

COOL TOOLS FOR SABBATH SCHOOL

Decision Days

“Who will be earnest workers for souls in our Sabbath schools? Who will take the youth separately, and talk and pray with them, and make personal appeals to them, beseeching them to yield their heart to Jesus, that they may be as a sweet savor to Christ? . . . Who will accept these grave responsibilities, and watch for souls as they that must give an account? . . . Let all do their utmost to work for the salvation of the dear children and youth, and by and by they will listen with joy to the words of Jesus, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’”¹

“There are sacred responsibilities entrusted to Sabbath school workers, and the Sabbath school should be the place where, through a living connection with God, men and women, youth and children, may be so fitted up that they shall be a strength and blessing to the church.”²

It is clear that Sabbath School officers and teachers have God-given responsibilities to work for the conversion of boys and girls, youth, and those of mature years. Sabbath School workers have tremendous opportunities to reach for Christ many thousands of uncommitted, young and old. This must be their supreme purpose.

“The Sabbath school, if rightly conducted, is one of God’s great instrumentalities to bring souls to a knowledge of the truth.”³

The challenge to the superintendent and his/her associates is to conduct the Sabbath School in such a way that all who are unsaved may surrender to Christ, that non-attending members may be reached and won back to loyalty, and that all members may grow into spiritual maturity.

Personal Work for Every Pupil

“Teachers of the different classes should bring every child into their heart and under their special watchcare.”⁴

Inspired counsel indicates that soul-winning work is to start with the little ones and the youth and continue with adults, with every effort being made with personal loving concern. Sabbath School evangelism is not a matter of mass production. Fruit for God’s kingdom is hand-picked, not machine-harvested. When Sabbath School workers everywhere make full proof of their ministry, enlisting, instructing, and training on a person-to-person basis, then it may be truly said that the Sabbath School is “one of the greatest instrumentalities, and the most effectual, in

bringing souls to Christ.”⁵

“There should be much personal work done in the Sabbath school. The necessity of this kind of work is not recognized and appreciated as it should be.”⁶

At the very first council meeting called by the new superintendent, the subject of personal work for every pupil should be high on the agenda. All programs and projects should rightly focus on this objective. As soon as teachers in all divisions are chosen, it is advisable to call them together with the Sabbath School officers to lay plans for personal evangelism. Plans should include cradle roll and kindergarten divisions, for it is here that foundations may be laid for full conversion experiences later on. Personal work can be truly effective only if it includes personal contacts at times other than the formal Sabbath session. Tactful visits to the homes of the pupils to become acquainted with the entire family and to discover personal interests, problems, and needs are essential and effective. Spiritual help for each pupil can be given with maximum success only if the leaders or teachers know and understand the pupils in their own environment.

Social contacts through carefully planned nature outings, picnics, or other recreational occasions provide opportunities for building mutual confidence and for spiritual conversations. When leaders and teachers team up in doing various kinds of missionary work, a rapport is established that can be a redemptive factor. More intimate acquaintance makes it possible for the wise worker to lead the pupil to Christ gently without embarrassment or peer pressure to hinder. Teachers need to pray for an infilling of the love of Christ that will cause them to look upon each class member as one for whom Jesus gave His life, and thus worth a tremendous



expenditure of time, energy, and concern to bring him into the safety of God's fold.

Concern for the Missing

Jesus implied to His followers that their primary concern should be for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6, KJV). Absentee Sabbath School members and non-attending church members are as much a challenge and opportunity as are the unsaved attending members. Specific plans should be laid by the officers and teachers for a consistent and persistent effort to enroll every church member and every possible prospective member in some division of the Sabbath School. A little effort in a loving, tactful, personal way when a member is first absent from Sabbath School may save long and agonizing efforts later on.

