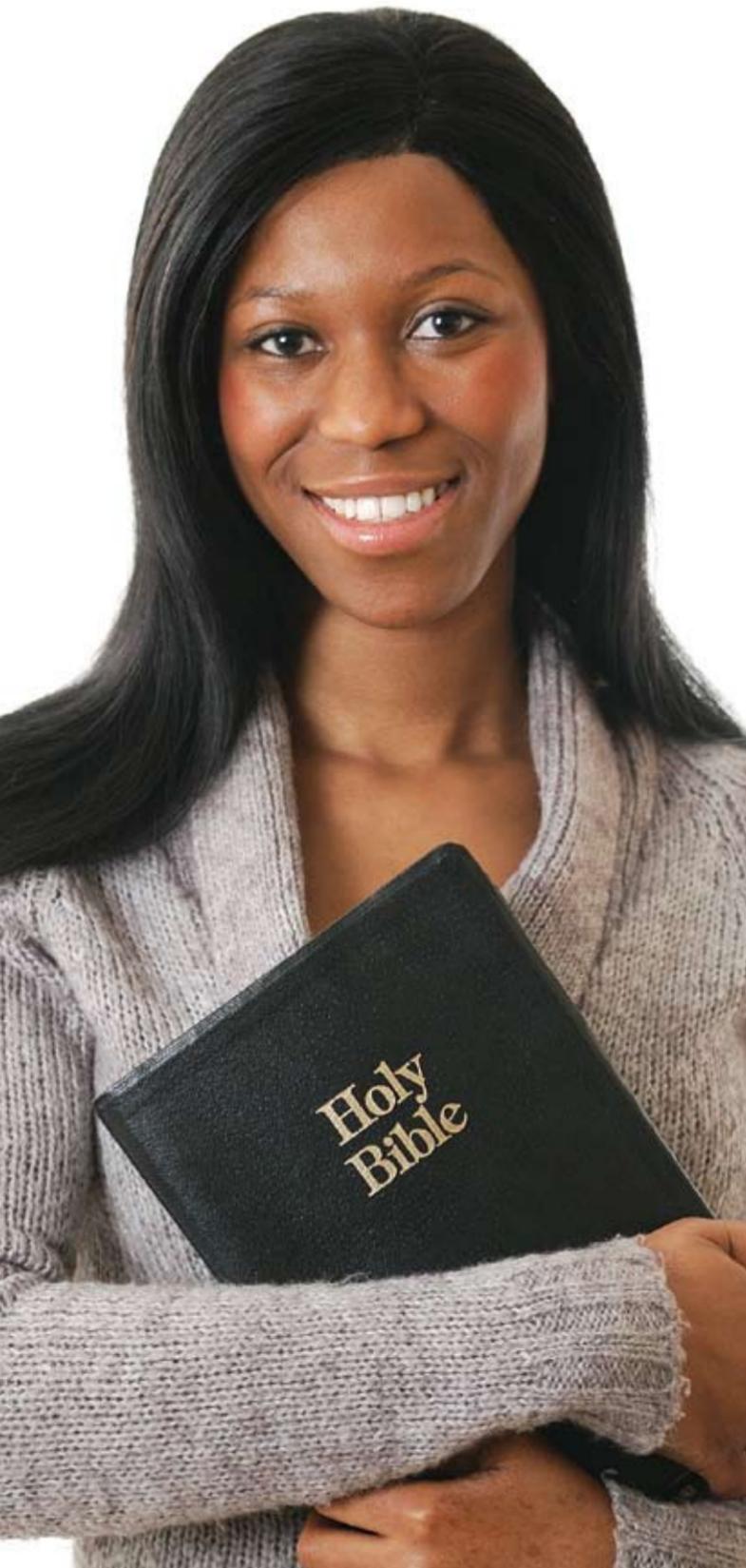
SUGGESTED EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- Was notice of the meeting and an agenda given?
- Were minutes of the previous meeting available?
- Were supporting papers made available where appropriate?
- Were objective problem-solving processes undertaken before the meeting where necessary?
- Did members arrive on time?
- Were the meeting facilities adequate?
- Was the chairperson able to minimize discussion?
- Were members encouraged to express their views?
- Did most members contribute to the discussion?
- Were all contributions relevant?
- Did members discuss the problem thoroughly before making decisions?
- Was a consensus reached?
- Did the meeting make decisions?
- Was it clear who was to implement the decisions?
- Were deadlines set for carrying out resolutions?
- Did the meeting close at the predetermined time?
- Was the meeting short enough?
- Did members do necessary preparatory work?
- Was the meeting necessary?
- Was the meeting worth its cost?

¹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), p. 376.

² *Procedures for Meetings and Rules of Order* (Wahroonga, Australia: South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, 1993).

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SABBATH OBSERVANCE

“IN CHRIST” AND THE SABBATH

Because Sabbath is about a relationship with Christ, we each can say, “Because I am in Christ, and Christ is in me, because my character has been transformed by His character, the Sabbath takes on a richer and more profound meaning for me.”

In my dissertation, I summarized the meaning of the Sabbath as follows:

The Sabbath is a holy gift of time created by God on the seventh day of creation week, given as a memorial to celebrate the power of His creation. Its sacred, delightful hours provide spiritual and physical rest and undistracted time to worship and focus on the Creator. It is “God with us” in a deeper sense than during the week. Not only does it point back to creation, but it represents redemption from sin and the future “God with us” at the second coming. It provides concentrated time for service to others and for healing. It has two dimensions: a vertical relationship focused on God and horizontal relationships with fellow human beings.^[1]

When we have a profound relationship with Jesus and understand the meaning of the Sabbath, we can more easily find guiding principles to keep the Sabbath well. Here is a list of some guiding principles for living the Sabbath, which I have derived from my statement on the meaning of the Sabbath and is based on Scripture.

PRINCIPLE 1: PREPARING

Sabbath-keeping means preparing for this special day so we can enjoy its benefits (see Hebrews 4:11; Exodus 16:28-30; Luke 23:54-56).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle

1 is based: God is a preparer. He prepared the beautiful Garden of Eden and the plan of salvation before He created humankind and the Sabbath (see Genesis 1-2; Proverbs 8:27-31; 1 Peter 1:20); He has prepared an inheritance for the redeemed, the kingdom prepared since creation (see Matthew 25:34); He has prepared a place for us—a custom-made home in heaven (see John 14:1-3); He will prepare the Holy City as a bride adorned for her husband (see Revelation 21:2).

PRINCIPLE 2: RESTING

Sabbath-keeping means resting from work, life’s burdens, and secular concerns and distractions—one of the purposes for which God gave us the gift of the Sabbath (see Exodus 16:28-29; 20:9-10; 23:12; 34:21; Nehemiah 13:15-22; Jeremiah 17:27; Luke 23:54-56).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 2 is based: God is the epitome of rest. “My soul finds rest in God alone” (Psalm 62:1, NIV). Through Jesus, God offers rest to all who come to Him (see Matthew 11:28). Jesus Himself rested on Sabbath after He worked all week creating the earth (see Genesis 2:1).

PRINCIPLE 3: RENEWING

Sabbath-keeping means observing the day in a manner that renews us physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and socially since our loving Creator provided the Sabbath vacation for our welfare (Mark 2:27). This produces a sense of well-being that lowers stress (Matthew 11:29-30).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 3 is based: God is a restorer of our being—“He restores my soul” (Psalm 23:3, NIV) He exudes renewal, (see Psalm 103:5; Matthew 11:29-30; Isaiah 40:31; 2 Corinthians 4:16).

PRINCIPLE 4: HEALING

Sabbath-keeping means observing the day in such a way as to foster healing, relief, release, liberation, and refreshment. Any action that hurts oneself or others is Sabbath-breaking. (Isaiah 58; Matthew 12:9-15; Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:38,39; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-18; and John 9).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 4 is based: God is a healer (see Exodus 15:26; Psalm 103:3; 147:3; Matthew 4:23; Acts 10:38). He has “healing in His wings” (Malachi 4:2, NKJV). God the Son announced that His mission is to restore sight to the blind and to release the oppressed (see Isaiah 61; Luke 4:18, 19).

PRINCIPLE 5: CELEBRATING

Sabbath-keeping means celebrating the creation, or birthday, of the world (see Genesis 2:1-3), and of our redemption (see Deuteronomy 5:15), so its atmosphere

should be one of celebration, joy, and delight (see Psalm 92; Isaiah 58:13).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 5 is based: God celebrates and rejoices. He celebrated creation (see Genesis 2:1-3; Proverbs 8:27-31). He rejoices when people come to him (see Deuteronomy 30:9; Isaiah 62:5; Zephaniah 3:17; Luke 15). He will celebrate at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9). He is a source of joy (see Psalm 43:4). Speaking of God, David said, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11, NKJV). “You will find your joy in the LORD” (Isaiah 58:14, NIV).

PRINCIPLE 6: SANCTIFYING

Sabbath-keeping means keeping the Sabbath day holy—setting it apart for a special focus on God, His Word, and His agenda, to seek intimacy with Him, embrace Him wholly, and nurture a love relationship with Him that makes us holy. (see Exodus 20:8; 31:13; Isaiah 58:13; Ezekiel 20:12). This nurtures our “vertical” relationship—our relationship with God.

