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SMALL GROUP FOR FELLOWSHIP, FAITH AND MISSION

Training
booklet for
personal grow in
fellowship, faith
and personal
witnessing



A deep
and lasting
renewal for
my church

Sabbath School
and Personal Ministry
Inter European Division

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is prepared for Sabbath School directors, teachers, animators and personal ministry leaders. It can be useful for other church leaders. Particularly it is prepared for teacher of Sabbath School Action Unit. Before it was the classical Sabbath School classes but renamed Sabbath School Action Unit after the 1990's GC session of Indianapolis.

During the years 2011 – 2013 the office of Archive, Statistics and Research has been made a survey to more than 40.000 seventh-day Adventist believers plus over 900 ex-SDAs who shared the experiences that led them to leave our ranks. The research named Seventh-day Adventist Global Data Picture has been chaired by Doctor David Trim and consisted in a number of questions on spiritual issues, beliefs, stewardship practices, attitudes, experiences in the local church and spiritual-life practices.

According to this research published in 2014, some questions were asked to rate the extent to which their

pastors, elders and Sabbath School teachers knew them well, were warm, friendly, caring, and had a positive impact on their spiritual lives.

“In all surveyed divisions, more than 50% of respondents gave their Sabbath School teachers the highest rankings in these categories ... the SS teachers were consistently ranked above other local church officials”.¹

So, if first came the Sabbath school teacher or animator (from now animator) and to the ones who serve in Sabbath School ministry we want particularly to dedicate this short manual to them.

This booklet has the purpose to share theoretical and practical contents. The title, Small Group For Fellowship, Faith And Mission, expresses in a more meaningful and direct language the old expression “Sabbath School Class” or the most recent “Sabbath School Action Unit”. We use alternately classes, small groups, groups, and action units with the same meaning.

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Bern, October 2017,



THE MISSION OF THE SABBATH SCHOOL

The sabbath school is one of the oldest ministries exercised in the Seventh-day Adventist church. It had been organized in the very beginning of its story. First it had been organized for young people, then for children finally for all believers.

Sabbath School Mission Statement matches the Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that so states: “The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting gospel embraced in the three angels’ messages [Revelation

14:6–12], and to prepare the world for Christ's soon return".²

"... to call all people to become disciple of Jesus ..." is the commission rooted to the instruction Jesus gave to the eleven disciples just before returning to the Father: "Go then and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). Going from these words to the Sabbath School Mission Statement we see the neighborhood and the contiguity: "Sabbath School and Personal Ministries serves as the primary religious educational resource for the world Church and seeks to foster discipleship among its members. ... With the perspective that each church is a training school for the development of Christian workers, Sabbath School and Personal Ministries seeks to educate and equip members in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12 and to help all members of all ages grow and mature in their relationship with God, with His Church and with others".³

In the Seventh-day church manual we see the same direction in defining this mission. We read four directions: "The Sabbath school, the primary religious education program of the Church, has four purposes: study of the Scripture, fellowship, community outreach, and world mission emphasis".⁴

In the Working policy we have a synthesis for these four concepts: “*Faith; Fellowship; Community Outreach; World Mission*”.⁵

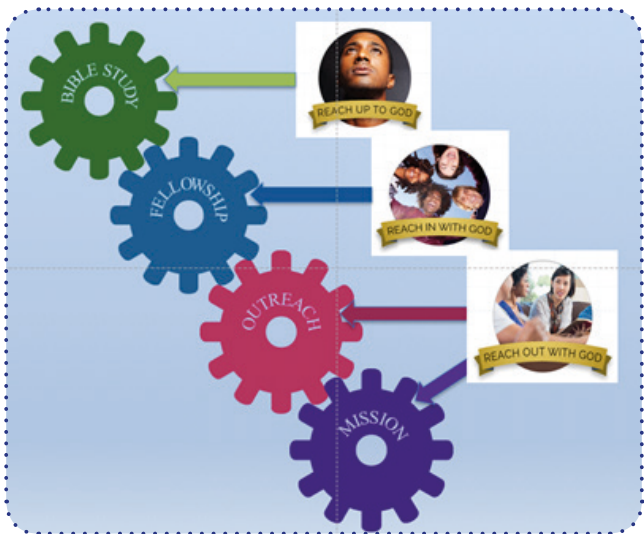
Reading together Working Policy and Church Manual we realize the following broad concept:

- to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ (SDA Mission Statement)
- The Working Policy states “Sabbath School ... seeks to foster discipleship among its members, ... and to help all members of all ages to grow and to mature in their relationship with God, with His Church and with others”.
- In the church manual we read “Sabbath School, ... has four purposes: study of the Scripture, fellowship, community outreach, and world mission”.

This synthesis fits perfectly with the three concepts the church adopt to define the mission and the priority of the church: Reach up With God, Reach in With God, Reach out With God.

In the below picture we see these three concepts matching the mission of the Sabbath School. The three pictures underlined by the word *REACH* are taken in the document adopted by the GC section in San Antonio (2015) titled “Reach the World”.⁶

The four graphics in the form of a gear have been downloaded a few years ago from the web site of the Sabbath School and Personal Ministry GC department.



But now let us take a short time in order to reflect on these three “REACH”.