Sabbath School teachers are in reality under-shepherds, assistants to the pastor. This means that ideally they will have a vital personal interest in each class member and will not rest until contact has been made with an absent member. They will come or call or write without delay to convey the greetings and solicitude of the class for the missing, offering any practical aid or comfort that might be called for. An illness of any length would make it appropriate for flowers to be sent from the class, or at least "get well" cards, expressing sympathy and best wishes. If all would be uniformly kind and courteous, more people would be won to Christ and fewer people would slip away from Sabbath School fellowship.

To maintain essential personal contact with each class member, it is necessary for careful records to be kept of class members, including their names, addresses, and telephone numbers, if any. The teacher may wish to have other information, such as birthday, family members, and the like.

It is suggested that the assistant superintendent designated for membership work with the church clerk and the Sabbath School secretary in preparing the records of potential Sabbath School members as well as former or missing members. They will need to consult the church roll of membership, the Sabbath School records, extension division records, and perhaps lists of individuals the pastor may feel are prime prospects for membership. This study may reveal some names that should be referred to the pastor for special attention. The general list should be reviewed by the Sabbath School Council, preferably with junior, earliteen, youth, and adult teachers present. Officers and teachers may then agree on assignment of names to the various classes in the most practical manner.

When a class agrees to follow up certain names, these should

be written in the "prospective member" section of the Class Record booklet. As soon as any of these respond and join the Sabbath School, either on a regular class or in the extension division, the name should be enrolled on the regular membership record. All prospective members should be extended warm, friendly invitations, particularly on the occasion of decision days or community guest days.

Decision Days

Every year many thousands of children and youth reared in Seventh-day Adventist homes reach the stage of maturity at which they should be able to make an intelligent decision for Christ. Along with the home and the youth department, the Sabbath School has a definite obligation to work to lead boys and girls to know and love Jesus.

Careful Bible instruction and thorough indoctrination are important, but they are not enough. The supreme objective is to bring children and youth to a definite decision to accept Christ. They must be led to give themselves to Him in full commitment. A new birth experience must be theirs. This is an imperative.

"The object of Sabbath school work should be the ingathering of souls. The order of working may be faultless, the facilities all that could be desired; but if the children and youth are not brought to Christ, the school is a failure; for unless souls are drawn to Christ, they become more and more unimpressible under the influence of a formal religion."⁷

Note that a formal routine of Bible instruction without a spiritual application that leads to a surrender of the soul to Christ tends to harden the heart, and may even build a wall of resistance, cynicism, and rebellion. "The longer the youth remain in impenitence, the more confirmed they become in their resistance of the Spirit of God. With increase of years it is probable that there will be a decrease of sensibility to divine things, a diminished susceptibility to the influences of religion. Every day Satan works to fasten them in their habits of disobedience, their spirit of impenitence, and there is less probability that they will become Christians."⁸

Let Us Gather the Harvest

The old gospel song, "Bringing in the Sheaves," expresses the real purpose of the Sabbath School, yet in real application many Sabbath Schools fall short. While their hearts are still tender and impressionable, the children need to be shown how God loves them. Jesus must be made real to them as a Friend and Helper. Very young children can love Jesus and choose to let Him guide their lives. In simple terms

they can be taught how they may be His very own little boys and girls.

Of course, not every kindergarten or primary child should be baptized immediately. Infant baptism has no divine approval. But this does not mean that we cannot or should not do our utmost to influence the boys and girls to come to Jesus and to declare themselves to be His little children. Although baptism may come later, after more formal preparation, the invitation may certainly be given to accept Christ or to make a new commitment to Him.

“Do not speak of religion as something that children cannot understand, or act as if they were not expected to accept Christ in their childhood.”⁹ “It is still true that children are the most susceptible to the teachings of the gospel; their hearts are open to divine influences, and strong to retain the lessons received. The little children may be Christians, having an experience in accordance with their years.”¹⁰

“Children of eight, ten, or twelve years are old enough to be addressed on the subject of personal religion. Do not teach your children with reference to some future period when they shall be old enough to repent and believe the truth. If properly instructed, very young children may have correct views of their state as sinners and of the way of salvation through Christ. Ministers are generally too indifferent to the salvation of children and are not as personal as they should be. Golden opportunities to impress the minds of children frequently pass unimproved.”¹¹ Inspired counsel points out that the aim of Sabbath School workers should be to bring whole classes to Jesus.

