

COOL TOOLS FOR SABBATH SCHOOL

Action Units

What is the ideal Sabbath School like? It is a place with a warm, caring atmosphere, where new and older members feel the spiritual and emotional support and encouragement they need in meeting the complexities of daily life. It is a place where missing class members are first cared for, where the class outreach leader then leads out as all share the joys and challenges they met in sharing Jesus during the week in accordance with their class outreach plan.

Finally, it is a place where prayer lists are updated, where soul winning training is conducted that is appropriate to the outreach needs of the coming week, and where total participation in the discussion of the lesson takes place as it is applied to life and witnessing opportunities that week.

This is a brief description of the simple Sabbath School Action Unit plan set in operation to organize, equip, and mobilize the church to accomplish its mission and to give support to new members and to active long-standing members.

It is a revolutionary and comprehensive plan covering all the objectives and essential elements of Sabbath School, and its broad perspective can include all aspects of Personal Ministries.

Results

This plan has brought tremendous increases in at least seven ways:

1. Many report increases in Bible study immediately or within a very few weeks. Often it has been stated that 90 to 100 percent are studying daily. When members have time and opportunity and experience the joy of sharing what they learned in the class, they study diligently so they can share.

2. A loving, caring atmosphere develops that is so essential to quality church growth. Most members who leave the church do not leave over doctrinal issues but for lack of true friendship and loving fellowship.

3. Attendance increases of up to six times previous attendance have been reported. Excited action unit members are successful in inviting their friends to class.

4. Large numbers of missing and former Sabbath School and church members return. Many units make bringing them back their first priority.

5. Membership involvement in outreach of all types, and especially Bible study work, is phenomenal. This, of course, is the major purpose of an "action" unit.

6. All the above results in large numbers of quality baptisms. The newly baptized are not left to backslide but are immediately invited, by those who taught them, to join their Sabbath School Action Units. Here they receive follow-up support and witness training so that they become strong soul winners.

7. Tithes increased up to eight times in three years, and Sabbath School offerings reportedly more than doubled in many places in a short time. When each unit gets excited about the Lord and His work they, naturally, in addition to giving more time to study and prayer, give more of their means to hasten the spreading of the good news.

Underlying Concepts for Success

First, those who first developed the plan sought most diligently wisdom from the Lord and through much prayer discovered and built the plan on the following nine basic divine imperatives for a finished work as set forth in the writings of God's messenger to this church:

- "The church must realize its *obligation* to carry the gospel of present truth to every creature."¹ In doing so, "they will find pure happiness and rich joys."²

- "We can receive only as we impart to others."³

- The work will never be finished until the membership unites with the ministers in the work.⁴

- The essential latter rain cannot come until the "largest portion of the church are . . . laborers together with God."⁵

- "The greatest help that can be given our people is to teach them to work for God, and to depend on Him, not on the ministers."⁶

- "Time is short, and our forces must be organized to do a larger work."⁷

- "Every church should be a training school for Christian workers."⁸

- "The Sabbath school, if rightly conducted, is one



of God's great instrumentalities to bring souls to a knowledge of the truth."⁹

●“One who cannot err” has advised the formation of small groups “as a basis of Christian effort.”¹⁰

The small-group Sabbath School Action Units can provide adherence to the above imperatives. They can provide an excellent organized, continuous training school, without adding another organization with its time requirements, since Sabbath School already meets every week. The system with its outreach leaders can provide the greatest help, weekly promotion and training in soul winning, both theoretical and practical, so that the largest portion of the church can soon be unitedly working together with God for a finished work.

When the whole church works unitedly, God works to produce unlimited results. We are told: “If Christians were to act in concert, moving forward as one, under the direction of one Power, for the accomplishment of one purpose, they would move the world.”¹¹ Much prayer is essential in every detail of the plan. “Only the work accomplished with much prayer, . . . will in the end prove to have been efficient for good.”¹²

Finally, the plan is so simple that everyone can easily follow it. We are instructed to implement a simple plan, and notice the promised results: “The very simplest modes of work should be devised and set in operation among the churches. If the members will unitedly accept such plans, and perseveringly carry them out, they will reap a rich reward; for their experience will grow brighter, their ability will increase, and through their efforts souls will be saved.”¹³

How to Get Started—and Continue

There are ten essential elements of successful Sabbath School Action Units:

1. Classes of six to eight members.
2. Outreach leaders in each class.
3. An outreach plan in each class.
4. One-hour class time.
5. Five minutes to care for missing class members.
6. Twenty minutes for outreach.
7. Thirty-five minutes for lesson discussion and application.
8. Weekly leader consultation.
9. Weekly/monthly corporate sharing.
10. Monthly home fellowship evaluation.

