

COOL TOOLS FOR SABBATH SCHOOL

Sabbath School Welcoming and Ushering

“We like your Sabbath School. Everyone is so friendly. You make all who attend feel glad they came. Your visitors are welcomed and cared for in such a pleasant, natural, courteous way. I would like to belong.”

Do you not want visitors in your Sabbath School to say this? If they do, it is evident that you have one of the prime factors for a growing Sabbath School, one that will attract members and win souls. This is the Lord’s plan. He wants every Sabbath School to be a soul-winning agency, a great power for evangelism. “The Sabbath school should be one of the greatest instrumentalities, and the most effectual, in bringing souls to Christ.”¹

Moreover, a friendly, growing Sabbath School will contribute to a friendly growing church, for as goes and grows the Sabbath School, so goes and grows the church. It is the Lord’s plan that “The influence growing out of Sabbath school work should improve and enlarge the church.”²

To win, the Sabbath School must have a winsome atmosphere. Every officer, teacher, and member should pray, study, plan, and work to make every Sabbath School period and every personal contact so cordial, so inspirational, and so irresistibly attractive that souls will be drawn into and held in the Sabbath School.

This presupposes that the cordiality and sincerity of the welcome extended at the entrance will follow on into the assembly and that it will be manifest throughout the entire Sabbath School session. It is not enough to have a good advertisement at the door; the goods must be delivered on the inside. This includes a well-organized program on the part of the superintendent, secretary, and music director. It means well-prepared lessons on the part of the teachers, with cheerful and stimulating presentation in the class.

Not only should the leader of the song service and the superintendent cordially welcome the members and visitors to Sabbath School, but the teachers also should express appreciation for the faithful attendance of the members, and give a special welcome to the visitors. It is a commendable practice for teachers to shake hands with those in the classes before time for the lesson. In this way they can ascertain the names and addresses of visitors and can give them special mention as they introduces them to the class. Thus, they will make them feel at home and appreciated, if, indeed, it is done, as it always should be done, with genuine fervor and cheerful good will. “Smile,

teachers. . . . Let the sunshine from a loving, grateful heart light up the countenance.”³

How Do We Treat Our Guests?

Every Sabbath day should be guest day in every Sabbath School. A very special guest will be present—the greatest guest of all—Jesus Himself. His promise is, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).⁴

He is present to bless and to guide us in the study of His holy Word and to help us in winning souls for His kingdom. He won souls by His loving friendliness and by the special interest He manifest in each individual. He considered every person He came in contact with a soul to be saved, and did all in His power to win him or her. Sabbath School should be organized and conducted in harmony with His purpose. The Sabbath School program should always be conducted with the consciousness of Jesus’ presence.

Remember the admonition: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Heb. 13:2).

Selecting and Training Receptionists

The selection, training, and organization by the Sabbath School Council of the staff to do the very important work of meeting the public in the Sabbath School should be considered as important as the choice of the other officers. Their work, their attitude, their personality and deportment create, to a great extent, the image of the Sabbath School. People should be selected who have tact, courtesy, and a sense of the sacred fitness that the work requires.

An experienced person should be chosen to be leader of the welcoming and ushering staff. Others chosen to assist might include the host or hostess and assistant, one to meet and register the guests visitors and newcomers as well as the persons to serve as ushers. This group will serve during the whole year.

Soon after his or her appointment, the leader should call the members of this team together for an



organizational meeting to plan for their work and help assure that the group will function harmoniously and efficiently. The superintendent of the Sabbath School and the pastor of the church will certainly be invited to meet with the group because their work is a soul-winning function to advance the cause of the Lord in the Sabbath School, which in turn enlarges the church.

Next several training classes should be arranged that all members of the group should attend to become thoroughly acquainted with their duties. It is a fine work to meet people, to welcome them and diplomatically encourage them to register their names and addresses, and to usher them to an appropriate place in the Sabbath School.