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 6 is based: God is holy (see Leviticus 11:44; 19:2), personal and loving (see 1 John 4:8), and He seeks intimacy and special time with His family (see John 15:15; Revelation 3:20). He sanctifies, or makes holy, the Sabbath and His people (see Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:11; 31:13).

PRINCIPLE 7: REMEMBERING

Sabbath-keeping means remembering, reflecting, and rejoicing about the Creation of the world (see Exodus 20:11), redemption from sin (see Deuteronomy 5:15; Luke 4:16-19), and Christ’s second coming and the creation of the new earth (see Isaiah 66:22, 23).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 7 is based: God remembers and reflects on important happenings. For example, He paused to reflect on His accomplishments at creation (see Genesis 1:4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:2, 3; Exodus 20:11). He remembers His covenants with humanity (see Genesis 9:15, 16; Leviticus 26:42, 45).

PRINCIPLE 8: WORSHIPPING

Sabbath-keeping means participating in corporate, focused worship of God with our church family (see Leviticus 23:3; Isaiah 56:1-8; 66:22, 23; Mark 1:21; 3:1-4; Luke 4:16; 13:10; Hebrews 10:25; Revelation 14:7). This nurtures both our “vertical” and our “horizontal” relationships—those with God and with our fellow human beings.

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 8 is based: God desires corporate worship (see Isaiah 66:22, 23). Jesus attended and led out in worship services while on earth (see Luke 4:16).

THE EXCUSES OF MOSES

Exodus 3:1–4:17

PRINCIPLE 9: BASKING

Sabbath-keeping means enjoying, studying, experiencing, and basking in the world God made, rather than working at maintaining it (see Psalms 92:4, 5; 111:2-4; compare Romans 1:20). At creation, God was filled with satisfaction, rejoicing “in his whole world and delighting in mankind” (Proverbs. 8:31, NIV).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 9 is based: God is Creator, and He appreciates His creation—He considered it all “very good” (Genesis 1:31, NIV).

PRINCIPLE 10: RESPONDING

Sabbath-keeping is a joyful human response to God’s grace in obedience to His loving command to remember Him and His Sabbath gift (see John 14:15). It is not meant to be a means of earning our salvation (see Romans 3:20; Hebrews 4:9, 10). We respond to God’s gift of rest by working for Him in His strength and for His glory (see Exodus 20:8, 9; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Hebrews 13:20, 21).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 10 is based: Love motivated Jesus’ keeping of His Father’s commandments (see John 15:10).

PRINCIPLE 11: TRUSTING

Sabbath-keeping means trusting God to take care of what we leave undone during the hours of the Sabbath (see Exodus 16:14-30; 20:10; Psalm 5:11, 12; Matthew 6:33). It means learning to depend on God rather than on ourselves.

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 11 is based: Jesus trusted His Father no matter how much Satan tempted Him to do otherwise (see Luke 4:1-13). He demonstrated this trusting attitude as He suffered for our Salvation (see Matthew 26:39; Luke 23:46).

PRINCIPLE 12: FELLOWSHIPING

Sabbath-keeping means nurturing our relationships with family and friends (see Mark 1:29-31; Luke 14:1). In the gift of the Sabbath, God provides time for focused fellowship with the whole family—even the family animals (see Exodus 20:8-11). Sabbath and family go together (see Genesis 1:1-2:25; Leviticus 19:3). This nurtures our “horizontal” relationships—those with our fellow human beings.

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 12 is based: The members of the Godhead are relational (see John 15:15). God’s relationship with us is the foundation of our relationship with each other (see John 13:34,



So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Genesis 2:3



35; 17:20-23). Jesus fellowshiped with others on Sabbath (see Mark 1:29-31; Luke 14:1).

PRINCIPLE 13: AFFIRMING

Sabbath-keeping means rightly representing the atmosphere of the Sabbath by a spirit of acceptance, love, and affirmation rather than a spirit of judgment and criticism (see John 7:24).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 13 is based: God is accepting, loving, and affirming (see Matthew 11:28; John 3:16; Romans 8:38; Ephesians 1:3-10; Revelation 22:17).

PRINCIPLE 14: SERVING

Sabbath-keeping means serving other people in love and witnessing lovingly for God (see Isaiah 58:7-10; Matthew 12:12; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9; 13:12, 16).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 14 is based: Jesus is a Servant and Proclaimer of the Good News (see Luke 4:18-21; Philippians 2:5-11). He went about doing good (see Acts 10:38).

PRINCIPLE 15: CARING

Sabbath-keeping means caring for necessary physical needs on Sabbath; no creature—animal or human—should be allowed to suffer on this day (see Exodus 23:12; Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 2:27).

Characteristic of God’s person on which Principle 15 is based: God supplies all our needs, all the time (see Exodus 16:26, 35; Joshua 5:12; Matthew 6:25-33; John 5:16, 17; Philippians 4:19), and He advocates that we care for the needs of all His creatures (Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5).

The principles above are based on God’s character, and they provide a foundation for our Sabbath rules/practices. God will help us to reflect and live His character as we translate these principles into actions. What better day to reflect His nature than on Sabbath—the day above all days!

^[1] May-Ellen M. Colón, “Sabbath-keeping Practices and Factors Related to These Practices Among Seventh-day Adventists in 51 Countries,” Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2003, pp. 25, 26.

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When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He called him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. In response, Moses made up excuses, telling God why he was not the man for the job.

In this sermon, we will look at Moses’ excuses and God’s response to them. As God’s people today, we, like Moses, have received from God a special calling. We are called not to deliver people from physical bondage but to preach Christ’s message of deliverance to a world in bondage to sin. We are called to “go into the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15; 1 Peter 2:9, 10). Too often, though, we behave just like Moses, making excuses.

Let’s begin by reviewing the story of how God called Moses. (Read Exod. 3:1-10). Now let’s consider the five excuses given by Moses.

I. “WHO AM I?” (EXOD. 3:11)

Remember that Moses was once a member of the ruling house of Egypt. But now he was a humble shepherd. It had been 40 years since he had been in Egypt. He was 80 years old, already past the average lifespan for his generation.

For these reasons Moses wondered whether he was the right man for the job. But God’s response was quick and should have been adequate as He assured Moses, “I will certainly be with you” (Exod. 3:12). God promised to be with Moses, and this alone should have been enough.

Some of us may insist that we are insufficient for the task. It is true that by ourselves we are insufficient, but God can make us sufficient. (Read 2 Cor. 3:5, 6). Look what He did with the apostles, those 12 uneducated and untrained men (Acts 4:13).

Through Jesus, God has provided us the same assurance given to Moses (Matt. 28:20). With His help, we can accomplish anything He wants us to do. We can say with Paul, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13).

Our excuses for not doing what the Lord has called us to do are lame and may merely indicate a lack of faith, yet we come up with excuse after excuse. When Moses’ first excuse was refuted, he quickly came up with another.

II. “WHAT SHALL I SAY?” (EXOD. 3:13)

Moses knew that if he went to the

children of Israel, they were bound to ask questions such as, “Who is this God who sent you to us? Why are we to leave the country that has been our home for the past 400 years?”

Again, God’s response was quick. (Read Exod. 3:14, 15). God told Moses what he should say in response to the Israelites’ questions.

Again, we sometimes use the same excuse today. We may try to excuse ourselves by saying that our knowledge is inadequate. But God has told us what to say. It is really quite simple. (Read Mark 16:15, 16.) How simple? (Read 1 Cor. 15:1-4; 2:2).

As we return to the story, we see that although God told Moses what to say, Moses soon raised a third objection.

III. “SUPPOSE THEY WILL NOT BELIEVE ME?” (EXOD. 4:1)

Now that he had been given words to say, Moses suggested that the people might not listen to him. Had he already forgotten that God would be with him? God responded by equipping him with several convincing proofs to demonstrate to the dubious Israelites.

- Moses’ staff, which turned into a serpent (Exod. 4:2-5).
- His own hand, which turned leprous (Exod. 4:6-8).
- The water, which turned to blood when it fell on dry ground (Exod. 4:9).

Some today hesitate for the same reason. The fear of failure keeps us from trying. But just as God gave Moses convincing evidence, so He has given us the evidences necessary to convince the honest and sincere person.

The Word of God, especially its evidence concerning the resurrection of Christ and fulfilled prophecy, is able to produce faith (Rom. 10:17; John 20:30, 31). For this reason, we cannot justify not sharing the gospel with others. One would think that by this point in his discussion with God, Moses would accept the call, but he quickly concocted a fourth excuse.

IV. “I AM SLOW OF SPEECH AND SLOW OF TONGUE” (EXOD. 4:10)

Moses claimed that he was not an eloquent speaker, but God was not moved by this objection.

- He already knows the inability of those He calls (Exod. 4:11).
- Again He promised to be with

Moses (Exod. 4:12).

• He had even arranged a mouthpiece for Moses (Exod. 4:14-16): his brother Aaron. Aaron was sent earlier so as to arrive at the right time (Exod. 4:27).