A full explanation of each of these ten key elements follows:

1. *Form and maintain classes of six to eight for optimum participation, which is vital to*

understanding, spiritual growth and outreach. In a group of twenty, usually only three or four become involved, whereas, 100-percent participation usually occurs in the unit of six to eight. And there is time for all to share. Normally, everyone feels comfortable from the beginning to open up, share and discuss their life experiences, their joys, burdens, witnessing experiences and challenges, and to receive personalized support, encouragement, and training in soul winning. The more they know of the circumstances other members face, the more they will understand, love, and support them and the more unlikely they are to offend. Many have left the church because they were offended and felt they were not understood

As we basically remember about 10 percent of what we hear but 90 percent of what we talk about, in addition to nurture, the interaction also prepares them to talk to their neighbors effectively.

When a class grows to 9 or 10, form two classes. Usually the class experience will have developed leaders for the new one.

2. *Pastor, Personal Ministries and Sabbath School leaders select and train the best possible Missionary Leader available for each unit.* Sometimes called a “Care Coordinator,” this dedicated person is an assistant to the Personal Ministries Leader and Bible School Leader, and in cooperation with the Discussion Group Leader (teacher) should work enthusiastically, tactfully and perseveringly to develop a band of well-trained soul winners. He or she should be teamed with the Discussion Group Leader that he or she would enjoy working with.

Each unit appoints its secretary to care for the prayer list, keep class plans and records, see that witnessing materials are provided to the members, and helps in other ways as needed.

(All leaders and active members need a “double vision,” to work equally as hard encouraging, training, and supporting members in witnessing as in witnessing themselves.)

3. *Each unit develops an essential one-year written outreach plan with specific goals.* The unit planning session is most vital. With no specific outreach plan, nothing will be accomplished. With a plan, results are unlimited through the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

Before the unit planning session, the Missionary Leaders should meet together with the pastor, Personal Ministries Leader, and Sabbath School Superintendent to determine the outreach plans and goals of the church. It is hoped that these will focus on target reaping dates.

Knowing the objectives of the church, they can

then, by earnest prayer and study, write down what their units could do to coordinate successfully with the church's cultivation, sowing and reaping plan. They should list what has worked best in the past and has the greatest soul-winning possibility. They should decide what they would like to do, considering the experience and potential of each class member. They should decide how to make it easy for them to start and how to lead them to advanced activities. With a potential plan in hand, they are ready to lead their units in planning.

At the special planning session, the pastor, Personal Ministries Leader, and Sabbath School Superintendent should lead by first sharing the church's specific outreach goals and suggesting how the classes might help. The pastor should then ask the units to develop and write down their plans and specific goals and give him or her a copy at the end of the meeting, providing, if possible, a simple worksheet for this purpose.

The Missionary Leaders, with the support of the leaders of the units, the Discussion Group Leaders, may then use, as needed, the following steps in their groups, and, if possible, utilizing the worksheet:

A. Seek the Lord in earnest prayer for cleansing, claiming Christ's love for souls, and the unity of purpose and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

B. Ask all to participate throughout the planning session. Value each opinion and comment. The final plan must have input from all the members so that they own the plan and will work together to carry it out.

C. Review briefly the church goals and challenge all to dream big.

D. Ask them to share what has worked best in the past. They may begin by sharing how they became an Adventist. List all points on the worksheet.

E. Ask for and list all suggestions from the group.

F. Present your suggestions and list the ones that fit.

G. Select together one to three workable ideas and plans and finalize and record specific goals with target dates. Example: "Each member (of class # 15) will bring back one missing member. Each will share three VOP lessons and work with another member in giving two Bible studies per week. The class baptismal goal is 8 by the end of the reaping meeting October 25."

H. The unit plans may also include steps to be taken to reach specific goals and should list the dates and places where the group will meet for the monthly home fellowship evaluation sessions (discussed under number 10 below), where the plans and goals can be

updated and sharpened.

A copy of the plan is given to the pastor and Personal Ministries Leader who will monitor, encourage, support, and provide training where needed.