REACH UP WITH GOD,
REACH IN WITH GOD
REACH OUT WITH GOD,
PRINCIPLES OF THREE-
DIMENSIONAL LOVE

“the goal of this ministry is love”
(1 Timothy 1:5)

Questioned by a lawyer on what was the most imperative thing, “What is, in law, the greatest commandment? What is most important? What comes first?” Jesus’ response was immediate and clear, “He replied: “Love the Lord your God with all thy heart and

with all your soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40).

Jesus sums up all the revelation, all the life principles in two values-principles: love God and love people. In fact we could do a synthesis: everything is summed up in one word, LOVE. Paul is giving us permission to do this summary when he says: *“Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law”* (Romans 13:10). Paul repeats and summarizes the ministry of his associate Timothy with even more emphasis giving his commitment to Timothy: *“the goal of this ministry is love... ”* (1 Timothy 1:5). This possible translation is supported by the context of verse 18 of the same chapter.

Love is all about because God is love, and is the expression of all the will of God, which is a reflection of His nature, takes place in the principle, the value of love.

The three dimensions of love

A closer look at the biblical texts, including all the New Testament texts which speak of love, tells us that the Lord has called us to love in three directions: towards God, towards our brothers and sisters: our family, both the natural and the spiritual; and to our neighbors whoever they are. Let us give a look directly at the texts.

Love for God

From the very beginning of the story of God's people we find this fundamental law: *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE! You shall love the LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH"* (Deuteronomy 6:4,5).

To the rabbi that questioned Jesus about the greatest commandment the answer he received by the Lord was very precise: *"This is the first and great commandment"*, love. The answer of Jesus leaves no room for interpretation on what is the most important.

Not only, this commandment is the most repeated and the most retold throughout all the Bible. This sentence is mentioned 28 times, but 16 of these are texts that repeat this command with the same words we read in the book of Deuteronomy.

God is love and to love God is the highest and most noble expression of love. He is the source and the "cause" of love. We can love God only because of the love He has for us, *"because love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God"* (1 John 4:7).

God showed His love through actions and through the implementation of a loving relationship expressed personally to His creatures: *"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him"* (1 John 4:9).

Loving God, living the love of God, is living the life experience that comes from God: *"We love because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19). To love God is only possible in an encounter, in a relationship with God, in a personal relationship with the revelation of God's love, the Christ.

John goes even further and opens up an unlimited landscape, he draws the theme of God's knowledge, and all the implications that this knowledge of God brings. John wrote: *"We have met the love God has for us, and we have believed. God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him"* (4:16). With these words John goes into the heart of the doctrine of salvation that is a "living experience", a relationship with God's love that forgives, that redeems, that transforms. That is salvation!

These thoughts on love does not pretend to be exhaustive in any way, it is just an introduction. And it is only one aspect among many chapters of this vast subject. Another chapter that is intrinsically linked is that of faith: Faith and love are closely related (1 John 3:23: *"This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one others according to the commandment that he gave us"*).

Brotherly Love.

The number of texts about love for God we found in the Bible are only a little bit higher than the number of texts that speak about brotherly love.

Even here we have almost thirty texts on brotherly love, and about 20 underline explicitly “love each other”. It is not something optional; only true brotherly love can testify we are sons of God, His disciples. This was the first report of the community Luke describes in a very concrete way: *“And they were in fellowship...”* (Acts 2:42).

While the Old Testament has a limited number of declarations on love of the neighbors, this call is repeated many times in the New Testament. Jesus expressed it categorically: *“This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you”* (John 15:12). Jesus has indeed repeated this commandment as it was a new one: *“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another. as I have loved you, you also love one another”* (John 13:34).

Brotherly love is fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), marks the transition from the old to the new nature, from death to life (the principle of eternal life here and now). Again we read in 1 John 3:14: *“We know that we have passed from death to life because we love brothers. Who does not love remains in death”*.

This is not only the will of God, is a human need, an urgent need that wants satisfaction. The phrase “love one another” underlines the reciprocity of love; love must be celebrated, shared, lived together.

Many times the term is used to characterize the relationships in the church, relationships of peace, service, respect, hospitality, mutual intercession, compassion, affection and care. It is the style of the community of believers.

Love is the greatest medicine, the most effective antidepressant, the gateway to joy, peace, and so on. It is the highest fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Working to build a community in brotherly love is the first task of those who are called to serve and lead the church. If love characterizes our community, then the Kingdom of God has come among us.

“Pursue love” penned Paul (1 Corinthians 14:1).

Love your neighbor, love the others

The third direction of love is “love toward *all* men”. God wants all men to be saved because He “*loves them*”. He loves the world. In the same way He calls us to offer love.

This challenge to love beyond our borders is clearly expressed both in the Old and in the New Testament: “*Treat the stranger who dwells among you as one born among you, love him as thyself*” (Leviticus 19:34). Jesus goes in the same path: “*Ye have heard that it was said: Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you*” (Matthew 5:43,44).

Jesus accomplished his ministry moved by love and compassion. In this he becomes our model.

The driving force of mission is love.

Three dimensions of the Christian style.

In these three pathways we have the synthesis of the Christian life, the three characteristics of a disciple of God, the three main paths the Lord has marked out for His children.

These are the three dimensions of being part of Him and in these three dimensions we realize humanly the most complete portrait of the divine love in us. In these three paths we follow three steps that Peter indicates in his first letter for a priest: to live in Him and through Him (2:4,5), to build the house, the family of God, (2:5) , to proclaim His virtues, to share the Gospel to those who need this salvation.

