

COOL TOOLS FOR SABBATH SCHOOL

Branch Sabbath Schools

Sabbath School members throughout the world are sharing their faith with friends and neighbors through a variety of outreach programs. Sabbath School is not only a time for fellowship and study, but it provides a means for reaching out in a tangible way to people around us.

Sabbath School transforms lives through the discovery of spiritual truths. These truths shared with others can break down prejudice and fear while strengthening faith. Many souls can be brought into a saving relationship with Christ and into the fellowship of the church.

Many people in the community are willing to attend a home fellowship Bible study group. These groups easily transition into branch Sabbath Schools and later churches. A Branch Sabbath School is an excellent way to plant a church.

The Purpose of Branch Sabbath Schools

A Branch Sabbath School is an evangelistic type of service conducted primarily for the benefit of non-Seventh-day Adventists. It often begins in a simple way and can easily be adapted to fit the particular interest and needs of the people. A Branch Sabbath School is conducted under the approval of the Sabbath School council or the conference Sabbath School director. Regardless of the day on which it is held, the term Branch Sabbath School is used to designate any regular weekly Sabbath School evangelistic endeavor in which Sabbath School materials are used.

Types of Branch Sabbath Schools

Branch Sabbath Schools fall into two general:

1. *A Swarming Branch Sabbath School* is one which that is held on a Sabbath by a nucleus of Seventh-day Adventists who have chosen to branch out from their Sabbath School for the purpose of establishing a new Sabbath School and eventually a new church. This is conducted along the same lines as the parent Sabbath School, using the same materials and the same organization. As with any Sabbath School, neighbors and friends are invited and made welcome. This type of Branch Sabbath School usually meets at the same time as the regular Sabbath Schools. It is advisable to consult with the pastor and church officers regarding the best location, which frequently develops into a regular company and church.

2. *An Outreach Branch Sabbath School* is

evangelistic in nature and may be conducted on any day of the week. It is designed for the express purpose of creating spiritual interest in order to bring souls to a saving relationship with Christ. This type of outreach may take the form of a family Bible study, a Neighborhood Bible Club, a Branch Sunday School, or a story hour. It may be conducted for children, youth, or adults. The results may lead to adding new members to the existing Sabbath School or may form a nucleus for establishing a new company or church.

Soul-winning Counsel

“The object of Sabbath school work should be the ingathering of souls.”¹

“He who becomes a child of God should henceforth look upon himself as a link in the chain let down to save the world, one with Christ in His plan of mercy, going forth with Him to seek and save the lost.”²

“Not upon the ordained minister only rests the responsibility of going forth to fulfill this commission. Everyone who has received Christ is called to work for the salvation of his fellow men.”³

“A great work might be accomplished in bringing souls to the knowledge of the truth. . . . In every town, city, and village there are persons who would embrace the truth if it were brought before them.”⁴

“I saw jets of light shining from cities and villages, and from the high places and the low places of the earth. God’s word was obeyed, and as a result there were memorials for Him in every city and village.”⁵

“Truth that is not lived, that is not imparted, loses its life-giving power, its healing virtue. Its blessing can be retained only as it is shared.”⁶

Prospects for Branch Sabbath Schools

Who might be interested in attending Branch Sabbath School? As we see the many contacts available to us we can find many avenues to interested souls.

• Church members who are not Sabbath School members



- Former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
- Non-Seventh-day Adventist parents of children in Sabbath School or church school
- Guests who visit our church
- Vacation Bible School follow-up interests
- Interested friends and neighbors
- Interested relatives
- People responding to a home visitation survey
- Interests from literature evangelists
- Radio, TV, and Bible school interests
- Hospital interests
- Interests from literature distribution
- Ingathering contacts
- Those attending evangelistic efforts
- Community service contacts
- Prison interests
- People in retirement homes
- People living in areas where there is no Sunday School
- Business associates and contacts
- People who formerly attended Branch Sabbath School or Vacation Bible School

Organization of Branch Sabbath Schools

Any Sabbath School leader, teacher, or member may be impressed by the Holy Spirit to begin a Branch Sabbath School. Many times it will be the spontaneous outgrowth of a Vacation Bible School or of any gathering of children, youth, or adults. If it appears that there might be some interest, there may be an informal beginning with only a story or Bible lesson, perhaps on film or tape. As interest grows, set a definite weekly schedule and add additional items to the program as you develop more effective soul-winning methods.

Some suggested approaches for creating interest may be to:

- Have a story hour for children.
- Begin a Bible-marking class.
- Have a Bible discussion group.
- Have a combined songfest and Bible discussion.
- Conduct an adult program during Vacation Bible School.
- Bring Sabbath School to an isolated or shut-in member.
- Involve former members in a Sabbath School program.
- Continue Vacation Bible School on a weekly basis.

If the Branch Sabbath School involves a more elaborate beginning, plans should be presented to the Sabbath School council and then coordinated with other outreach activities of the church. When the plan

is accepted, some steps to follow may be to:

- Appoint leaders, teachers, musicians, and other necessary personnel.
- Survey the territory and settle on a location.
- Decide on the time and day most suitable for all.
- Promote the plan in the local church to get personnel and financial support.
- Secure lesson and program materials.
- Prepare announcements and invitations.
- Set up an effective visitation program.
- Prepare an interesting program.