Some Christians also try to use this excuse. They lament that they cannot speak well or are too timid to speak in public. But fear did not stop the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 2:1, 3, 4), and it has not stopped others. Some have even overcome real speech impediments to become preachers. I know of one who, despite a severe stammer, preached at any opportunity.

We have considered four excuses that Moses gave, but as we can see, they were not really valid. In Exodus 4:13, we learn the true reason that Moses kept making excuses.

V. “PLEASE SEND SOMEONE ELSE”

Moses simply did not want to go! His previous excuses were simply attempts to hide the fact that he did not want to accept God’s challenge. Now that the facade is removed, God’s impatience with Moses becomes evident. His anger is kindled against Moses (Exod. 4:14a). (Read verses 15-17 with an emphasis on the word “shall” to appreciate the anger of the Lord).

We may find similar parallels in our own lives. Usually the excuses we dream up are just that—excuses—not valid reasons. We would rather God send someone else! We really don’t want to do what God has called us to do.

CONCLUSION

With Moses, we know the rest of the story. He answered the call and went to Egypt. He led the children of Israel as God delivered them out of Egyptian bondage. In humility he trusted God and accepted the enormous challenge that had been given to him.

But what about us? What will be the rest of our story? Will we listen to the call to share the gospel with the lost? Will we listen to the call to obey the gospel of Christ? Or will we make excuses and one day suffer the wrath of God? Only time will tell, but if you know what you should do, follow Moses’ example and respond to God’s loving call.

General Conference Ministerial Association

PERSONAL EVANGELISM PRINCIPLES

John 4:1-26

Most Christians want to share the gospel of Christ with others. But many people feel awkward in their attempts to talk with others, or they simply don't know how to establish contacts for a Bible study. Thus many experience frustration that discourages them from trying again.

Jesus, the Master Teacher in evangelism, often engaged in personal evangelism as well as public preaching. For example, think about His conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:1-26). Observing Jesus in action, it is possible to glean some principles of personal evangelism.

I. CONTACT PEOPLE SOCIALLY

We must have social contact. In John 4:1-6, we can see the importance of Jesus passing through Samaria. Because of their disdain for Samaritans, many Jews avoided Samaria. Jesus and His disciples chose to pass through Samaria, assuring contact. A similar example of Jesus making social contact is found in Luke 5:29-32.

When people aren't coming to Christ, it's because we are not going to the people! We can't be fishers of men by fishing in a barrel; if the fish won't come to the barrel, then we must go where the fish are! The problem with sowing the seed is not that there is no good ground, but that the seed is still in the barn (Hag. 2:19).

A. *Do not confuse separation with isolation.* Yes, the Bible tells us to be separated from the world (2 Cor. 6:14-18). But this does not mean we are to isolate ourselves. Note the prayer of Christ (John 17:15). Note the command of Paul (1 Cor. 5:9-11). Withdrawing ourselves from those who have not heard or obeyed the gospel is contrary to the will of the Lord!

- B. *Opportunities for social contact.*
- *At school* with fellow students. Don't think you are too young to be involved in leading others to Christ.
 - *At work* with fellow employees or employers. We spend much of our lives with these people, and we have great potential to influence them, especially by our example.
 - *At home* with neighbors, friends, and family. Do we even know our neighbors? Those closest to us can be difficult sometimes, but they are reachable (Matt. 13:54-58).

Remember, Jesus said "Go into all the world" (Mark 16:15). We must go where the people are!

II. ESTABLISH A COMMON INTEREST

Common interests create a bridge.

Note Jesus' first words to the woman (John 4:7, 8). She had come to draw water. He was thirsty. His first words centered around their common interest—water.

Common interests are many. They include *family* (such as children, grandchildren); *activities* (such as work, community projects, hobbies); *shared experiences* (such as travel or even tragedies), etc. Don't feel that you must immediately begin talking about spiritual matters. Take time to nurture common interests.

III. AROUSE SPIRITUAL INTEREST

We can arouse spiritual interest by showing kindness and compassion to all, even the evil and the wicked. Don't harbor racial or social prejudices toward those who are different. Set an example of faith and hope (1 Peter 3:1, 2, 15).

At the well, Jesus' statement shifted the conversation to spiritual matters. He led the woman into a discussion on a common spiritual interest (living water).

We can raise questions or make statements that shift conversations to spiritual matters. For example: "Why do you think our world is in such a mess? Would you be interested in what the Bible says about . . . ?" The discussion should first involve matters of common agreement. Start with things upon which you agree, to build rapport and instill confidence. This was the practice of apostolic preaching (Acts 13:16-22).

IV. DON'T GO TOO FAR, TOO FAST

Give a person what they can handle. Note Jesus' discussion with the woman. She wanted "living water," but did she really understand what it was? Jesus saw the need to slow her down and provide the proper groundwork. She needed faith in Him as the Messiah. He needed to provide evidence that He was the Messiah.

Some people want to study Revelation before they are grounded in the rest of the Bible. Some want to discuss issues related to church organization, work, worship, etc., when they ought to focus on the "first principles" of the gospel. It is important that a person not choke on the "meat" of the Word (1 Cor. 3:1, 2).

V. DON'T CONDEMN UNNECESSARILY

Jesus could have focused on the fact that the woman was an adulteress. But as was stated elsewhere, Jesus came to save the world, not to condemn it (John 3:17).

This is not to say that He will never judge the world, but rather that the primary purpose of His first coming was to offer salvation (John 12:46-48). God seeks reconciliation with sinners, and ours is a ministry of reconciliation too.

VI. STICK WITH THE MAIN ISSUE

In the case of the Samaritan woman, she turned the subject away from herself to where one should worship. Jesus answered her question while effectively turning the conversation back to the original subject: Who He is and what He offers (John 4:21-25).

In seeking to establish a common ground of agreement, avoid jumping ahead. As you move from common to uncommon ground, take one step at a time. Do not go on until agreement at each step has occurred. If your objective is simply to obtain consent for a home Bible study, avoid getting into a detailed discussion at that time (Prov. 15:28).

VII. CONFRONT DIRECTLY

Finally, Jesus confronted the woman with His identity (John 4:26). This came after He had laid the groundwork.

In trying to set up a home Bible study, take advantage of social contacts. Develop common interests. Be open to comments that indicate a spiritual interest while demonstrating your own faith through actions and words. Avoid fruitless arguments; instead, emphasize common beliefs. Praise a person's good points and encourage him or her in the right direction.

Have one primary objective: to encourage the person to study the Bible even more. Ask if he or she would like to learn more about Jesus, the Bible, the church, and gospel plan of salvation (Mark 16:15, 16; 1 Cor. 1:5, 6).

CONCLUSION

The result of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman was the conversion of many people in the city of Sychar. This demonstrates the potential of personal evangelism. Who knows whether the one person you teach may in turn bring many to Christ? That one person may be like a seed from which many seeds may come forth.

Realizing this potential, we can better appreciate the words of Jesus. (Read John 4:35).

General Conference Ministerial Association

EVERYTHING I HAVE BELONGS TO GOD

Acts 3:6

“Money is a blessing when those who use it consider that they are the Lord's stewards, that they are handling the Lord's capital, and must one day give account of their stewardship.”

Ellen White
Our High Calling, p.192

The book of Acts relates the history of Christianity from the point where the Gospels end. After Jesus' ascension to Heaven, the Holy Spirit was manifested in a singular way, and the apostles were progressing with dynamism and vigor, courageously proclaiming the story of the resurrected Christ.

Doubtless the book of Acts narrates only a few of the wonderful events that took place. The Holy Spirit counseled Luke to record Peter and John's visit to the temple, where they cured a man who had been lame from birth. Peter's words may have sounded a little strange when he declared, "Silver and gold I do not have . . .," but how striking was the fact that he took the man by the hand, raised him, and, through the Holy Spirit, cured him!

That day, a double miracle occurred. The man jumped up the moment he was cured and learned to walk.

This story teaches us an important lesson about stewardship. Today we need to do for the love of Jesus whatever we can with what we have, wherever we are, and never wait for great opportunities or for a time when more abilities and resources are available.

I. MONEY IS NOT EVERYTHING

When we talk about stewardship, it is common to think in terms of money, but it's clear that money is not the most important thing in this story. In fact, Peter attributed a smaller importance to money when he declared "Silver and gold I do not have" and then performed the miracle.

Is it possible that we have reached a time in the life of a church or religious organization when money is a stumbling block?

During a visit to the pope, Thomas Aquinas, an imminent religious leader, was shown all the treasures of the Roman Catholic Church. The pope said, "Well, Thomas, the Church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold I do not have.'" Thomas immediately answered, "Yes, holy Father, but have you realized that the church is also at risk of not being able to say, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!'"

II. BUT MONEY IS IMPORTANT

What we have just considered is true, but something else is also true: Money is necessary to move forward with God's

work in the world. The Word of God says a lot regarding stewardship of our assets and giving money to God's cause. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul devotes chapters 8 and 9 to the subject of donating material goods. He states, "But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also" (2 Cor. 8:7). The apostle emphasizes that our supreme example in the act of giving is the Lord Jesus Christ who, although rich, became poor so that through His poverty, we could be rich.