4. *Allot a one-hour class period.* Sabbath School has four objectives: fellowship, outreach, Bible study, and mission. The first three can best be accomplish in the small group, and mission offerings can best be promoted there too. To do this, an hour is needed in the action unit.

After the first five minutes is devoted to welcoming members and caring for missing members, it is essential that twenty minutes be devoted to outreach, followed by thirty-five minutes for lesson discussion and application.

Most begin the Sabbath School program at 9:15 and classes run from 9:45 to 10:45. Or better, others begin Sabbath School earlier to have more time.

Leaders must stay seated, put themselves on the level with the students, and facilitate not lecture.

5. *The Discussion Group Leader (the teacher and leader of the class) takes five minutes to arrange visits and care for missing class members.* Loving, caring concern for missing members is very important. Many have backslidden because they were not cared for without delay when they first began to miss Sabbath School. After a welcome and record-taking, the leader often arranges, as appropriate, for a member to telephone or to deliver a written message to each missing unit member that afternoon. If that and prayer fail, an elder or the pastor should be contacted. Immediate care is essential.

6. *The Missionary Leader takes twenty minutes for outreach:*

A. Review the class plans and goal.

B. Call for experiences related to the class plan. As each experience is shared, the leader should ask, "What can we learn from that?" Discuss and learn together from the experience, whether it was good or bad. The most effective soul winning training is to draw lessons from live experiences. Discuss how the visit, contact, or study could have been improved. The secretary records lessons learned for later use.

C. Assist those who are experiencing witnessing challenges by not only offering suggestion alone, but by utilizing the expertise of all. Give each member the opportunity to encourage, support, and make suggestions from their experience to those who are experiencing difficulties.

D. Seek help from the Personal Ministries Leader, leaders' meeting (discussed under number 8 below), or pastor if the group is unable to find solutions to the challenge.

E. Give simple training that will be needed during the coming week. This should be appropriate to guests present.

The training may include:

(1). The necessity of claiming Christ's love of souls and the power, wisdom, and continual guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(2). How to be kind and tactful.

(3). Using the tones of the voice properly.

(4). How to start a visit with FORT—"Family," "Occupation," "Religion," and "Testimony." (Adjust to translation.)

(5). How to develop and use your testimony in various situations.

(6). The importance of listening, and how to listen.

(7). How to disagree agreeably and never argue.

(8). How to start and give Bible studies.

(9). How to mark your Bible for witnessing.

(10). How to visit former and missing members.

(11). The importance of and how to get a decision for Christ before teaching the testing truths.

(12). How to get decisions.

F. Promote class plans and goals.

G. Give visitation assignments and arrange for on-the-job training where needed.

H. Give time to the secretary to hand out witnessing materials needed and to update the prayer list.

I. Have special prayer, two by two, involving all who would like to pray, for interests, plans, goals, and lesson discussion. Remind everyone to pray daily for those on the prayer list.

7. *The Discussion Group Leader, involving all, as a choir director and not a soloist, takes thirty-five minutes for lesson discussion, applying it to life and witnessing that week.* This method is not to distract from deep Bible study; its whole purpose is to attract people to it. Daily deep Bible study at home is the real goal of the class. The objective is to inspire and facilitate daily Bible study in the home, then in the class to pull from that experience what God is saying to us today, and apply it to our life situation and to witnessing opportunities we may encounter during the week.

Although the major emphasis of action units is outreach, lesson discussion should not be minimized, as a deeper knowledge of Scripture is crucial to both nurture and witness. Knowledge is best obtained and retained in class by discussion and not by lecture. People remember about 90 percent of what they talk about and only about 10 percent of what they hear.

Participation in discussion usually increases to 100 percent in a short time if the action unit leader focuses on involving everyone rather than being the all-knowing lecturer. The class involvement results in more study at home. When members are given the opportunity to share in class, they study so they can share.

The discussion leader's objective is twofold. The lesson must not only be presented, it must be matched to the person.

The discussion leader should come prepared with written application questions and case studies that fit the members' spiritual and outreach needs.

Participation in answering questions such as: "What would you say to your neighbor if he asked you this question?" reduces fear and helps prepare members for interaction in sharing Jesus with others.

The following six interactive questions can be asked to emphasize specific Bible texts in the lesson:

● What does it say?

● What does it mean?

● What does it mean to you?

● Share an experience in which this text was fulfilled or was significant in your life.

● How can you use this text in reaching out and sharing with someone this week?