The Art of Welcoming and Ushering

Welcoming is an art acquired through observation, study, and practice. So is ushering. Sabbath School ushering is much more than a social custom, more than showing people to their seats. It is a service to God, and as such contributes to the worship of God and the extension of His kingdom. It helps to prepare the people for worshipful study of God's Word and the support of His own work on the earth. It assists in maintaining decency and order, in harmony with God's desire (see 1 Cor. 14:40). It promotes the work of evangelism and fosters favorable community relations.

Only persons who properly represent the character and teachings of the church should be selected for this responsibility. Their appearance should be neat and representative of Christ, well groomed, not overdressed or untidy. Their bearing should be sincerely and unaffectedly friendly, courteously tactful, pleasingly attentive, and appropriately dignified—but never cold, stiff, or austere. The Sabbath School may be more informal than the preaching service, yet it is a sacred service in which the Word of God is taught. All who participate in welcoming and ushering, as well as those who lead and teach, will bear this in mind.

They should reflect the best in finesse and good grooming. They will always seek to show courtesy and patience, to demonstrate and to foster quietness and reverence, and to show proper decorum, not slouching or leaning against walls or pews, and most certainly never chewing gum or engaging in careless banter with others.

A Community Friendly Sabbath School in Action

People who simply drop in, attend with a friend, or return to Sabbath School after a long absence, usually don't want to be ignored, but neither do they want to

be smothered with attention or singled out.

Guests should be greeted with a friendly smile and perhaps a question like, "Are you familiar with our program and/or facility?" This is not too invasive yet may help to set the guest at ease. A pre-arranged hospitality host could be introduced to the guest. He or she may engage in light conversation by self-introduction and tell a bit about family, work, how long he or she has lived in the community, etc.

The hospitality host may then answer questions and show guests to appropriate rooms for children's classes and give the locations of restrooms. They may invite the guest to their own adult Sabbath School class if appropriate. The host should select a class that is community friendly. The host family may sit near guests during church, accompany them to fellowship meal, and/or invite them to their home for Sabbath dinner.

Most guests are willing to sign a guest register, though there is a trend among younger generations to not be so inclined. Simple casual conversation with the right people may help a guest feel welcome and may best serve to communicate information about the guest to the pastor.

For the most part, guests do not want to be singled out by the use of a sticker or special attention from the front. In many localities, however, it is vital to recognize guests and to make their welcome a special part of the program. Consult local customs in this regard.

Always remember that a newcomer does not desire to be made conspicuous when being ushered to a seat. If the usher takes an unescorted woman to a seat, it is proper for him to walk by her side, but he should not offer his arm or take hers. It may happen that the husband is delayed while parking the car. When he comes in, the usher will take him to where his wife is seated.

The friendly approach does not mean the boisterous, backslapping kind of welcome. Though it is desirable to learn the names of newcomers (ushers will do well always to carry a small notebook and pencil for this purpose) and to introduce them to two or three key individuals at the beginning of the service, the general repetition of their names and general handshaking should be reserved for the close of the service, preferably after the worship hour, if the guests remain for the after service. A friendly nod of the head, a smile, and a look of genuine welcome, are always proper and effective, but it is usually considered appropriate for ushers to wait for the guest to offer actually to shake hands, especially when the visitor is a woman.

The ushers, of course, will know where the Sabbath

School officers and the pastor would like to have the visitors located and to which class they should be taken. In some Sabbath School divisions, the names are read near the close of the Sabbath School, with appropriate welcoming remarks.

Smiling, undisturbed courtesy and tact will usually enable the usher to manage such awkward situations as getting people to move in from aisle seats and accommodating those who do not choose to follow where the usher leads.

The Guest Book

The guest book is of great importance, especially in some cultures. It should be kept neat and clean, and free from children's scribbling. The host or hostess should see that it is put safely away after the service and is back in place for use early enough the following Sabbath. The book should already be open to the correct page for the guests, with the date entered, and a pen offered for their use. Attractive guest books may be secured from your local Adventist Book Center or from a stationery store.

The names and addresses registered in the guest book give the Sabbath School officers and the pastor of the church an opportunity for follow-up work which may result in new members for the Sabbath School and the church.