These three dimensions are also stated by Paul. To the church of Ephesus he wrote: *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Even here we have these three concepts, three fundamental truths about the life of the believer.

The first aspect is a call to holiness, i.e. to receive the image of God in us. Sanctity comes from God (2 Corinthians 3:18), through the guidance of the Scriptures.

The second is “the edification of the Body of Christ”, through love, we have seen”.

Finally we have the third concept which Paul penned: “for the work of ministry”. To be ministers of the Gospel, (Romans 15:16; Colossians 1:23; Philemon 1:13); minister as Jesus was (Rom 15:8), as Paul was (Romans 11:13).

Pursuing and living these three dimensions

Both Peter and Paul propose this Christian Style to communities and not to single. To a body and not to a member. To the church. This is relevant.

We can't express love alone, we need someone that stays in front, or God or my brother, or the other. With God, with my brother, with my neighbor.

Because of this the Bible refers that God saw good Adam alone. God invented the family, God invented the church. We have here the principle of the small group and of the community.

Reach Up with God, Reach in with God, Reach Out with God

These three paths express how the Adventist church understands herself and its mission. They are the titles of three steps that we can express as follows:

“Reach Up to God” expresses the importance of the encounter, the knowledge and the personal experience with the Lord of life. Reach Up is searching for God because we know that by nature we are separated from Him; we are not automatically with Him; due to our sinful nature we are drawn away from Him. Reach Up is wanting His presence; it’s wanting to dwell in Him. The Bible affirms this truth. Jesus said: “This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). We Reach Up to God through personal and corporate spiritual practices taught in the Word of God, including reading, meditating, studying, and sharing the Bible.

“Reach In with God” means caring for each other as His family. It is the pursuit of brotherhood, of unity with our brothers, of acceptance, of communion and of brotherly love. It means offering forgiveness, shelter, and affection. It means to offer a home to those who are lost and alone, for those who have fallen away. By reaching in we are intentional in fostering discipleship and in building up the church in comfort, mutual listening, sympathy, and love. Jesus said: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

“Reach out with God” captures the mission dimension of Christian life. We would like to reach out to

others, starting with those who are closest to us, and continuing with those far away, by sharing love and faith in God. As we reach out we take seriously the mission mandate given to the church and express our concern for the salvation of others following the method of Christ.

In synthesis with God, with my brother, with my neighbor.



SMALL GROUPS AND SUPPORTING STRUCTURES

“He laid the foundations of the house”

(Ezra 5:16)

“...the church needs support structures to facilitate re-consecration, revival, commitment to service and testimony that last and are strengthened over time. Small groups are the essential structure”.⁷

In this chapter we will face the practical questions and purposes of a small group, particularly the Sabbath School Action Units. We will try to be practical as well as detailed and concrete in the various aspects of these units. We will start with the concept of “Supporting Structure”.

Supporting structures: What are they?

What is their purpose?

Let's begin by asking some questions. How can we make each believer consciously aware of his/her priestly role? How can we motivate people to witness and develop the calling to discipleship? How can we make the desire for a consecrated life and a growing knowledge and personal experience with the Lord Jesus a stable and progressive one? How can we encourage family worship to be practiced with increasing regularity? And, furthermore, how can we motivate and mobilize for mission?

How can we promote and maintain small groups, which we spoke about in the previous chapters; how can we avoid that they start up and then become barren and die?

Certainly a number of answers can be found, many reasons advanced both for the good result or the failure. In these pages we want to underline one factor we believe important, the "supporting structures"!

But what is a supporting structure?

A "supporting structure" is a body that facilitates the implementation of the "agencies" responsible for achieving the set objectives. This type of body can be useful in almost all fields, especially those where the objective is to promote human resources.

This idea is more and more in use and is currently also called an "infrastructure". This term refers to a set

of elements which are arranged so that together they form a structure which functions to implement a precise purpose.

Although the term might be considered a little *abstract*, it is commonly used in several specific fields:

Infrastructures exist, for example, in transport: the network of roads, motorways, railways and canals, i.e. all those things which allow passengers and merchandise to move from one place to another.

Transport networks for energy materials (oil pipes, gas pipes, power lines), communication (telephone lines, television transmitters, radio transmitters), essential utilities (water pipes), waste (sewers) are also infrastructures.

The economic *infrastructure* is the basic fabric of the economy of a State, which allows the manufacture of the finished product starting from the raw materials via passages between interconnected companies.

The information technology or telecommunication *infrastructures* are made up of the various networks that allow various forms of interconnection.

There are public service *infrastructures*, such as the Fire Agency, the Police, Waste Disposal, etc. All this are offered to the community by the public administration.

There are educational and coaching *infrastructures* which facilitate instruction, specialization and training.

It can be deduced that these structures are essential to perform tasks not always achievable otherwise.

Supporting structures and the church

Supporting structures are requests more and more in ecclesiastic circles, in our field. In the last decades two Adventist studies explicitly discussed supporting structures. One is “Pattern for Progress: the Role and Function of Church Organization”, by Raymond and Bert B. Beach. The authors examine the models, concepts and functions behind the church departments and institutions.