“God wants every child of tender age to be His child, to be adopted into His family.”¹²

“We want to see whole classes of young people being converted to God, and growing up useful members of the church. . . . Never rest till every child in your class is brought to the saving knowledge of Christ.”¹³

If we do our part, results are assured that are thrilling to contemplate. “We may bring hundreds and thousands of children to Christ if we will work for them.”¹⁴

Preparing for Decision Day

In every well-taught lesson pupils are being prepared for decision day, but for maximum effectiveness more specific planning should precede the chosen day. During the program and at class time for a period of several weeks in advance the pupils may be reminded of Jesus’ love for them and of His invitation to come to Him. Stories and illustrations can help to make plain what it means to confess our sins and to receive Jesus into our hearts by faith.

References such as Matthew 18:1-5, 11-14; 19:13-15; 1 John 1:9; 2:2-4, 12; Ephesians 6:1-3, may be helpful if carefully explained in simple terms. To prepare and encourage children ahead of time to give their hearts to Christ is to make it much easier for them to take a public stand for Him on decision day.

Children and junior youth are a primary concern in planning for decision day, but there may be older youth and adults who attend Sabbath School but who have never made a public commitment to follow Jesus. Whether children and youth have never given their hearts to Christ or have become discouraged and despondent, concerned teachers and leaders should be alert to their needs and should gently and tactfully urge them to make a new or renewed consecration. Decision day should, and can, bring a great blessing to all ages in the Sabbath School.

Decision Day Plans

It is suggested that normally decision days be held twice in the year, in the spring and in the autumn. Because this can be a very significant day in the Sabbath School calendar, it requires prayerful and thorough preparation. It is recommended that the Sabbath School Council should hold a joint session with all teachers to lay plans for decision day. In large churches the decision day services should probably be held by divisions in their own rooms. Division leaders and teachers would then plan the kind of program best suited to their pupils. In smaller churches a combined service for children, youth, and adults may be effective. A simple service, featuring a simple, earnest talk is sufficient, leading to an appeal for surrender to Christ.

In the weeks just preceding decision day, it would be well for officers and teachers to meet as frequently as possible for prayer and counsel. Pages 60-126 in *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* may be used as the basis of devotional study as leaders and teachers make their own spiritual preparation. The superintendent may also wish to supply each officer and teacher with a copy of this leaflet.

Decision Day Program

On decision day the superintendent’s remarks and the secretary’s progress report must be very brief. The special feature and the world mission report will need to be left out to make room for the decision day program. The special program for the day may properly come at the close of the lesson study, ending the exercises for the day with opportunity for decision and consecration.

A brief decision day service program is suggested below:

- A brief statement of the purpose of the service—

the need, your earnest desire, and God's loving readiness to help each one to know what he or she should do.

- "I Have a Saviour," *The SDA Hymnal*, no. 575, or "I Am Coming to the Cross," no. 600.

- A passage such as John 6:37; Matthew 19:13-15; or Romans 5:6-9 may be used. God's love prompted Him to give Jesus to redeem us (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Without the grace and power of Jesus we are held in helpless and hopeless slavery to sin, and would be eternally lost (Jer. 13:23; Rom. 8:13). God extends a tender invitation to every person to come to Him for pardon, victory, and peace (Matt. 11:28, 29). Shall we not come to Him just now, repenting and confessing our sins? He has promised to cleanse every spot and stain (Isa. 1:18; 1 John 1:9).

- Before extending the invitation to surrender to Christ, sing one stanza of "Just As I Am," *The SDA Hymnal*, no. 222.

- Responses may come more readily if an invitation is given first for those who have already decided for Christ, to re-consecrate themselves to the Lord. Then the invitation may be given to those who have never before surrendered to Christ, to do so at this time, joining those who have previously responded.