God gave some people the ability to make a lot of money. Their duty is to give a good part of their money to the work of preaching the gospel.

In Old Testament times, a 10 percent tithe was the minimum to be given. However, considering all the special offerings and additional tithes, an Old Testament believer gave much more than 10 percent.

III. HOW MUCH DO YOU HAVE?

What can we offer God? A generation ago, the emphasis was in a person's talents and abilities. Today, however, we talk about gifts. We could make a distinction between the two, but we are not concerned about this distinction at the moment. On the contrary, the question to ask is: "What do I have to offer my Lord?" Another question immediately follows: "Am I willing to give my-

self—including my talents, abilities, and gifts—so that God can use me as He sees best?"

When General Pershing disembarked in France with the American Expeditionary Force during World War I, he and his troops presented themselves to General Foch, commander of the Allied Forces. In the presence of Foch, he said, "Our men, our arms, our resources, and everything we have are yours. Use them as you see best." God hopes to hear the same statement from every Christian.

Stewardship means giving everything we have to our Master, without reservation, for the service of His kingdom.

CONCLUSION

All who believe in Christ and dedicate themselves to Him have great riches. These gifts, however, are spiritual resources. A Christian's greatest happiness should be to share the gospel with others, through words and example. This, however, does not exempt the Christian from the duty to support God's work financially.

A true believer in Christ should be liberal and compassionate. When it comes to financial matters, we cannot escape our responsibility, arguing that we are "spiritual" and therefore not required to give financial gifts. In Old Testament times, even the Levites returned a tithe from the tithes.

On the other hand, our financial donations do not exempt us from serving in other ways. Stewardship involves our lifestyle as well as our finances. When it comes to stewardship, it is not a matter of one or the other. Time, talent, tithe, influence—everything we have belongs to God.

General Conference Ministerial Association

Sermon Notes:

A NATION OF PRIESTS

1 Peter 2:9, 10

Paul's ministry was dedicated especially to the Christian Jews (Gal. 2:8), but he did not discriminate against anyone. Peter was the first apostle to defend the inclusion of Gentiles in the gospel message (Acts 11:17).

Peter's message is not about discrimination between Jews and Gentiles, but between Christians and non-Christians.

In the verses prior to today's text, Peter points out that Jesus is the living stone (Acts 2:4-8). He also says that Christians are stones in the building of a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). Then he reaches the heart of today's theme: In contrast with non-believers, believers have a sublime call.

I. CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE

When Paul says that Christians are "a chosen people," he is referring to the new Israel, not the ancient one. Here the word "people" refers to folk born of common lineage who live in communities.

Spiritually speaking, the church has a life in common, for Christ's life is shared by all; church members have a common lineage, for they partake of the new birth, being children of God.

The people of Israel were a chosen people (Isa. 43:10), but they lost their privileges through their disobedience and hardness of heart. Now God granted the Christian community the privileges and responsibilities formerly held by the Jewish nation. Thus the frontiers of the people of God are opened to include people of all origins.

II. CHRISTIAN DIGNITY

A. *Christians are a "royal priesthood" and "royal house."* In Revelation 1:6, we read, "And has made us kings and priests to His God and Father." Exodus 19:6 talks about a kingdom of priests. "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

B. *Christians are a "royal house."* In Hebrews 4:14, 16, Jesus Christ is shown as the enthroned High Priest. He is the King-Priest. As priests, Christians have direct access to God through Jesus and are responsible for bringing others to Him.

In the final celebration of Revelation, the Lamb is praised with a song for having purchased men from every tribe, tongue, and nation. The song says, "And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10).



The spiritual life of the church can be kept alive only as the members make personal efforts to win souls to Christ.



Ellen White
The Signs of the Times
December 20, 1899.

C. *What was the priest's duty?* "The priest was a person duly authorized to minister in sacred things as a mediator between man and God, and to offer sacrifices for the sins of men" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*).

D. *What is a Christian's duty as priest?* We have a double duty: to offer praise to God and to intercede for our neighbors. As priests, may we enter into the sanctuary? Paul says, "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him" (Eph. 3:12).

III. CHRISTIAN QUALITY

Christians are called a "holy nation," a designation that surpasses their ethnic identity.

A. *We are not in the royal home merely to enjoy the power.* We are a holy nation, set apart from the world, set apart from its evil and corruption, separated for God. The fundamental idea of the word "separated" is moral and spiritual purity; it does not mean to live in isolation, without contact with the world.

B. *"Separated" means to have different practices and habits,* following God's will, independent from the habits and values of the world in which we live. We are separate because we live according to a culture that differs from the world's. We have values unlike those of our society. We are citizens of a better kingdom. Our minds, our words, our habits, our aspirations, and our acts should all demonstrate that.

C. *"God's people are to be distinguished as a people who serve Him fully, wholeheartedly, taking no honor to*

themselves, and remembering that by a most solemn covenant they have bound themselves to serve the Lord and Him only" (Ellen G. White, *Testimony Treasures*, 3:286).

IV. CHRISTIAN PECULIARITY

The phrase "God's peculiar people" literally means "a people for acquisition, a people for God's possession, a people that, in fact, belong to God and who demonstrate this through their acts pleasing to the Lord." First Corinthians 6:19, 20 says that we are bought with a price.

Jesus has redeemed us to live apart from sin. "Any sin in them separates them from God and, in a special manner, dishonors His name by giving the enemies of His holy law occasion to reproach His cause and His people, whom He has called 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people' (1 Peter 2:9), that they should show forth the praises of Him that hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light" (Ellen G. White, *Testimony Treasures*, 1:264).

Isaiah expands on this concept, saying, "This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise" (Isa. 43:21).

We are called to praise God. The gospel's efficiency in our life—transforming us, molding us, removing us from sin, and carrying us into the kingdom of light—is an object of astonishment before the universe and even the angels of darkness.

A people like this, of priests, of kings, holy and peculiar to God, "proclaims the virtues of Him who called us."

CONCLUSION (READ 1 PETER 2:10)

What a great privilege God gives us! To be saved would already be an incomparable privilege, but we are not only to be rescued from death. God gives us more than we could ask for or imagine. In Him we become a people who are the peculiar property of God, a people of priests, members of the royal family of Heaven.

Let us live up to this incredible privilege. Let us become this kind of priestly Christians and intercessors.

Licuis Lindquist is an editor for Brazilian Publishing House.

HEALTHY TIPS FOR ELDERS

LEARNING TO "PUT THE GLASS DOWN"

A lecturer raised a glass of water and asked, "How heavy is this glass of water?" Audience members called out answers ranging from 20g to 500g (less than one ounce to more than one pound). The lecturer replied, "The absolute weight doesn't matter. It depends on how long you try to hold it. If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm. If I hold it for a day, you'll have to call an ambulance. In each case, it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes."

"And that's the way it is with stress," he continued. "If we carry our burdens all the time, they become increasingly heavy, and we won't be able to carry on. As with the glass of water, we have to put our burdens down for a while and rest before picking them up again. When we're refreshed, we can carry on with our burdens."

We usually think of stress as being caused by negative pressures or unhappy life events; however, sometimes we do not realize that even "good pressures" (working for a good cause, such as in service to God) may also result in the unhealthy effects of prolonged stress. The key is balance. If we are not getting proper rest, our bodies may experience profound physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual damage. We must remember that as elders in God's service, it is our duty to "put down the glass" for a while and rest.

This health concept was best exemplified by Christ Himself. He had a perfect sense of when to serve and minister to others and when to stop and rest. In Mark 1:35-38, we read about a time when the crowd was looking for Jesus, seeking to be healed, to listen to His words, to be in His presence. But after a long day of ministering to their needs, Christ woke up early the next day to rest and commune with God. When the disciples found Him praying and resting under a tree, they told Him, "Master, the multitude is looking for you." Instead of going to attend to the needs of the crowd, Jesus instead decided to leave and go to another town. One may wonder how He could leave that needy multitude,

but Jesus knew His mission, and the Holy Spirit revealed to Him daily when to say "Yes" and when to say "No" when He rested in God's presence. God gave Him the necessary wisdom to know when it was time to "put the glass down" for a while before taking it up again.

We all believe that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and that we must "glorify God with our body" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20), but it is easy to be so engaged in ministry and service for Him that we forget the principle of rest for the mind, body, and soul. God never asked us to sacrifice our health and our families to His service. Instead, He created us to live balanced, full, and abundant lives (John 10:10). To achieve that kind of life, we must take time to rest, to enjoy His presence alone, and to enjoy the companionship of our family and loved ones. That is an important part of our ministry. We are reminded today to follow Jesus' example to "put our worries and our work for Him down for a while," seeking rest in His presence. We can pick up our tasks tomorrow or the day after, reenergized and better prepared to fulfill our mission and glorify Him with our bodies.

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SABBATH OBSERVANCE

GUIDELINES - PART 1



INTRODUCTION by George W. Reid

This document was prepared by a special Commission appointed in 1981 by the officers of the General Conference with the assignment of studying the biblical passages involved, reviewing how Seventh-day Adventists observe the Sabbath in various parts of the world, and dealing with the challenges confronting those seeking to worship God in true Sabbath reverence.