The other is “The Power of the Spirit”, already quoted by Neal Wilson and George Rice. In this work the two authors discuss the concepts, the experiences and the results of revival, of growth and of renewal observed in various parts of the world. Neal Wilson writes, *“The church needs support structures to facilitate re consecration, revival, commitment to service and witness”*.⁸

What are the objectives to pursue in our ecclesiastic circle?

The first and fundamental objective is the salvation, the growth and the sanctification of the believers: the experience with the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ is the first approach to apply.

The second fundamental objective is the transformation of the believers themselves in witnesses, in dis-

ciples and priests, and their growth to the measure of the stature of Christ.

Which agencies and structures are needed to pursue and reach these objectives?

In the light of these objective we try to list some of these supporting structures, or infrastructures, which we can identify in the Scriptures, in the Christian church in general and the Adventist church in particular.

Here are some of them:

- **“The family”**, is the primary institution, desired and created by God for human joy and growth. It is the foundation of all the structures, the basis. Thinking about the family implies working for it and through it for others: the individual.
- **The day of rest, the Sabbath.** It is said of the Sabbath that it *“was made for man”* and for the community of believers: *“remains therefore a rest to the people of God”*.⁹ The Sabbath has been given to us so that we could remember and celebrate God and His acts, to help God’s people to have an encounter with their God and fellowship among the members. For a number of christian denomination the topic of “the day of rest” is increasingly considered an essential support structure for the spirituality, for the identification and for the “sanctification” of the people of God.¹⁰

- **Gifts and ministries in the church.** In the Scriptures, gifts and ministries are, by definition and mission, set for the growth of God's children.¹¹ They support and serve the saints for their training and equipment.
- **Finally, the organization of small groups we are discussing.** Neal Wilson's book quoted earlier, reads further, "*among the support structures, small groups are vital*"¹². T. S. Rainer, in his paper "7 Secrets of Healthy Churches"¹³ penned: "*Healthy churches have small group structures. For many churches, the main small group is that of the Sunday School*".

In the Adventist church's organizational model, "Sabbath School is an important and irreplaceable supporting structure in the life of the church.

Then let's analyze this supporting structure: the Sabbath School!



SABBATH SCHOOL ACTION UNIT - THE SUPPORTING STRUCTURES

For the reason why it was organized, for its mission, for its organizational setup, as outlined in our official documents¹⁴, and for other reasons which will be listed in the lines that follow, this “small group”, this “action unit”, is a vital support structure which forms a basis for the whole life of the church. Let us look briefly at some texts which reveal the motives and implications.

Why is the SS a supporting structure?

Let us begin with what is stated in the church manual¹⁵: “*The Sabbath School is the primary religious educa-*

tion system of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and has four purposes: study of the Scripture, fellowship, community outreach, and world mission emphasis”.

This declaration on the SS mission was included in the “Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia” in 1976. It dates back to the beginning of the Adventist church’s history¹⁶ around 1873.

Two important motives emerge from this quotation of the church manual:

1st: It is “*the primary religious education system of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*”. An education system is obviously, by definition, a “supporting structure”. It is established to train people for development and for life. To train them to be mature individuals, to have an identity, purpose in life, with vision and hope.

2nd: It “*has four purposes: study of the Scriptures, fellowship, community outreach, and world mission emphasis*”. On these four purposes we have already discussed in the first two chapters of this manual.

Thus, by constitution and purpose Sabbath School is one of the “supporting structure” for grow of individuals and the church.

However, it is also immediately evident that the roughly 60-70 minutes spent each Sabbath morning in the Sabbath School Units are insufficient for putting into practice the three **REACH**. Indeed, in those 60-70 minutes of group meeting during the Sabbath morning

worship, all the objectives mentioned above **cannot** be “exhausted”. Communion with God, seeking the brethren and the mission of the church and of each of its believers, cannot be achieved in such a limited time.

Rather, this time is for a continual re-motivation, supporting, encouraging of the church to live according the Christian “style”, to motivate and inspire the believers to live 7 days out of 7, as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the primary motive why the Sabbath School is a supporting structure, but it is not the only one!

Another reason why the Sabbath School is a supporting structure is due to two other objectives for the church in the Bible: **unity** and **growth**.

It is unifying, for a church which is now global, to concentrate together in the study of the same topic of the Word of God, the one proposed by the Sabbath School quarterly. The study the same topic is a help for unity.

Even the presentation, Sabbath after Sabbath in the SS time, of the world mission report (known also as Mission Spotlight) offers a sense of unity and identification for mission. This short time opens a window on the worldwide church and offers to the single believer and to the local community a vision of a church that, despite all the difficulties, seeks to be united and global for the same goals. Through the simple gesture in giving

an offering¹⁷, we actively and pedagogically involve the members in the church's world mission and its growth. Therefore, the dynamic involvement of each member in common study and action is a unifying behavior.

Supporting structure for the DISCIPLESHIP

Such an action unit, therefore, according to what has been said above, should perform at least three functions:

- Nourishment on the Word and sharing experiences of faith and with the Lord.
- Brotherly love, mutual care, pastoral service,
- To motivate, to build a vision and involve for mission, for personal witnessing.

How is this achieved in practice; on what elements should we build so that these objectives can be achieved?