So the Discussion Group Leader involves all in searching Scripture and applying the lesson to life and witnessing that week. The action unit arrives at spiritual and outreach objectives for the week and closes with prayer for power to fulfill them.

The final steps help to keep the plan going and growing:

8. *Conduct essential weekly leader consultation and training meetings.* It is vital that Discussion Group Leaders and Missionary Leaders meet with the superintendent, Personal Ministries Leader, and pastor for mutual support, training, and to strengthen their coordinated efforts.

Pray earnestly together. An easy approach is then to discuss in order the 5-, 20-, and 35-minute sequence of the class time. The pastor (or another leader) should involve everyone in the discussion of successes first, and then challenges that could not be solved in the units relating to reaching missing class members, outreach, and lesson discussion. This meeting must be very interactive and not just a lecture by the pastor. Again, everyone learns and remembers more from participation in discussion than from hearing only. Everyone learns from everyone both in the units and in the leaders' meeting.

If possible, it is wise to have this essential meeting as late in the week as possible, or even on Sabbath morning. Discussion Group Leaders can share their

written-out application questions and case studies, and each can select the best that fit their classes.

9. *Conduct weekly or monthly corporate sharing.* The Personal Ministries Leader should select from the units and share, through interview or otherwise, the best success stories during the superintendent's program time, the Personal Ministries period, or, better, during the church service, for all to hear. Witnessing success is contagious. Sharing success is the best promotion possible. It encourages all, especially the weaker classes.

10. *Hold monthly home fellowship/evaluation meetings.* To sharpen progress and build mutual trust and fellowship, hold casual, relaxed, and pleasant fellowship/evaluation meetings in the homes of class members. Set dates and locations during the class planning session. This is a social and fun time—a time for getting to know one another better—a time for closer bonding and deeper friendships. Plan to include games and refreshments if you like. Toward the close of the meeting, set aside time for prayer, to review progress toward meeting class goals and to sharpen plans.

By following these simple steps, your Sabbath School will soon become a dynamic system and center of nurture and outreach, like thousands world wide. God bless you as you prepare thousands for the soon coming of Jesus.

Advantages of the Sabbath School Action Unit Support System

1. Members will write out their specific cultivation and Bible-study goals and work together to meet them.

2. They will pray daily for each other as they look for Bible studies.

3. When studies are started, members will put the names of all the unit's students and those giving the studies on their personal prayer lists and will pray for them daily.

4. During the class 20-minute outreach time, all members will be energized and trained for more effective outreach by live success stories shared and lessons drawn from them.

5. In the units and in the weekly pastor's-leaders' meeting, members receive the training needed to meet challenges they meet, and all benefit from all solutions offered.

6. New members receive the needed love and support: Members stay close to their students through the reaping meetings, and after they are baptized, they will invite them to become members of their Sabbath School Action Units. Thus, new members, who are often bonded only to the evangelist, will unite with

little families who love them dearly because they have been praying daily for them and discussing their spiritual journey since they were first contacted.

7. Potential missing members become soul winners. These new babes now become part of support groups that will never let them down. Instead of non-caring superficial entities, these groups will virtually die for them. The members have gone through the pain of helping to give them birth. They are not mere uninvolved spectators of evangelism. They have been totally involved.

8. They will not let the fruits of their sometimes excruciating labor slip out the back door of the church. They will assist them with every difficulty, help them to grow and give them on-the-job witness training until witnessing becomes their way of life too.

The following will show you:

How to Launch Sabbath School Action Units

1. The best way to do it is to *do it*. Plan for one hour of class time. Warn regular teachers that they will not be responsible that Sabbath.

2. Prepare a lesson-discussion outline that gives a balanced overview of the lesson. Include: Scripture reading, four or five application and witnessing discussion questions, life-situation and case studies, and a commitment and prayer appeal at the end.

3. Divide the Sabbath School into units of six.

A. In addition to prayer the following preparation is needed:

(1) Write large numbers on 5 ½ X 8 paper sufficient to provide a few more classes than needed. Place these on the seats at class locations. Crowd the classes as close as possible together. Thus you can demonstrate the quietness of the units and that there is plenty of room for classes.

(2) To divide the Sabbath School attendance into units of six each, have the potential of 72 attending (twelve classes of six each). Prepare five stacks of 2" x 2" pieces of paper numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, to 12. If only 60 are present when you divide them, take ten off the top of each of the five stacks of twelve, stack them in one stack and they are ready to be distributed.