The Commission's report was presented to the General Conference session of 1985 and formally received by vote of the delegates. It is not intended to serve as a set of ecclesiastical legislations, but instead to make available the results of exploring the elements involved in faithful Sabbath observance. As such it represents recommendations from a diverse international Commission of Seventh-day Adventists. This study was presented to the church following extensive research in the Scriptures and thoughtful reflections on how best to respect God's hallowed day of rest, given to Adam and Eve as a part of the Creation.

Although its work was based on careful study of the Scriptures, accompanied by the counsels of the Spirit of Prophecy, the Commission was specifically asked to address and make recommendations on how best to deal with contemporary issues that impact Sabbath observance today. Therefore the reader will find a number of quite specific recommendations that address specific matters, although many more could easily come to mind. The study was presented in the interest of encouraging worldwide unity of understanding and practice among Seventh-day Adventists, who now represent the largest Sabbath-observing faith community in the world, being present in more than 200 of the world's nations.

SABBATH OBSERVANCE - GUIDELINES

PURPOSE AND PERSPECTIVE

The main objective of this document on Sabbath observance is to provide counsel or guidelines to church members desiring a richer, more meaningful experience in Sabbathkeeping. It is hoped that this will provide an impetus toward a real reform in Sabbathkeeping on a worldwide basis.

Conscious of the fact that the worldwide worshiping community encounters numerous problems in Sabbath observance arising from within a given cultural and ideological context, an attempt has been made to take these difficulties into consideration. It is not the intent of this document to address every question pertaining to Sabbathkeeping, but rather to present biblical principles and Spirit of Prophecy guidelines that will assist the church members as they endeavor to follow the leading of the Lord. It is hoped that the counsel given in the document will be helpful. Ultimately, however, decisions made under critical circumstances must be motivated by one's personal faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

SABBATH - A SAFEGUARD OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Sabbath encompasses our entire relationship with God. It is an indication of God's action on our behalf in the past, present, and future. The Sabbath protects man's friendship with God and provides the time essential for the development of that relationship. The Sabbath clarifies the relation between God and the human family, for it points to God as Creator at a time when human beings would like to usurp God's position in the universe.

In this age of materialism, the Sabbath points men and women to the spiritual and to the personal. The consequences for forgetting the Sabbath day to keep it holy are serious. It will lead to the distortion and eventual destruction of a person's relationship with God.

When the Sabbath is kept, it is a witness to the rest that comes from trusting God alone as our sustainer, as the basis of our salvation, and as the ground of our hope in the future. As such, the Sabbath is a delight because we have entered God's rest and have accepted the invitation to fellowship with Him.

When God asks us to remember the Sabbath day, He does so because He wants us to remember Him.

PRINCIPLES AND THEOLOGY OF SABBATH OBSERVANCE

Nature and Purpose of the Sabbath. The origin of the Sabbath lies in Creation when God rested from His work on the seventh day (Gen. 1-3). The Sabbath has significance as a perpetual sign of the everlasting covenant between God and His people in order that they might know who it is that created them (Ex. 31:17) and sanctifies them (Ex. 31:13; Eze. 20:12), and that they might recognize Him as the Lord their God (Eze. 20:20).

Uniqueness of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a special occasion for worshiping God as Creator and Redeemer and as the Lord of life with whom the human family will be reunited at the Second Advent. The Sabbath commandment forms the center of the moral law as the seal of God's authority. Since it is a symbol of God's love relationship with His earthly children, human beings are obliged to respect this gift in the sense that they will do everything in their power to promote and engage in activities that will help establish and enhance a lasting relationship with God. Thus His people will engage only in those activities that are directed toward God and their fellowmen, and not in those that lean toward self-gratification or self-interest.

Universality of the Sabbath. The universality of the Sabbath is rooted in Creation. Thus its privileges and obligations are binding in all nations, sectors, or classes. (See Ex. 20:11; 23:12; Deut. 5:15; Isa. 56:1-8.) Sabbath observance pertains to all members of the household, including children, and extends even "to the stranger that is within thy gates" (Ex. 20:10).

Time Frame of the Sabbath. Biblical Data: The Sabbath starts at the end of the sixth day of the week and lasts one day, from evening to evening (Genesis 1; Mark 1:32). This time coincides with the time of sunset. Whenever a clear delineation of the time of sunset is difficult to ascertain, the Sabbathkeeper will begin the Sabbath at the end of the day as marked by the diminishing light.

Principles Guiding Sabbath Observance. Although the Bible does not deal directly with many of the specific questions we may have regarding Sabbath observance in our day, it does provide us with general principles that are applicable today. (See Ex. 16:29; 20:8-11; 34:21; Isa. 58:13; Neh. 13:15-22.)

"The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 207).

This concept, however, is not supportive of total inactivity. Both the Old and New Testaments invite us to care for the needs and alleviate the sufferings of others, for the Sabbath is a good day for all, particularly the lowly and the oppressed (Ex. 23:12; Matt. 12:10-13; Mark 2:27; Luke 13:11-17; John 9:1-21).

Yet even good works on the Sabbath must not obscure the chief biblical characteristic of Sabbath observance, namely, rest (Gen. 2:1-3). This includes both physical (Ex. 23:12) and spiritual rest in God (Matt. 11:28). The latter leads the Sabbath observer to seek the presence of and communion with God in worship (Isa. 48:14), both in quiet meditation (Matt. 12:1-8) and in public worship (2 Kings 4:23; 11:4-12; 1 Chron. 23:30ff.; Isa. 56:1-8). Its object is to recognize God as Creator and Redeemer (Gen. 2:1-3; Deut. 5:12-15), and it is to be shared by the individual family and the larger community (Isa. 56:1-8).

Sabbath and the Authority of God's Word. Ellen White points out that the Sabbath commandment is unique, for it contains the seal of God's law. It alone "brings to view both the name and the title of the Lawgiver. It declares Him to be the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and thus shows His claim to reverence and worship above all others. Aside from this precept, there is nothing in the Decalogue to show by whose authority the law is given" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 452).

The Sabbath as a sign of the Creator points to His ownership and authority. Meaningful Sabbath observance, therefore, indicates the acceptance of God as Creator and Owner, and acknowledges His authority over all creation, including oneself. Sabbath observance is based on the authority of God's Word. There is no other logical reason for it.

Human beings have the freedom to enter into a relationship with the Creator of the universe as with a personal friend.

Sabbathkeepers may have to face resistance at times because of their commitment to God to keep the Sabbath holy. To those who do not recognize God as their Creator, it seems arbitrary or inexplicable for someone to cease from all work on the Sabbath day for merely religious reasons. Meaningful Sabbath observance testifies to the fact that we have chosen to obey God's commandment. We thus recognize that our life is now lived in obedience to God's Word. The Sabbath will be a special test in the end-time. The believer will have to make a choice either to give allegiance to God's Word or to human authority (Rev. 14:7, 12).

HOME AND FAMILY LIFE AS RELATED TO THE SABBATH

Introduction. Home life is the cornerstone of proper Sabbath observance. Only when individuals keep the Sabbath conscientiously in the home and assume their assigned responsibilities as members of the family will the church as a whole reveal to the world the joys and privileges of God's holy day.

Different Kinds of Homes. In the twentieth century there are various kinds of homes: for example, the home in which there is a husband, wife, and children; the home in which there is husband and wife and no children; the home in which there is a single parent and children (where because of death or divorce one parent must function in both maternal and paternal roles); the home in which a person has never married or where death or divorce has left one single, and no children are involved; or the home in which one parent only is a member of the church. In addressing the needs and problems of these categories, it should be understood that some of the principles and suggestions enunciated will apply to all groups and some will be more specialized.

Two Sacred Institutions—The Home and the Sabbath. "In the beginning" God placed a man and a woman in the Garden of Eden as their home. Also, "in the beginning" God gave to human beings the Sabbath. These two institutions, the home and the Sabbath, belong together. Both are gifts from God. Therefore both are sacred, the latter strengthening and enriching in its unique manner the bond of the former.

Close fellowship is an important element of the home. Close fellowship with other human beings also is an important element of the Sabbath. It binds families closer to God and binds the individual members closer to one

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I know him, that
he will command
his children and his
household after him.

Genesis 18:19



another. Viewed from this perspective, the importance of the Sabbath to the home cannot be overestimated.

Responsibilities of Adults as Teachers. In choosing Abraham as the father of the chosen people, God said, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him" (Gen. 18:19). It seems clear, then, that an enormous responsibility has been given to adults in the home for the spiritual welfare of their children. By both precept and example, they must provide the kind of structure and atmosphere that will make the Sabbath a delight and such a vital

part of Christian living that, long after leaving the home, the children will continue the customs they were taught in childhood.

In harmony with the injunction "Thou shalt teach them [God's commandments] diligently unto thy children" (cf. Deut. 6:4-9), the adult members of the family should teach their children to love God and keep His commandments. They should teach them to be loyal to God and to follow His directives.