Let us see some issues:

a) **A Unit.** First it's not a class, it's a "small group, a unit". In a class there is who teach, others listen and learn. Here there are "leaders" or "monitors", whose job is not primarily to teach but to encourage, to include *everyone* in the processes of listening, of learning, of sharing, understanding and involving. All are in a dynamic active situation. Edgar Dale underlined the usefulness of the group dynamic as one of the most effective process of learning and grow.¹⁸

b) **A small group.** From the Bible to the writings of Ellen G. White, from various fields and institutions today, it appears obvious, definite and clear that “small groups” are an indispensable structure with a pedagogic, didactic, motivating and engaging nature, where “group dynamics” are developed. See the place of the small group in the process of learning of Edgar Dale at the end of this manual.¹⁹

Recent studies at university level in the field of psychotherapy, in management and fields related to professional training, have widely confirmed this assumption: you have to work with small groups. The data confirms that a small group should be composed of not more than 6-9 members.²⁰

c) **The timetable in a small group and Sabbath School Action Unit.** Each activity undertaken must have time to be carried out. Establishing this depends on many factors, last but not least on the nature and objectives of a group. If a group meets in a house, among friends, informally, things can be planned with very flexible times. But in a “*Sabbath School Action Unit*”, the times need to be clearly defined according the local church timetable.

The objectives of this specific moment are not, however, completely determined by the ecclesiastic worship service. Sabbath School has its program and place in the Sabbath worship service. The SS timetable not only

depends on the general worship timetable, but influences this timetable as well. The entire worship program must take into account the Sabbath School times.

Its three pillars, i.e. *sharing* the faith and the study of the Word, are strategic in organizing the worship service. *Brotherly communion*, which is facilitated in a small group, is also crucial in organizing the worship goals. *The focus on mission* is also an important part of the worship service. These three fundamental activities²¹ not only constitute the worship service: they create it.

Having made this necessary premise, we come now to the Sabbath School timetable. Ideas on this have been proposed in the various manuals. They have been tested by many years of experience. Taking into account the church manual²², and is organized around an optimum time of 70 minutes, divided as follows:

1. 5 minutes: general opening.
2. 3 minutes: presentation of the world mission report.
3. 60 minutes: time in small group.
 - a. 8-12²³ minutes, fellowship. Time for greeting, welcome, giving thanks, for listening to personal needs and experiences. All in brotherly care.
 - b. 30-35 minutes, Bible study. time for study, dialogue, sharing and testimony based on the Word studied during the week through the quarterly.

- c. 8-15 minutes, mission. time to share witness and experience in mission. Time to motivate and pray for mission.

4. 2-4 minutes: conclusion.

Before examining these specific objectives one by one, it's good to re-emphasize that the Sabbath School is a supporting structure for fellowship, for faith and for outreach. Three goals that cannot be fulfilled in the 60/70 minutes in the unit. This short and minimal time is for sharing, motivating, equipping and mobilizing for the daily personal discipleship during the week.



SABBATH SCHOOL ACTION UNIT IN DETAIL (SSAU)

Many of the practical Ideas and suggestion we list in this chapter can be applied in all kinds of religious small groups. We are now particularly to develop the three fundamental objectives of the SSAU. Fellowship, Bible study, Outreach.

Fellowship, brotherly communion.

This must be the starting point. It corresponds to the Reach in with God's plan previously examined. In this service the SSAU achieve an essential pastoral function. Here are some steps:

Time for greetings and welcome. Extending a sincere “welcome” to all is extremely important, it helps to feel at ease, as at home. It is a good idea to offer this in particular to all those who are not usually regular. Greeting with appropriate words the newcomers, the occasional visit and those who might join the church with handshakes or “discrete” hugs.

If there is someone that is in particular need, with difficulty, suffering, i.e. this is the time to express solidarity, support and prayer for her or him.

It is time to remember and engage for the absents, whether it is the reason: illness, problems, or other, (spiritual, moral, emotional). The people present are to be involved in taking care of them in some way.

Invite the group to pray for them and to do it immediately, mention these people specifically ask someone for a phone call, a visit, to send a card from the group. Then, on the following Sabbath, ask to give news. Continue to pray for these people.

Plan a visit for this people. Do this with prudence and discretion, taking care that the gesture is not unwanted. This visit should be organized in proper time. If the person visited is ill or elderly, the group should commit to visit them on a regular basis.

At Holy Communion, set up a communion service at home as a church especially for elderly or ill brothers and sisters. This service should be organized by the church officials but done together with the SSAU.

These are just some ideas. As the brothers and sisters gradually become a “unit” and the group becomes a “family”, other ideas may emerge from the group members themselves. Each group can activate its creativity. For example, one unit decided to introduce a sort of prayer calendar for the members themselves: they took turns to pray for one member of the group each week!

If this process is put into place with perseverance, care and order, the following results will come about:

- The church is a real family and that we really care about one another.
- Who carries out this ministry in the SSAU activates a certain number of processes, which openly or unconsciously instruct and develops a mentality of service and brotherly love. This develops empathy in the unit and, by extension, for the whole community²⁴. So the SSAU becomes training time for deaconship. It builds bridges between the brothers, Reach In with God to be precise.
- The ideal aim to set is that a deacon be charged with this delicate and important diaconal service. If a church deacon is not available the group can choose a member of the same unit and be entrusted for this service.
- Working in this way, the relationships between the brethren of the unit will not remain simply

that of “brothers and sisters”, they will become “friends”. By becoming friends, it will be the natural to meet “among friends” during the week too, at someone’s house. Thus, ultimately, it will be much easier to build another “small group” based on this Sabbath “group” - a home group!