(3) Before Sabbath School begins, choose someone, like let's say, "John," to count each person as they enter and to keep a running exact total of those present so that when you pass numbers you can ask him how many are present and you can divide the total by six.

B. After a brief song and prayer, you (the superintendent) may say, "Sabbath School is for participation. We are going to try something new that

is enjoyed and successful around the world. We will not know what it is like unless we try it. So we want to try it today. John, how many are present? “Fifty-nine” he replies. “So we need ten groups.” (Take ten off the top of each stack and stack them in one stack so you are ready to pass them out). “Those of you who are sitting near numbers one through ten, would you kindly stand and hold up that number. Thank you. Now, I would like to invite all of the rest of you to pick up all your things and come up to the front. Thank you very much” (Repeat if needed.)

C. Take six people and demonstrate how you will want them to be seated in the unit with two in the front pew at each end of the unit turning toward the four seated in the row behind them.

D. With the people in the pews holding up the 10 numbers, distribute numbers to each member, asking them to go immediately to that location.

4. Begin by asking, “How many of you see someone in your group you do not know?” Then ask them to go around the circle to introduce themselves (if unknown) and to say in one sentence what they would like to praise God for today.

5. Select leaders: Explain the purpose of the Missionary Leader, have them pray a three sentence prayer for guidance, (You must watch the time) mutually select one, and have that person stand. When you see one in each class standing, ask them to sit in the first pew of the classes on the left side (your right), trading places with the person there.

Then have them select the leader and teacher of the class, the Discussion Group Leader. Explain that the person is not a soloist but helps each to share. Repeat the process above and have that individual sit on the opposite side in the first pew.

The Secretary, whom they then select in the same manner, can sit among the four.

6. Outreach period: Ask the Missionary Leader to lead 10 to 15 minutes (depending on the time you have left) in the outreach period. (Reserve 35 minutes for the lesson discussion. Guard class time very carefully).

A. Explain briefly that outreach sharing and training is a vital part of Sabbath School. Call from the audience for a brief recent witnessing experience. When someone responds, say, “This is what you do in class. As soon as this person shares his or her experience, I will ask you, ‘What can we learn from this experience?’ ” Do that, getting three or four responses. Then tell the Missionary Leaders to lead, ask one person to share a brief witnessing experience and ask all, “What can we learn from this?” Probe the depths. Get all they can from one experience. Ask secretaries to record what they learned and to be

prepared to share the most important point their unit learned.

Tell the leaders how much time they have and tell them when they have three minutes left. Pass out the lesson discussion outline just before time is up.

B. When they finish, ask how many enjoyed this and were encouraged to witness. Have secretaries tell how many points they learned and to share with the Sabbath School the number one thing the unit learned. You comment.

C. Say that it is much more enjoyable when each class has a written plan and specific goals and twenty minutes each week in class to share experiences, train from them, meet challenges, and pray together.

7. Lesson discussion period: Ask the discussion leaders to get everyone involved in following the lesson outline. You may ask them first to pray and to go over it briefly, so they can choose the points they like the best. Assure them they may not be able to cover it all but that you will ask them to move to the last commitment question three minutes before they have their closing prayer in which they ask God to help them meet their objectives. Tell them how much time they have and to begin. Remind them not to lecture but to try to involve everyone possible in the discussion.

8. When they have finished, Say, “Sabbath School is for participation.” Then ask:

A. “How many participated?”

B. How many enjoyed it? (There is always an enthusiastic response).

C. Then ask, “What did you *like* about it?” The responses will be exciting. Comment on their responses emphasizing the reasons for various aspects of the plan.

D. Then ask, “How many want to continue?” (Usually everyone does). Tell them that if it is their wish, you will arrange to continue next week. (You may then want to get the church board approval and support. It is usually difficult to get approval before they experience it).

E. Many keep the same classes. Others select the two best leaders possible, put their names on paper with four blanks under them on a bulletin board and the members select the class they desire. Others assign everyone to units. Pray, Plan, and Persevere—and God will bless.

1. *Christian Service*, p. 111, emphasis supplied.
2. *Review and Herald*, Dec. 12, 1878.
3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 370.
4. *Gospel Workers*, p. 352.
5. *Review and Herald*, July 21, 1896.
6. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 19.
7. *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 27.

8. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 149.
9. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 115.
10. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 21, 22.

11. *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 221.
12. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 362.
13. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 433.