Whether the visitors are from far or near, the sending of a card will be appreciated; thank them for visiting, and invite them to come again.

Visiting Children

If adults are accompanied by children or youth, those young people should also be welcomed by name. One of the ushers should offer to take them to the proper divisions. The same tact and friendliness should be shown the children in their divisions as is expected in the adult division. In each division someone should be appointed to receive and welcome the visiting children. For the younger divisions a name tag or other item is often given them. They should be welcomed by the teacher and other adults.

Many children are shy about being separated from their parents in a strange place. If the children's leaders have instructed their regular members in the way to react to visitors, the shyness among strangers can usually be overcome. This can be accomplished by introducing the visitor to another child of similar interest and age and seating them together. The children should be instructed in sharing their Bibles and song books and in other ways to make the visitor feel comfortable. At the close of Sabbath School, an adult should make sure the children are quickly reunited with their parents.

It is essential that the adults who work with children should be completely trustworthy. Screening for possible pedophiles is recommended and required by some conferences.

Bulletins

Ordinarily there is one bulletin for both the Sabbath School and church service. There should be a sufficient number so that each guest and member may receive one. Usually the hostess will give bulletins to the guests when they sign the register. However, the ushers should have a supply of bulletins on hand where they are stationed so that none will be missed. The bulletins indicate the periods in the program when it is proper for people to enter. The ushers will courteously and kindly govern the entry of all in harmony with this so that nothing will occur to distract from the service.

The greeters and ushers should seek to participate in the Sabbath School as far as possible. Usually by the time the class period commences most of the people have arrived, thus as a general rule one person remaining in the entry area is usually sufficient to care for any latecomers. The others should attend a class.

Never should a group remain in the entry chatting and thus miss the blessing of the Bible study and Sabbath School exercises. If it is necessary for one to be on duty during the class period, he or she should still be registered as a class member in one of the Sabbath School classes, it being arranged so that he or she would alternate with other ushers not more than once a month. Or perhaps he or she may be seated in a class near the door, ready for duty.

Some Do's

- Do wear appropriate attire.
- Do show a winsome Christian smile as you meet the public in the name of Jesus.
- Do spot visitors quickly so that no one enters wondering where to go.
- Do take the job seriously as a faithful steward of the Lord.
- Do conduct your behavior as comfortable with yourself and with others.
- Do show a genuine interest in guests without interrogating or investigating them.

Some Don'ts

- Do not smother the person with too much attention.
- Do not ask people why they have not been attending Sabbath School.
- Do not show surprise or rejection when known

sinners show up for Sabbath School. (The exception would be those who have been asked not to attend, such as sexual predators.)

- Do not be absent from your post of duty without notifying the leader so that he or she can arrange for a substitute.
- Do not engage in conversation so the visitors are not noticed.
- Do not ignore the children who come with the visitors.
- Do not wait for someone else to greet a person; take the initiative.

Some Be's to Remember

- Be early. You should be the first ones to Sabbath School if your work is to be successful.
- Be pleasant and cheerful. "A true Christian constantly acknowledges Christ. He is always cheerful, always ready to speak words of hope and comfort to the suffering."⁵
- Be courteous. "A kind, courteous Christian is the most powerful argument that can be produced in favor of Christianity."⁶
- Be an example. "There is nothing that the Saviour

desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and His character."⁷

- Be reverent. A cheerful, reverent dignity bears a strong influence. True reverence is not cold and cheerless. We influence others more by what we are and do than by what we say. Christ's followers are admonished to "guard against the tendency to lose the spirit of reverence and godly fear."⁸
- Be alert. Your work will present many opportunities. Watch for them. "We are to cultivate tact and sharp discernment, to be quick to see opportunities to do good, and to seize these opportunities and make the most of them."⁹
- Be diligent. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Eccles. 9:10). "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

1. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 10.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

4. Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural references in this leaflet derive from *The New King James Version of the Bible*.

5. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 70.

6. *Gospel Workers*, p. 122.

7. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 600.

8. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 48.