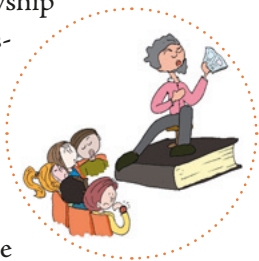
This ministry cannot be improvised, it must be part of the plans made by the church leaders; it must be a precise project that engages the responsibility of the elders, the deacons and the pastor. This will develop mutual support among the brothers and sisters, brotherly love will increase.

This supporting function of the SSAU can develop annexes result during the week. SSAU is a practical training school for deaconship ministry for brothers. It is clear that those who have been called to lead this time should be trained!

If we start with this time of fellowship we can foster Bible study and witnessing.

The time for the Word.

Generally the mission of the Sabbath School is thought to be fulfilled in Bible study. This is right. To study the Scriptures is important and extremely needed. Even if the mission of the Sabbath School, as we have



just seen, does not end here, this is a basic ministry for church life. It is an important mission which must be developed and be improved! We face some big problems in this field:

Fewer and fewer members have regular and personal Bible study.

People are not involved in interaction in the SSAU also because they don't know what the weekly topic is about.

In many churches the attendance is decreasing, especially in Sabbath School.

All this produces lacking in fellowship and in community feeling.

How can we deal with this challenge? How can we motivate members to turn again to the Bible and how we can facilitate active participation?

To make positive the effects of the Bible in life.

To recommend with a sermon the study of the Bible and punctuality may be necessary but by simply urging members to do it does not solve the problem from the base. A positive attitude and a participation to the dialogue gives a greater impact to the SSAU. -

We need to act, in particular, on pulling the right lever that brings the Word to the center of life and the sharing of everyday life experiences.

Not just a dogmatic, theological study of the Bible; also that, but more.

We must create a balance between the knowledge and discussion of the Word (*there are people who have a predisposition to this*) and the sharing our experience in relation to the benefits that we have received from the Word (*there are people who are more inclined to this*).

The way in which the study of the Word is conducted in the group becomes important if the study is brought into the floor of the existential matters of everyday life, and this even if the theme of the quarterly is a doctrinal one. However, the most important thing is how the “Word” works in my life and gives me values and growth.

To answer some of the primary needs in an individual, especially the existential one.

More and more people feel existential needs among the universal primary needs. Consciously or unconsciously people feel today that love, acceptance, a sense of belonging, safety and protection are a priority. Other important needs are forgiveness, faith, purpose for life, hope for the future.

During the discussion around the Word, in order to meet these needs, one definite path is to facilitate sharing, reciprocal care, confession of existential needs.

In this the leader has the great task in facilitating these processes. One of the most helpful tool to “use” in order to realize good result is to build good questions. As we learn from Jesus.

Therefore, a fundamental principle is to ask “good” and “real” questions. Not theoretical, not only doctrinal, not catechistic, but questions that goes into the existential, enter into the values, touch the practical life need.

Here are some examples of “real” questions:

- **Why** is this lesson important for me?
- **What** can I still learn from these texts from God’s Word?
- **Where** can I put into practice what I have learned from God’s Word?
- **How** can I start to apply what I have learned from God’s Word?
- **How** can I help, serve, witness to other on this matter?



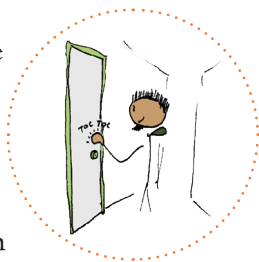
To be able to put good question facilitate, motivate and encourage the members in active participation.

This way of doing gives a great contribution to the interaction between the group members. It promotes the personal identification of each member with the group and, by extension, with the message being dealt with.

This certainly doesn't resolve all the problems but it does facilitate and encourage active participation and sharing from a greater number. Such involvement will also have positive, engaging effects on the personal study of the Word during the week.

Time for service and mission.

For a good number of people to take time from Bible study and reserve it for mission is not good and unusual. For this reason it is certainly a difficult task to lead many people to shift from a tradition to same new. Difficult but not impossible. Let's list the difficulties.



For some, too, it sounds negative, impossible, stressful and not satisfactory to speak about mission and on the missionary mandate.

Working for a change, furthermore, will bring up all possible obstacles as is when we want to change the status quo.

What to do? How? Where to start?

First of all, it should be clearly understood that God does not need us to make known His love and announce His message of salvation to the world, He can do it as He wants. If He calls us to His mission it is because we are the first to benefit from it and because in His wisdom He sees this as the best way.

Then we need to start simply, we need to understand one simple thing: the shortest itineraries and the simplest ideas are often the ones that work the best and those that facilitate the understanding and the accomplishment of the objectives set.

We need to understand that evangelism is one important part of the Sabbath School. We need to have clear ideas. We need to agree on how to implement them. We need to work on it and have patience and perseverance, not giving up if things don't seem to work out.

Why are SSAU a facilitating and supporting structure for the involvement of everyone in Mission?

Because the processes of motivation and involvement are better achieved if the work is done with interaction, for that works small group is the best.

Because SSAU provides the opportunity to involve the largest possible number of church members with this interaction.