Where to Hold a Branch Sabbath School

The type and size of the proposed Branch Sabbath School will help to determine the location. Consideration must be given to transportation facilities as well as adequate space and other necessary accommodations. It may be necessary to move to larger quarters as attendance grows. Also, after interest has been fairly well established, the group may move to the church facilities, thus gradually becoming acclimated to church surroundings and eventually into total church fellowship. Some places to consider for use in opening a Branch Sabbath School would be:

- Home of a member.
- Home of an isolated member or shut-in.
- Home of an interested neighbor.
- Home of an interest from Vacation Bible School or Bible study.
- School room or small hall.
- Public building—town hall, courthouse, fire station.
- Vacant building—store, church, office.
- Nursing home.
- Prison.
- YWCA, YMCA, lodge, or veterans' building.
- Out-of-doors if weather and conditions permit.

Keeping It Going

What happens to a Branch Sabbath School if initial enthusiasm wears off, if attendance drops, if interest wanes, or if all of these develop and discouragement sets in? Don't give up. Take time to evaluate; then revise and keep moving.

- Change the location if necessary.
- Revise the program to be sure it is bright and lively; add music and other interest features.
- Re-establish visiting groups to visit those who have dropped.
- Consult with the pastor for support and encouragement.
- Pray for the direction of the Holy Spirit in this outreach endeavor.

Programs

No definite number of people is required to start a Branch Sabbath School. When you are reaching out for souls, you can start with one or two persons. Begin small with a simple program. If the program is interesting, those attending will invite others. Each outreach Branch Sabbath School should be evangelistic in nature and the program should be designed to fit the age and experience of the people.

Experienced Branch Sabbath School leaders have found it helpful to have several people involved in leadership, which allows for an occasional absence of a leader, while the Branch Sabbath School continues week by week. When several leaders work and pray together, they usually find more fresh ideas to maintain interest in the meetings each week.

Suggested Beginning Program

Welcome
Song or song service
Prayer
Bible lesson or story
Prayer

Children's Programs

General suggestions:

- Children's programs should not last more than one hour.
- Use plenty of good music and participation activities.
- If Bible quizzes are used, the age and experience of the children will determine the difficulty.
- Divide into small groups for the Bible lesson.
- Use activities and object lessons to reinforce the Bible truths.
- Have enough materials for everyone so that each child has something to take home.
- Arrange for the children to give an occasional program for parents.
- Use Bible- and character-building stories.
- Be careful about presenting testing Bible truths to young children. Concentrate first on leading them to know and accept Christ.

Suggested program:

Song service (include choruses and illustrated songs)
Prayer
Devotional talk (two minutes—on prayer, Bible study, reverence, etc.)
Song
Nature talk or story (show objects or pictures)
Bible games
Bible lesson
Song

Mission story

Song

Closing prayer

Program and lesson materials for Branch Sabbath Schools are prepared for special age groups. Each age group will use appropriate record cards, songbooks, mission material, program helps, and teaching aids. The Bible lesson and other material for kindergarten and primary children should be selected from the Sabbath School publications for Cradle Roll, Kindergarten, Primary, and Junior ages.

Other material used in the regular Sabbath School can be adapted for the Branch Sabbath School, such as felt visual-aid sets, picture sets, songbooks, illustrated songs, and activity materials. Contact the local Adventist Book Center or Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department of the conference for information about the variety of materials being produced for Neighborhood Bible Clubs, including Bible and character-building stories on tape, and Bible, nature, and mission stories on filmstrip, DVD, and slides.

Youth Programs

Youth programs often follow the general adult plan, modified as necessary to appeal to this age group. Use the regular Sabbath material for earliteen or youth or one of the programs designed for easy Bible study.

Youth enjoy singing, fellowship, and an opportunity to discuss current problems. In any discussion the leader should endeavor to keep the thinking positive and constructive, always bringing the youth to Christ and His Word for solutions to their problems. The programs should close on an encouraging note as the leader gradually and consistently brings the youth to a closer relationship and commitment to Christ.

Adult Programs

It is well to start the branch Sabbath School with dynamics that will result in growth. The emphasis on prayer, Bible study, fellowship, outreach and missions can be rather informal but practical. The adult Branch Sabbath School can be conducted along the same line as a regular Sabbath School, following the regular schedule and using much of the same material. The adult lesson materials may be studied, or if the members have limited Bible background, the *Profiles of Faith* or similar lessons may be used. Adult groups also enjoy additional topics for study and discussion such as health, family life, or child growth. Many parents can be encouraged to attend at the same time as the children if they see that an attractive adult program is being offered.

Miscellaneous Pointers

- All parts of the program should be geared to provide spiritual growth.
- Try to have a small nucleus of Seventh-day Adventist members for help and support.
- If a variety of ages attend, be sure to have a program for each age level no matter how few in number.
- Children especially like to have something to take home each week.
- Keep the teaching and stories short and vibrant.
- Begin and end promptly.
- Don't just lecture to the people; encourage discussion and participation.
- Keep children busy in order to avoid discipline problems.
- Keep a record of attendance.
- In cultures where it is effective, use devices for attendance and memory work and incentives for bringing new members.
- Encourage personal devotion on the part of those attending; perhaps even providing Bibles for those who do not have one.
- Visit homes occasionally, especially those of the sick.

● Avoid embarrassing anyone by presenting testing truths too soon. Avoid controversy.

- Never assume that people know about God or other spiritual topics.
- As you see spiritual growth taking place, be ready with encouragement and help as needed.
- Keep the pastor and the home Sabbath School informed of the progress of the Branch Sabbath School and the interest of individuals.
- Keep in mind that many Branch Sabbath Schools develop into regular Sabbath Schools. Plan accordingly.
- When appropriate, invite members of the Branch Sabbath School to participate in church functions such as Vacation Bible School, Community Guest Day, or cooking classes.
- Remember that success in any missionary endeavor depends upon our own spiritual condition and our willingness to be used of God.

1. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 61.
2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 105.
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 110.
4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 113.
5. *Ibid.*, vol. 9, pp. 28, 29.
6. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 149.

