



NURTURE AND RETENTION (Sabbath School Program)

June 19, 2021

Suggested Hymns from the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

No. 348 – “The Church Has One Foundation”

No. 573 – “I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go”

No. 350 – “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”

No. 370 – “Christ for the World”

Scripture Reference

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46, 47).

Sabbath School Program Overview

One topic of conversation within the walls of many churches focuses on the issue of losing members “through the back door,” especially newer members. It takes a lot of effort to bring missing members back, so the emphasis should be on nurturing each other so members don’t wish to slip out the back door. One way of nurturing those in our houses of worship is through Sabbath School. By providing small groups to engage members and keep people involved, the attrition experienced will be much less, and everyone will benefit from having a more personal and rich relationship with Christ.

The following was written by Gary B. Swanson, the previous Associate Director for Sabbath School and Personal Ministries until his retirement at GC Session 2015 in San Antonio.

Review the origins of Sabbath School as presented below, then springboard into a discussion of what works and what doesn’t in your particular church/culture. Discuss ways to use your local resources to encourage Sabbath School members to nurture everyone so missing members don’t need to be “reclaimed”. Provide/have available resources your local church/conference has to offer.

Sabbath School Program

Pop quiz: What do potato chips have in common with Sabbath School?

Answer: Both had their beginnings in 1853.

The first potato chips were produced in Saratoga Springs, New York, United States of America. That same year, just a couple hundred miles away in Rochester, New York, the first Sabbath School was established.

In 1853, only a few years after the first group of Sabbathkeeping Adventists was formed in Washington, New Hampshire, James White organized the first regular Sabbath School in Rochester. In 1852, estimating an informal membership of about 1,000 in the state of New York, White had written a series of 19 lessons appearing in the new *Youth's Instructor*. He authored some of these earliest lessons, "in the form of questions and answers," as he traveled in a covered carriage with his wife and 3-year-old son, Edson, throughout New England. Ellen White describes in *Life Sketches*, pages 144, 145, how he composed much of this material during noon stops.

Gather outsiders. From its inception Sabbath School has focused on four emphases that are still prominent to this day: fellowship development, community outreach, Bible study, and foreign mission. A solid balance of these elements characterizes the most vital Sabbath Schools around the world.

As local members grow closer together in small groups, they help one another to grow spiritually as individuals, hold one another accountable in positive Christian relationships. Potlucks, picnics, socials, and a variety of other outlets bring members into closer relationship with Jesus and with one another. In the family of God there are no outsiders.

Vibrant Sabbath Schools also provide rich spiritual growth through an array of community outreach projects: Vacation Bible Schools, Branch Sabbath Schools, hospital and nursing home visitation, singing bands, and a host of other creative approaches to the community. Personal ministries have always been an integral part of the vitality of any Sabbath School, and members are ever seeking new ways to represent Christ in their community. The view from Sabbath School is outward!

How are your heart and soul? The study of God's Word forms the very heart and center of Sabbath School. When members interact with Scripture and with one another, they are exposed to the everyday value of the Bible in drawing them into closer relationship with Jesus and with the world around them. Where else can they go for answers to the questions that occur to any half-awake viewer of the 6:00 news?

Throughout Sabbath School's history, its focus on foreign mission has led to some creative and exciting projects that have impacted the far corners of the earth. The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, weekly mission stories, and Mission Spotlight have focused attention on ministry needs around the world. In 1890 Sabbath School offerings were the sole source for the building of the *Pitcairn*, a schooner used for 10 years to transport missionaries across the Pacific Ocean. The hemispheres of the heart of Sabbath School are north and south, east and west.

Based on these four emphases, from its beginning in 1853, Sabbath School membership has exploded from a handful of believers in upstate New York to more than 17 million worldwide today.

[Past] General Conference president Jan Paulsen has said that Sabbath School is like breakfast. For 150 years it has provided the spiritual nourishment that is needed to meet the challenges that arise during the rest of the week. And that's much better than potato chips!

The *Youth's Instructor* “The first Sabbath School lessons were written by James White. He published the first four in the initial issue of the *Youth's Instructor*, August 1852, only a few months after the Review and Herald publishing house had acquired its first press at Rochester, New York. But the second monthly issue was delayed until October because . . . White spent more than a month on a tour of conferences in various places between Rochester, New York, and Bangor, Maine. . . . He often sat down at noon, and while his horse was feeding, used the ‘dinner box’ or the top of his hat for a table on which to write material for the *Youth's Instructor*” (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, p. 513).

Prayer