From earliest infancy children should be taught to participate in family worship so that worship in the house of God will become an extension of a family custom. Also, from infancy children should be taught the importance of church attendance, that true Sabbath observance involves going to God's house for worship and Bible study. Adults in the family should set the example by attending services on Sabbath, providing a pattern that will be seen as important when their children make decisions on what is of value in life. Through discussions, as the children grow older and more mature, and through Bible study, the children should be taught the meaning of the Sabbath, its relationship to Christian living, and the enduring quality of the Sabbath.

Preparation for the Sabbath. If the Sabbath is to be observed properly, the entire week should be programmed in such a way that every member will be ready to welcome God's holy day when it arrives. This means that the adult family members will plan so that all household tasks—the buying and preparing of food, the readying of clothes, and all the other necessities of everyday life—will be completed before sundown Friday. The day of rest should become the pivot around which the wheel of the entire week turns. When Friday night approaches and sundown is near, adults and children will be able to greet the Sabbath with tranquility of mind, with all preparation finished, and with the home in readiness to

spend the next 24 hours with God and with one another. Children can help achieve this by carrying Sabbath preparation responsibilities commensurate with their maturity. The way the family approaches the beginning of the Sabbath at sundown on Friday night and the way Friday night is spent will set the stage for receiving the blessings that the Lord has in store for the entire day that follows.

Proper Sabbath Dress. Where there are children in the home, on Sabbath morning as the family dresses for church, adults may by precept and example teach children that one way to honor God is to appear in His house in clean, representative clothing appropriate to the culture in which they live.

Importance of Bible Study Hour. Where children do not have the advantage of attending Adventist schools, the Sabbath school becomes the most important means of religious instruction outside the home. The value of this Bible study hour cannot be overestimated. Therefore, parents should attend Sabbath morning services and do everything possible to take their children with them.

Family Activities on the Sabbath. In most cultures the Sabbath noon meal, when the family gathers around the dinner table in the home, is a high point of the week. The spirit of sacred joy and fellowship, begun upon arising and continued through the worship services at church, is intensified. Free from the distractions of a secular atmosphere, the family can converse on themes of mutual interest and maintain the spiritual mood of the day.

When the sacred nature of the Sabbath is understood, and a loving relationship exists between parents and children, all will seek to prevent intrusions into the holy hours by secular music, radio, video, and television programs, and by newspapers, books, and magazines.

Sabbath afternoons, as far as possible, will be spent in family activities—exploring nature; making missionary visits to shut-ins, the sick, or others in need of encouragement; and attending meetings in the church. As the children grow older, activities will enlarge to encompass other members of their age groups in the church, with the question always in mind, "Does this activity cause me to understand better the true nature and sacredness of the Sabbath?" Thus proper Sabbath observance in the home will have a lasting influence for time and eternity.

SABBATH OBSERVANCE AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Introduction. Sabbath observance includes both worship and fellowship. The invitation to enjoy both is open and generous. Sabbath worship directed toward God usually takes place in a community of believers. The

same community provides fellowship. Both worship and fellowship offer unlimited potential to praise God and to enrich the lives of Christians. When either Sabbath worship or fellowship is distorted or abused, both praise to God and personal enrichment are threatened. As God's gift of Himself to us, the Sabbath brings real joy in the Lord. It is an opportunity for believers to recognize and reach their God-given potential. Thus, to the believer the Sabbath is a delight.

Alien Factors to Sabbath Observance. The Sabbath can be intruded upon easily by elements alien to its spirit. In the experience of worship and fellowship the believer must ever be alert to alien factors that are detrimental to one's realization of Sabbath sacredness. The sense of Sabbath holiness is threatened particularly by the wrong kinds of fellowship and activities. In contrast, the sacredness of the Sabbath is upheld when the Creator remains the center of that holy day.

Culturally Conditioned Phenomena in Sabbath Observance. It is important to understand that Christians render obedience to God and thus observe the Sabbath at the place in history and culture where they live. It is possible that both history and culture may falsely condition us and distort our values. By appealing to culture we may be guilty of giving ourselves license or excuse to indulge in sports and recreational activities that are incompatible with Sabbath holiness. For example, intensive physical exertion and various forms of tourism are out of harmony with true Sabbath observance.

Any attempt to regulate Sabbath observance beyond biblical principles by developing lists of Sabbath prohibitions will be counterproductive to a sound spiritual experience. The Christian will test his Sabbath experience by principle. He knows that it is the main purpose of the Sabbath to strengthen the bond of union between himself and God. Thus one's activities guided by biblical principles and contributing toward such a strengthening are acceptable.

In as much as no one can evaluate rightly the personal motives of others, a Christian must be very careful not to criticize his brethren living in cultural contexts other than his own and engaging in Sabbath recreational activities they approve.

While traveling, Adventist tourists should make every effort to observe the Sabbath with their fellow believers in any given area. Respecting the sacredness of the seventh day, it is recommended that Adventists avoid using the day for a holiday set aside for sightseeing and secular activity.

* Look for Part 2 in the next issue.

General Conference of SDA

WHEN THERE ARE BAPTISMS IN MY CHURCH, THE PASTOR SOMETIMES EXAMINES THE CANDIDATES ONLY BEFORE THE ELDERS, NOT BEFORE THE ENTIRE CHURCH. IS THIS CORRECT?

Yes and no. Let me explain. First, I would like to clarify that the candidate's examination is required by the *Church Manual*. No one should be baptized without first being examined. The question now is to define at what moment the examination should occur. The general rule is that the examination takes place before the church, but there may be circumstances when this is not possible. In that case, the *Manual* allows for an exception. Still, the results of the examination should be submitted for the church's consideration before the ceremony. Read carefully what is written in the *Church Manual*:

"The church has the right to know concerning the faith and attitude of every individual applying for church membership. It is proper for a public examination of all candidates to be held prior to their baptism, preferably in the presence of the church. If this should prove to be impracticable, then it should be before the church board or a committee appointed by the church board, such as the board of elders whose report should then be rendered to the church prior to the baptism. When the alternative mentioned under the preceding section is used, opportunity should be given for candidates to give public expression of their desire to unite with the church and to be identified with and by the church" (p. 31).

IS IT NORMAL PROCEDURE TO BE ELECTED AS AN ELDER IN THE CHURCH AND THEN TO WAIT ALMOST ONE YEAR FOR ORDINATION?

The *Church Manual* says, "Election to the office of elder does not in itself qualify one as an elder. Ordination is required before an elder has authority to function in that office" (p. 50). Soon after the church elects new elders and deacons, a service of ordination should be scheduled to dedicate them to this task. Such ordinations are to be performed by an ordained minister. Elders and deacons should be persons of experience, chosen wisely. Considering that local elders are elected for one or two years, it is not wise to wait a long period of time for their ordination. The same vote by the church which elects an elder is implicit with the church authorization for the ordination. There is no need for two votes, one for election and another for ordination. The same vote for election gives the church the authorization for the elder's ordination. In many places elders are elected and then have to wait long periods of time to prove they are qualified for that function. This process is incorrect. If the church board has doubts about someone, that person should not be elected. Once a person is elected as an elder, it means that there are no reservations with his or her name. 

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"GO TO THE ANT . . ."

The English language hasn't been very kind to ants. At the expense of this small insect, we use the expression "ants in your pants" to describe a slightly irritable, unsettled feeling. We describe a fidgety, impatient person as being "antsy."

Yet the close study of ants has led researchers to respect and even admire these industrious little creatures. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edward O. Wilson, an ardent admirer of the way in which ants work together, describes them as one of dominant forces in the natural world. Even Solomon, the wisest person ever to have lived, showed great respect for the ant with his famous reference to the insect's hard-working characteristics: "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!" (Prov. 6:6, NIV).

Representatives of the 8,800 known species of ants can be found anywhere on earth except the polar regions. With a population of 10 million billion, they outnumber mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians combined.

Without knowing it, the human race depends on ants in many ways. With the help of termites, ants turn most of the world's topsoil. They spread plant seeds and scavenge and consume more than 90 percent of small-animal corpses. But perhaps most impressive is the way in which ants assume roles in their communities. There are soldiers, builders, nurses, farmers, and hunters. And all contribute some specific talent to the welfare of the colony.

Desert ants of North Africa carry back to the colony 15 to 20 times their weight in food. There is no time to waste for these creatures, because in only six days, most get lost or are eaten by larger insects.

Christians, too, are supposed to work for the good of those around them. The Christian church is described as a single body, each of its parts working for the good of the whole. In this context we can learn a great deal from the hard-working cooperation that goes on in an ant colony. These lowly insects can teach us some valuable lessons about fellowship, one of the central characteristics of a healthy congregation and especially exhibited in Sabbath School.

Ants look out for and provide for one another. This is the absolute essence of fellowship. It is a characteristic that church members must actively emulate. Commenting on the troubling issue of recidivism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, James A. Cress points out that "a lack of fellowship [is] the strongest factor influencing personal decisions to leave the church." Sabbath School is one of the most obvious aspects of church life in which this issue may be addressed. It is a natural place and time for members to encourage and pray for one another.

Ants fulfill a role based on their specific gifts. This concept of individuals working as a whole resonates with Paul's concept of the optimal working of the Christian church: "The body is not one member, but many" (1 Cor. 12:14, KJV). Each member of the Sabbath School should be exercising his or her spiritual gifts in the interest of the gospel. There are surely spiritual equivalents for the ants' roles as soldiers, builders, nurses, farmers, and hunters. What would these roles mean in terms of Sabbath School?