It should be made very clear how it is desired to have the response indicated—whether it is to come forward to seats, which have been left empty, to stand, or to raise the hand.

On such occasions it is mutually encouraging to allow a good number of personal testimonies to be borne. The Lord declares that such words are precious to Him, being written before Him (Mal. 3:16).

Primary children and junior youth respond well by writing their feelings, intentions, or requests on slips of paper handed out before the service begins. When the appeal is made, the boys and girls thus seem free to give frank expression to their desires and determination to follow Jesus. These slips may also reveal needs of individuals that might not have been otherwise known, and thus personal help may be given.

Gentleness and an absence of pressure should characterize the invitations for decision. Let the Spirit of God do His work, but let the spiritual concern of every Sabbath School leader and teacher be evident.

Always close the service with an earnest prayer season. No one who has resisted the call to surrender should be made to feel that he or she has missed the last chance for salvation and that there is no further hope. The Savior will continue to knock. He is available to any who will come seeking Him. Those who do not choose to respond on this occasion should be encouraged to keep on studying, praying, and

believing in the unfailing love of Christ.

The Follow-up

Those who are old enough, children of eight, ten, or twelve years, should be encouraged to join a baptismal class, making certain that parents and the pastor concur. Those who are not yet ready for baptism and church membership should receive a great deal of spiritual nurture and encouragement to love and serve Jesus. If possible, a pre-baptismal class should be organized. It may meet a few times during the year with the pastor or other qualified individual for instruction, on their level, in the way of salvation. Such personal attention and carefully planned follow-up will increase the number of junior-age boys and girls entering baptismal classes.

Plans for social, cultural, and spiritual activities with the boys and girls should not be overlooked. Workers in the Sabbath School will do well to join with junior youth in recreation, nature hikes, achievement classes, Branch Sabbath Schools, singing bands, literature distribution—any and all activities that will help to guide the children and keep them loyal to Christ and His service.

Boys and girls who have made a commitment on decision day will need to be patiently taught how to be Christians in daily life: how to pray and have faith; the importance of taking part in family worship; how to let God speak to them daily through His Word and the study of the Sabbath School lesson; faithfulness in doing household chores; resisting temptations; telling others of Jesus and be helpful to those in need.

The People Business

"Entire consecration of soul must be maintained as much by the teachers and superintendents of our Sabbath schools as by the ministers in our pulpits, for all alike are engaged in the work of bringing souls to Christ. Each in his place is to work, as did Christ, in the spirit of love, for the erring and impenitent. This is what Christ would see in the Sabbath school work."¹⁵

Names are important, because names represent people, and people are important. Christ died for each person. If only one had been lost, He would have been willing to die for that one. The Sabbath School is in the "people business." Sabbath School activities have only one supreme purpose—to bring souls to Christ. Every name on every card in the Sabbath School files is a sacred responsibility. To fulfill God's purpose for each person whose name is on file is the opportunity and challenge of every Sabbath School worker. This requires entire consecration.

Surveys taken in recent years in fundamentalist

denominations, including ours, show conclusively that the optimum time for young individuals to decide for Christ is between eleven and fourteen years of age. Approximately two-thirds of Adventist children are baptized between the ages of seven and fourteen. Twelve is the peak age for most Christian denominations.

This makes Sabbath School work in the primary, junior, and earliteen divisions a vital concern that merits priority consideration. It means that no opportunity can be ignored to help these boys and girls make the all-important decision of their lives. Inspired counsel warns against procrastination and delay. It will take the utmost devotion and the most earnest spirit of sacrifice on the part of leaders and teachers to gather in this priceless harvest for God

during these most favorable years. But God has promised to do His part if we will do ours.

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1. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 75.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
 7. *Ibid.*
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
 9. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 517.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 515.
 11. *Testimonies for the Church*, p. 400.
 12. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 169.
 13. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 125.
 14. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 172.
 15. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 157.