Because the small unit is the best place to create ideas, to discover gift, to entrust motivation and develop personal capacity²⁵.

What mission to achieve in the short time of the SSAU?

First, it should be understood that in this short time reserved for mission it is impossible to accomplish the “mission” in the normal sense we apply. This is rather a time to reflect, to discuss, to share, to think and to motivate for mission. In those few minutes little or nothing “*can*” be done of missionary work but much can be done to raise awareness, to motivate and share ideas and principles!

Therefore, it is a great mistake to think that SSAU are one of the many possible areas in which to work, to alternate with others, through which one can do something for the mission or any other aspect of church life.

The Sabbath School, as we have seen, is a supporting structure and as such this short period is the time to “*support*” other missionaries initiatives. That is to say, not as an alternative to other initiatives, but to motivate, facilitate and support others plans.

What should be done then in these 8-15 minutes, or more?

To share experiences. Experiences of testimony, of service, of encounters that we had or we have with people.

This encourages, stimulates, gives vision, motivates and creates healthy emulation. Facilitating this type of sharing helps the members to engage in a constructive dialogue, to testify not only the positive things but also the limitations or personal needs in relation to the mission of every believer.

To engage in witnessing those nearby. All the data on church growth that we have confirms an unequivocal finding: the most fruitful field for proclaiming the Gospel is that of acquaintances, friends, relatives and neighbors.

In these few minutes of the Sabbath School, initiatives may be fostered for this people related with the group's members.

An excellent book which can inspire on this topic is “The Gospel of Love and Real Evangelism” by Peter J. Prime²⁶. For further information there are many web-sites on the topic found through Google²⁷.

The results achieved through this type of “evangelism” compared to those achieved using all the other methods: public lectures, radio, TV, correspondence courses, are indisputable: the ratio is 85 to less than 5.

To adopt “*It’s Nice to be Nice*” initiative This simple, humble, synergetic plan works on the platform of friendship. Some have defined it “*the most effective method*” in evangelism. The project “*It’s Nice to be Nice*” was prepared by the Ministerial Association of the world church²⁸.

The project is extremely simple. Here is a very concise presentation:

- Two members agree to form a pair and pray for one another and for three friends each with whom they would like to share their faith.
- For two or three months they commit themselves to this plan “only in prayer” and organize themselves to get closer in building friendship.
- Then, as they are building that friendship, the following step is to start in presenting Jesus and the Gospel message to them.
- And so on, till they begin a new path of Bible knowledge.

- All complemented by the ministry of prayer.

For these actions the role of the Sabbath School Action Unit is a supporting structure that keep on the fire of constant commitment over mission.

The Sabbath School Action Unit and the home group. The churches that grow are those that do not limit the opportunities for meeting for a few hours each week, in worship time, on Sabbath mornings. Meet also during the week.

There is countless literature on the subject in almost every language. The data that we have, gives us a result concerning the members participation on a maximum of 30-35% of the general number of church members. But the figures are different when the organization of the weekly groups is supported by the SSAU.

This shows that SSAU is not alternatives but supportive to the others small groups.

The SSAU and the different church activities. The same can be said for the other church activities. A SSAU is supportive to other activities: in these few minutes (8-15) we are mobilized for all the other forms of service and witness: activities for women, for children, for families, for Bible study. It is a time we can pray for these activities.

SSAU and prayer ministry. There should be no need to talk about the importance of prayer and its

role in worship. For this aspect will limit ourselves to a few Bible texts and few quotations from the Spirit of Prophecy which emphasizes the role of prayer.

“I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:7).

“And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down, and spoke unto the women who met these” (Acts 16:13).

The Bible see the church as a house of prayer! Prayer is not only a fundamental act of worship where each member has the “right” to pray. Prayer is worship and mission!



“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers unto his harvest” (Matthew 9:38).

“Praying always ... and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:18-20).

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for

all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

... and some E. G. White quotations on prayer and mission:

“Learn to exercise faith in presenting your neighbors before the throne of grace and pleading with God to touch their hearts. In this way effectual missionary work may be done. Some may be reached who would not listen to a minister or a colporteur. And those who thus labor in new places will learn the best ways of approaching the people and can prepare the way for other laborers.” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies, vol. 8, p. 245).

“The prayer of faith is the great strength of the Christian and will assuredly prevail against Satan. This is why he insinuates that we have no need of prayer. The name of Jesus, our Advocate, he detests; and when we earnestly come to Him for help, Satan’s host is alarmed. It serves his purpose well if we neglect the exercise of prayer, for then his lying wonders are more readily received.” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies vol. 1, p. 296).

“Select another and still another soul, daily seeking guidance from God, laying everything before Him in ear-

nest prayer, and working in divine wisdom. As you do this, you will see that God will give the Holy Spirit to convict, and the power of the truth to convert, the soul.” (Medical Ministry, p 245).

“We should hold convocations for prayer, asking the Lord to open the way for the truth to enter the strongholds where Satan has set up his throne, and dispel the shadow he has cast athwart the pathway of those whom he is seeking to deceive and destroy..” (6T, p.80).

“Pray for people, draw close to God, make fervent, humble prayers presented to Him for success in others’ salvation” (1T, p. 513).

“When men are as devoted as Elijah was and possess the faith that he had, God will reveal Himself as He did then. When men plead with the Lord as did Jacob, the results that were seen then will again be seen. Power will come from God in answer to the prayer of faith..” (Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, p. 255).