Ants work together almost as a single, living organism. Bestselling science author Loren Eiseley, impressed with the organized and selfless ways in which ants cooperate, describes a colony in terms of a whole. Similarly, Sabbath School members, working in openhearted cooperation, must become a harmonious force for the optimal development of the church and the effective witness and service to its surrounding community.

Ellen G. White sums up the need for unity in this way: "God wants His people to be united in the closest bonds of Christian fellowship." If a simple creature like an ant can live out this kind of unity and thrive in a fiercely competitive natural environment, Sabbath School leaders and members would do well to "consider [and implement] its ways" (Prov. 6:6, NIV). 

¹ James A. Cress, *You Can Keep Them If You Care* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association Resource Center, 2000), 40, emphasis supplied.

² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:446.

Gary Swanson
Associate Sabbath School Director for the General Conference



A NEW VISION FOR 2009

Imagine this scene! The lights are on at your church on Tuesday evening. The parking lot is jammed. Church members are gathering for an evening of witness. People are on their knees seeking God. Earnest, heartfelt prayers of intercession for the lost ascend to God's throne. Visitation teams leave the church to visit former Adventists and encourage them to return to church. Parents and children are distributing literature in the neighborhood. Pastors and lay people are giving Bible studies. Lay members are preparing to conduct an evangelistic reaping series. The Holy Spirit is being poured out. Revival fires are kindled. The church is ablaze with the glory of God.

Is this a picture of your church? It can be. We have just witnessed what God can do in a local church. Hundreds came to Christ and accepted the Three Angels Message during our recent evangelistic meetings at the Forest Lake Church in Apopka, Florida. God does amazing things when pastors and lay people unite in mission.

Thousands of Seventh-day Adventist lay people worldwide are rediscovering the joy of sharing their faith. They have a new understanding of their role as Christians. The Biblical truth of God's call to be His witnesses has lifted their vision and transformed their lives. They are sharing their faith with renewed enthusiasm. A sense of excitement about what God is doing through them has elevated their own spiritual experience.

Where the church is growing around the world, lay people are actively involved. Evangelistic success is largely

dependent on an active laity. Sensing we are nearing the return of our Lord, many church members are giving their time, using their gifts and actively witnessing.

Jesus gave a definite call to service to the New Testament church when He declared, "you shall be witnesses unto me . . ." (Acts 1:8).

Lay involvement is the key to fulfilling the gospel commission. *Acts of the Apostles*, page 111 says:

"The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers."

God is gathering lay people around the world for a final movement at the climax of earth's history. He will pour out His Spirit through them as they use their gifts to proclaim the 'Good News'.

Now is the time to lift our vision to what Christ is doing in the world. This is the time for a renewed sense that God is reaping His final harvest. As you step out in faith allowing God to use you many will accept Christ and His truth for these last days. There will be people in heaven as a result of your witness, Bible studies and lay evangelistic meetings.

2009 is the Year of World Evangelism. God is inviting each one of us to do greater things for Him. Think of what you can do to share the 'good news' of the gospel with those around you.

How can you make a difference in your church? What can you do to participate with Jesus and cooperate with your pastor to hasten the Lord's return?

My husband and I have been in ministry for 41 years. Since 1974 we have been involved in full time public evangelism. Although I have worked in various aspects of public evangelism, a few years ago I sensed a growing conviction to conduct a series of evangelistic meetings myself. After agonizing with God, although I had feelings of inadequacy, I could not shake the conviction that He wanted me to hold my own series. I received encouragement to follow my convictions from my husband, Mark and Ralph Ringer (Then Florida Conference Evangelism coordinator) and others to move ahead. I felt the only way my plan would succeed was if I preached my husband's proven sermons. This meant I would have to take every word from the Revelation of Hope audio tapes and transfer them to my computer to be formatted with the graphics. What I did not realize was that it would take me over 300 hours to do only part of the project. My daughter, Rebecca, and my son-in-law, Loren, helped me complete the sermons just in time to preach my own evangelistic meeting in Apopka, Florida. Although God blessed the meetings with many baptisms I realize now that God impressed me to do this series of meetings so I could encourage other lay people to do public evangelistic meetings as well.

This power-packed biblical series of Revelation of Hope sermons, graphics, and scripts are now prepared and ready for pastors and lay members to preach powerfully right off the computer. I had to step out of my comfort zone to conduct my first series of evangelistic meetings. This last year I had the privilege of going to my home town, Portland, Maine, to conduct another series in the University of Southern Maine auditorium. I was blessed once again to see many respond to God's last day message. When we are willing to step out of our comfort zone and get involved in the most exciting work in the world, soul-winning and evangelism, God blesses in remarkable ways.

When I think of how God has led His people and guided the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the past, I am confident He will do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think in this *Year of Evangelism*.

God's promises are sure! There will be a great harvest! And we will grow spiritually as we commit our lives to the most wonderful work in the world—soul winning. ED

Ernestine Finley is a partner in ministry with her husband, Mark Finley. Together they conduct trainings for laymen and bible workers throughout the world.

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 Our desire is to reach as many people as possible in 2009.
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- Monthly Pastoral meetings on Hope Church Channel
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- Regular newsletter with updates and ideas
- Ideas on how members can connect with interested people.

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The 2009 Initiative of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

The art of speech

PREACHING: BECOME A BETTER SPEAKER

“He who does not know how to speak well, even if possessing great intellect, risks being no more than a zero in society.” This reminds us of the importance of knowing how to speak well. Though at times we may feel like Moses, who asked the Lord for a good speaker to help him, we can all become better speakers. Here are some tips for polishing your speaking skills.

- *Be optimistic.* Mental attitude is one of the main traits of a good preacher. If you believe that you can and will speak well, this confidence will help you improve. The opposite is also true. The Bible says: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7, NKJV).

- *Prepare thoroughly.* Nothing happens by chance. Behind a well-presented class, a moving sermon, or an excellent speech is a good amount of time spent reading, researching, thinking, and organizing. We must do our homework well. God deserves our best.

- *Be sincere.* Share ideas that will reach and touch others’ hearts because they have touched yours. The poet Robert Frost wrote, “No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader.” The same is true for speakers; dull, dry information will not reach our listeners.

- *Be careful with grammar.* Being a good speaker doesn’t mean you have to use big words; however, it does require you to use the right language, being careful of grammar and accuracy. One way to improve your language skills is to read widely of skillful writers. It is often valuable to invite a teacher, professor, or educated friend to be your private critic to edit your sermons or speeches.

- *Start well.* The first minutes are decisive. Horne O. Silva, a specialist in speech, says, “The crucial minute for the speaker is at the beginning. A speaker who catches the audience during the first minute is likely to be successful at the end.”

- *Use appropriate body language.* The speaker’s motions should be natural throughout the presen-

tation so that facial expressions and gestures match what is being said. Avoid nervous habits such as putting your hands in your pockets, crossing your arms, or touching your head.

- *Articulate words clearly.* To communicate one must be understood. Part of being understood is clear articulation. Be careful not to omit word endings such as “g”, “s”, “d”, and “r” sounds.

- *Vary your tone of voice.* Maintain an appropriate rhythm, varying the pitch and speed of your voice. Using the same pitch and speed throughout is monotonous and boring to the listener. Changing voice inflections creates a pleasant effect, as if you are painting a beautiful picture in which there are bright and soft colors.

- *Be concise.* “Some people produce a flood of words but a desert of ideas.” A good speech isn’t necessarily a long speech; on the contrary, an effective speaker speaks briefly and delivers a lot. Avoid the “sword speech”—long and flat.

- *Be organized.* Organize your ideas so they flow logically. Stick to only one main point and support it with subpoints. Omit everything that is not relevant to the main idea. Don’t ramble.

- *Know when to stop.* Some speakers act as if they are airplanes, constantly signaling to the landing strip but never landing. Your speech should have a clear beginning, middle, and end. The conclusion should occur at the appropriate place and time. If you really want to lose your audience, talk too long. If you keep your speech a little shorter than the allotted time, your listeners will love you for it. Even adults have an attention span of less than 20 minutes.

As you practice these pointers, you will become a more confident, effective speaker, one who can inspire, inform, and bless others.

Eliseu Lira
Pastor in Minas Gerais, Brazil



Reconnect, Reclaim, Reflame

As we launch this year of evangelism, we must confront the reality that many who once worshiped with us, now, for a variety of reasons, no longer fellowship with our church, or any other denomination. While we emphasize reaching the lost—sometimes termed our “unsaved loved ones”—we ought to remember the needs of former, missing, or inactive members—our “unloved saved ones”!

Of course, free choice mandates that each individual’s right not to worship must be respected, but many of these individuals do not participate in worship or other church activities because they have been hurt, disappointed, or disillusioned at some point along the way. In many cases, we have been the cause of fellow believers leaving active fellowship by our coldness or indifference to their needs.