It is easy to understand that the structure of SSAU clearly facilitates such an act of worship giving to every member the opportunity to pray.

CONCLUSION

Ending these pages we repeat the phrase with which we started the SSAU topic: “...*the church needs support structures to facilitate re-consecration, revival, commitment to service and witness* ...”. SSAU can become this creative supporting laboratory.

We believe that three fundamental ideas must be identified as priorities and absolutely endorsed:

- 1st. To organize SSAU with the goal to realize Reach Up, In Out with God.
- 2nd. To organize SSAU in order to facilitate for all members the involvement in the ministry of intercession and transform our churches in house of Prayer.
- 3rd. SSAU can be time where each member becomes active and creative in service and witnessing indoor and outdoor.



A deep and lasting renewal for my church

Notes

1. David Trim, Seventh-day Adventist, Global data Picture, Report on Global Research, 2014 p. 13
2. Working Policy OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS, A 05 05
3. Working Policy, ... FR 05
4. SDA Church Manual, ed 2015, p 97
5. GC Working Policy, FR 10.
6. Reach the World, strategic plan 2015 – 2020, www.adventistmission.org
7. “The Power of the Spirit”; (R&H PA, 1988), by Neal Wilson (former president of the General Conference) and George Rice (former president of the Biblical Research Institute). pp 129-130.
8. “The Power of the Spirit”; idem.
9. Mark 2:27; Hebrews 4:9; Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12
10. See the encyclical letter “ECCLESIA DE EUCHARISTIA”
11. 1 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4:11-16; Acts 20; 17, 28.
12. Op. cit p. 130.
13. “Seven Secrets of Healthy Churches”, Adventist Review on 06/07/07 by Thom S. Rainer. Professor Rainer is president of LifeWay Christian Resources, one of the most important centres for research, consultation and information for churches and their various forms of service and testimony. The seven secrets are: (1) The church leadership and laity hold to a high view of Scripture; (2) The church and their leaders seek to be relevant; (3) The churches and their leaders hold to the primacy of preaching; (4) The churches have a healthy small group structure; (5) Emphasis on corporate prayer and church prayer ministries; (6) Churches that are healthy take membership seriously; (7) Healthy churches are highly intentional about evangelism.
14. Church Manual and Working Policy.
15. Church Manual 17th ed. page 103.
16. “The Sabbath School was organized to teach the Gospel in response to Jesus’ mandate, in the context of the Three Angels’ Message. Faithful to this original aim, the Sabbath School continues to communicate the good news with the aim of winning, nourishing and training men and women, the youth, boys and girls all over the world for the Lord’s work. This aim is achieved through following four areas: building faith, strengthening brotherly fellowship, mobilizing for witnessing and world mission” (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Washington, 1976; p. 1258).

17. The offering collected at the end of the Sabbath School is all destined for the world missions' fund.
18. Edgar Dale was an American educator who developed the Cone of Experience. He made several contributions to audio and visual instruction, including a methodology for analyzing the content of motion pictures. "The Cone of Learning" https://www.researchgate.net/figure/234564900_fig2_Figure-2-Cone-of-Learning-by-Edgar-Dale
19. The scale of learning of Edgar Dale

7°	Teaching to others	90%
6°	Practicing by doing	75%
5°	Discussion in group	50%
4°	Logical demonstration	30%
3°	audio-visual tools	20%
2°	Just reading	10%
1°	Lecturing	5%

20. Roger Mucchielli, *Le travail en équipe; clé pour une meilleure efficacité collective*; 2015, ESF, Edition Sociale de France.
21. The Church Manual states that, "*The Sabbath School... has **four** purposes: study of the Scripture, fellowship, community outreach, and world mission emphasis*". In reality, the last two, although they have distinct aims, form part of the same "Mission", which is both local and worldwide.
22. Church Manual, 17th ed. p. 79.
23. The duration can be flexible.
24. Read Romans 12:10; Galatians 6:10; 1 Peter 1:22.
25. "God does not cause manna to rain down from heaven today as He did in the desert ... but He touches our hearts so that we will bring the manna to the poor ... as much the material as the spiritual manna. The Sabbath School thus has the aim not only of training but also bringing to action and the service of others". E. G. White; *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 84, 85.
26. Peter J. Prime, "The Gospel of Love and Real Evangelism", R&H. 2010.
27. See: http://www.google.it/search?source=ig&hl=it&rlz=1G1GGLQ_IIIT375&q=friendship+evangelism&aq=f&aqi=&aql=&oq=
 - Also in Spanish: http://www.google.de/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=evangelismo+y+la+amistad&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&redir_esc=&ei=P7kGTv7hCI7UsgbtqOjxBw,
 - and French: http://www.google.de/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=a-vangelismo+y+la+amistad&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&redir_esc=

c=&ei=TLgGTqDrHM2Vswbpz92TDA#q=l'amitié%20et%20
l'évangélisation&nfpr=1&ei=2rgGTteyCoeMswb1rvWT-
DA&sqi=2&start=0&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.&fp=7ffc93ad9a5f-
d156&biw=1250&bih=646 , etc.

28. Peter J. Prime, "*It's Nice to be Nice*", can be downloaded in pdf format from the SS & PM section of the EUD website, it is in several languages.

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