Why they leave. While doctrinal differences, heretical breakaway groups, or disagreements over worship styles and standards have caused some people to leave, others depart due to boredom, poor preaching, and inadequately planned services. However, the vast majority leave due simply to a lack of friendship. They have been wounded in the church. Whatever the cause for their absence, two things are certain. The back door still swings and solutions lie far more within our power as active members than we might wish to think.

In North America alone, nearly 300,000 members officially have been removed (and not because of death) from our membership in the past 20 years. That total equals 40 percent of our total membership at the beginning of these two decades—a tragedy of greatest proportions, especially when we have not maintained even basic information like a mail or telephone contact. This equals a total loss similar to that of the ten largest conferences in the division simply disappearing.

These numbers, tragic as they are, reveal only part of the story. Also, thousands of individuals are still on the membership rolls who never worship with other believers—only about 50 percent of all members actually attend

weekly worship services. Granted, many are ill, elderly, or traveling. This still leaves a vast potential audience of individuals whom God loves and for whom His church ought to feel passion to love back into fellowship.

The great evangelist, Fordyce Detamore, used to emphasize the *reachability* of former members as his “best potentials” for bringing them to a new relationship with Jesus. So if we want to add 100,000 active members to our churches during this year, we might well start by reaching our “unloved saved ones” with renewed hope in the soon return of Jesus.

While we recognize that some who have left our fellowship would choose not to return, many have left because of interpersonal difficulties—loneliness, alienation, boredom, lack of spiritual food, criticism, rejection, etc. Thousands are waiting on the verge of the kingdom to be invited back. Among these, we can make a difference as we allow the Spirit to work in our lives. We can, and must, actively search for them, listen to them, and hopefully reclaim them into a vital relationship with Christ and His church.

You know who we need! One of the first steps in reclaiming those who were once part of our fellowship is to identify their names and mailing addresses so we can contact them. Your help is needed! Your congregants know the very ones we need. While we have the names and addresses of some of those who should be contacted, many names and addresses are unknown to the church office, even though they are individuals whom your members know personally. Never assume that the church has accurate or up-to-date information. If you know someone who should receive a gracious contact along with a no-pressure invitation to resume fellowship, please let us know.

In our last pastorate, Sharon and I intentionally concentrated on reclaiming our former and inactive members, as well as establishing contact with those we could not have known such as those who had moved to our area without initiating involvement with the church. We mailed

a request to every church in our conference and to every conference in North America requesting help in identifying individuals in our metropolitan area who no longer participated in church activities. In just a few weeks, we received the names of over 200 such individuals to whom we prioritized low-key, encouraging spiritual nurture. We focused our energies and resources toward those whose lives were once united in fellowship with the Adventist Church, and within a short time, we experienced more than four dozen individuals who had returned to our church.

God loves the missing! One of the clearest lessons Jesus ever taught was our heavenly Father's concern for those missing from the fellowship of believers. Luke 15 records three different stories that demonstrate this point—the missing sheep, the missing coin, and the missing son. Interestingly, each story tells a different path by which someone ends up among the missing, often without even realizing their situation. The sheep wandered off alone. The coin never left the premises but remained separated. The prodigal son deliberately chose to leave in rebellion and ended up alone.

While we diligently search for missing and former members and collect names and accurate addresses, remember that some, much like the story of the coin, might remain in our midst, yet alone. If you think of someone like this whom you know, why not give them a telephone call right now, and let them know they are missed. Never underestimate how much influence your personal contact might have.

And in my congregation's weekly newsletter that we targeted to hundreds of readers beyond our active membership, I wrote the following, "If you are reading this and feel all alone, please know that our intent is stronger than our follow-through in too many cases. This is your personal invitation. We want you back to a far greater extent than we are capable of expressing. God's love for you is even greater than our concern. Please don't wait for someone to call you! Give us a call! Better yet, come rejoice with us in renewed fellowship!" The very next Sabbath, a family showed up at church and stated, "We understand you're looking for us—we have not attended church in over twenty years."

How to reclaim? Some principles for reclaiming those who are missing from fellowship are outlined in Luke 15:

Count. The good shepherd knew that one sheep was missing because he kept careful count on those who were with him. Direct your elders to work with you in spiritually nurturing every member.

Risk. The shepherd left the 99 sheep exposed to dan-



ger in the wild places as he went searching for the one who was missing. He risked the group's security and convenience for the one most in need! Prioritize.

Labor. When the homemaker discovered her coin was missing, she worked long and diligently. Nothing of value comes easily! This parable also expresses God's intention for all members to be represented in ministry. Jesus framed the Divine Sweeper as a woman.

Wait. Never give up! The prodigal's father had to patiently wait until his son made the choice to start back toward home. Then he ran out to greet his prodigal. God will meet any returning soul more than half way.

Pray. You need not wait in idleness. Prayer is the key in the hand of faith that unlocks heaven's storehouse of blessings! When I pray for missing members, I do not pray to change God's attitude toward the lost; God changes my attitude toward the lost.

Love unconditionally. Never impose criteria on someone else in order for them to become recipients of your love. Express your love unreservedly! Accept them even as they stink from the pigpen; then love them into life-changing sanctified living.

Welcome. Joyously express your pleasure when a missing friend returns to fellowship. Make them feel wanted and welcomed! Encourage even their very first steps toward heaven. The prodigal received shoes, a ring, and a robe from his father at the moment of return.

Restore. Those who return have nothing to prove. The prodigal expected to be a servant; he was restored as an heir! The lost have nothing to prove to the church. We must prove our love and concern to those who have been wounded.

Celebrate. Make every restoration a joyous occasion. All heaven rejoices when one individual returns. We could at least host a fellowship luncheon! What better occasion to party?

Prioritizing reclamation. Mike Jones, who possesses the unique capability of thinking like a successful pastor, which he once was, and responding like a reclaimed inactive member, which he experienced for himself, states: "If the church wants to maximize its results for the *Year of Evangelism*, I make three suggestions. (1) Local congregations should make themselves more user-friendly, (2) evangelistic emphasis should include printing small, low-budget newspaper ads that intentionally invite inactive and former members to visit, (3) and pastors and elders should lead in planning an annual Homecoming Sabbath for those who have become inactive and missing." Mike's sermon, "Enduring to the End", calculated to retain current members

while encouraging the discouraged and disenchanted to return, can be viewed online at www.ministerialassociation.com and Paul Richardson's Center for Creative Ministry presents excellent Homecoming Sabbath resources at www.creativeministry.org.

What's next? Now that we've seen the potential to reconnect/reclaim/reflame inactive and former members, we must "put shoes on the process" and make a concentrated effort to reconnect relationships, reclaim fellowship, and reflame discipleship. I recommend the following process:

1. Appoint a central site for a master list of inactive and former members (The Voice of Prophecy for North America). Other divisions can institute and develop a similar plan for their territory.
2. Publish the following announcement in every church bulletin and newsletter for six consecutive weeks: **Searching for former and inactive Adventists.** Do you have a friend or family relative who used to be a member or active in church activities? We need their name, mail address, e-mail contact, and telephone. Each person will receive an attractively designed, sensitively written packet of materials inviting them to re-establish contact with the nearest Adventist church. Send all information to: Attention: Pastor Fred Kinsey, The Voice of Prophecy, Box 53055, Los Angeles, CA 90053 (www.vop.com/reflame).
3. Pray for the Holy Spirit to warm the heart of every individual who will receive a gracious invitation to attend worship services and to reconnect with the church of their heritage.
4. Print the following display advertisement in the "Weekend/Entertainment" section of Friday newspapers for eight consecutive weeks. For a version which you can adapt, visit www.ministerialassociation.com and click on the Reflame Logo.



5. Conduct a "Love Them Back" seminar for every church in which pastors will instruct members on how best to encourage and engage with those who will return to attendance. Mike Jones recommends that this seminar include the following

practical methods:

- a. Make eye contact with each visitor to your church.
 - b. Add a welcome smile to your eye contact.
 - c. Touch your visitors with warmth and welcome. A handshake or squeeze on the shoulder gives positive impact.
 - d. Ask questions designed to open conversation. "Do you folk live around here? (Never ask if they are "visiting," which might easily offend someone who attends regularly and believes you should already know them.)"
 - e. Listen to your visitors. Open-ended questions are better. "How did you come to be in this city?" or "How do you feel about our worship services?" Once you've asked, listen. Suture your mouth shut and you will learn much from what they share.
 - f. Talk to your visitors. Easy conversations such as, "Good morning, my name is Jim" will get the job done. At first, strive for a friendly relationship and nothing more.
 - g. Defer investigating their motive for attending or their challenges of the past. Over a period of time, they may share how they have felt wounded or became disenfranchised from the church.
 - h. Feed your visitors. Food and fellowship is a powerful social component and Adventists, at their best, do this very well.
 - i. Simplify your own life to take time to greet at least one or two individuals you don't know every Sabbath. These connections make high impact.
6. Restrain those who reject such training from imposing their antisocial attitudes, speculative ideas, or fanciful heresies on those who visit your church.
 7. Follow Jesus' model—the only way to reach the heart and mind of seekers. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me'" (*Ministry of Healing*, 143).
 8. Ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to be a loving and loveable Christian who will appropriately interact with all whom God will help us reclaim.

James A. Cress
General Conference Ministerial Association Secretary

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