

## COOL TOOLS FOR SABBATH SCHOOL

# The Art of Visitation in the Sabbath School

The great objective of the Sabbath School is to win souls for Christ. Many thousands of souls could be led to the Savior and saved in His kingdom through a well-organized, year-round program of personal visitation conducted by the Sabbath School.

Christian visitation can be designated as an art—indeed, a “fine art.” Fortunately, it is an art that can be acquired by almost any earnest, dedicated Christian. Every Sabbath School worker should actively practice the art, and Sabbath School members should be enlisted in the use of the art of visitation. No other phase of Christian service has been more instrumental in bringing souls to Christ than has the ministry of Christian visitation. Perhaps no other natural or acquired talent has been so neglected by Christians.

“[Visitation] cannot be done by proxy. Money lent or given will not accomplish it. Sermons will not do it. By visiting the people, talking, praying, sympathizing with them, you will win hearts.”<sup>1</sup>

### Approaches to Visitation Vary

The art of visitation has changed considerably in recent years. In our high-tech information society, with both husband and wife working and the accelerated pace of life, other methods of connecting may be more practical. A short phone invitation to meet for lunch or at the gym may work better than a home visit. In some cultures other means of contact such as visiting at the village well or water source, city center, or market might be more practical. Others may meet while walking along a path or on the job. It is essential for missionaries to quiz local members about customs and best ways to visit, when working across cultures.

### Non-Attending Members are Open to Talking About Their Experience

Most people who drop out of Sabbath School are open to talking about it if approached in the right way. The visitor should remember that, “the purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out” (Prov. 20:5, NIV).

Visitors should develop listening skills. Good listeners are not judgmental or critical, do not condemn or argue. They manifest interest, understanding, attention, concern, and loving kindness. Listeners do not interrogate but make it easy for the other person to share feelings. Good listeners perceive what the other person might be

feeling. They listen with the third ear for overtones of pain, fear, anxiety, or anger.

### Preparation for Visiting

“Angels of God attend you to the dwellings of those you visit.”<sup>2</sup> What a wonderful promise is ours as we prepare to make our visits! As you engage in prayer before going, God will grant your petition to use you to bring spiritual blessings and speak through your lips by His Holy Spirit to bring encouragement and help.

If you are not acquainted with the persons you are asked to visit, get as much information as you can about their work, size of family, spiritual background, and so forth before the visit. But don’t pry into personal matters, and never repeat confidences received while visiting in a home or talk about what you have seen or heard. As a Sabbath School teacher, you must maintain an ethical relationship, just as physicians do with their patients or pastors with their members. It is never advisable for a man to visit a woman alone or for a woman to visit a man alone in their homes. In some cultures this is considered to be little different from adultery. In the age in which we are living, the visitor must be also cautious when meeting and visiting youth and children of either sex. We need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

It may be useful to take along some leaflets, copies of the *Adventist Review*, or a Bible study guide if you think they may not have one. And if there are children, you might carry some of the children’s papers along. You might also select a good book from your library to loan them.

Select a time for your visit when the one to be visited is most likely to be home, but not too late or early in the day. Sabbath afternoon is a good time for most missionary visits. It may be appropriate to contact people by phone prior to the visit.

### The Visit

Approach the home in a cheerful, optimistic attitude. Bring greetings from the Sabbath School and your class (their class, if they are members). Ask questions



about things you are sure they are interested in, such as the family. Sometimes it helps to transition into spiritual topics to ask how long they have been Seventh-day Adventists, if they are members. If you do not find the people at home the first time, try again, and if at all possible try to see them before the next Sabbath. Come to Sabbath School prepared to report on your visit.

### **What Not to Do in Visitation**

Don't chide, accuse, or scold. Don't force your will on people or push your way into a house. Don't make statements that might be interpreted as judgmental, accusing, or showing lack of understanding. For example, suppose a person has been absent from Sabbath School for several weeks due to illness. It would be inappropriate to say, "We are praying that you will give your heart to the Lord and come back to Sabbath School."

It is essential to uncover the reason for non-attendance prior to addressing the issue. One should never assume that people have given up the faith or are growing cold in their experience simply because they are missing from services. There may be legitimate circumstances that could prevent a person from attending. Some of these could be: (1) lack of transportation; (2) sickness; (3) lack of mobility; (4) care for an invalid family member; (5) involvement in other ministries; (8) emotional trauma.

Statements of admonition are not the best to use. For example, "You need to come back to Sabbath School" may come across as more coercive than redemptive. Do not be more interested in trying to increase the size of your class than in the spiritual well-being of the member.

Avoid the approach of an investigator, attorney, or judge. Don't raise a false standard of righteousness by works. On the other hand do not compromise truth or lower the standards of the church. It is never appropriate to criticize the church or its leaders. Visitors should not judge the statements that people make, but neither should they agree with false statements or condone wrong conduct.

### **What to Do in Visitation**

It is essential to visit as a friend. Listen to the missing member's story. What is happening in their life, in their spiritual experience? Be understanding, kind, and sympathetic. Use healing statements such as, "No one can understand except Jesus." Connect with them spiritually. Give your own testimony of how Jesus is the answer to your trials and temptations. Let them know how the Sabbath School class has helped you spiritually. Uphold Jesus as the standard as well as the source of righteousness.

Most often people drop out or stay away because of problems in relationships. You can acknowledge that people make mistakes. You can apologize for things that have happened that have been unfair. Ordinarily it would be well to suggest a brief word of prayer with them before leaving. The visit should not be long, perhaps about fifteen to twenty minutes in length.

### **Who Is Responsible for Organizing?**

The superintendent is responsible for general direction of every phase of the Sabbath School work. It is well for each Sabbath School class to have a care coordinator, who organizes visitation for each class.

The first step is to bring the important matter of visitation to the Sabbath School Council with the teachers and care coordinators, if you have them, invited to be present. The success or failure of the visitation program depends on whether or not the organizational structure of the Sabbath School provides opportunity for reporting and sharing. It is also essential to have regular meetings with care coordinators and adequate time for organizing visitation in the class.

The membership superintendent is directly responsible for seeing that the card file record of all Sabbath School members and inactive church members is kept up to date. Inactive church members who could come to Sabbath School could be recorded as prospective members. The names of these are distributed evenly among the adult and youth classes.

### **Who Should Be Visited?**

*1. Prospective Members.* Reference has already been made to this group. Most of this group are church members who are not enjoying the blessings of Sabbath School attendance. These names are distributed among the classes and are listed with addresses in the prospective-member section of the Class Record and Directory. The teacher or care coordinator asks for a report from those who visited these people the previous week and then assigns the names to other members to visit the following week. These names should be included in the class prayer list. The teacher will take his or her turn in visiting these prospective members.

*2. Absent Regular Members.* Often members of the class will know the whereabouts of absent members. If, however the same member is absent several times without a known reason, a member should be assigned to contact them.

*3. Newcomers.* Whenever a new member moves

into the area, he or she should be visited as soon as possible and given a warm welcome. The teacher is the logical person to make this first visit. Newcomers should be made to feel a real cordial class spirit of welcome so they will feel they belong. Other members should be encouraged to visit the new ones also.

4. *Visitors.* Thousands of non-Adventist friends are visitors in our Sabbath School. The teachers should arrange to visit these visitors in their homes the week following their attendance at Sabbath School. A Bible study guide could be given them. If there are children in the home, the children's papers should be left with them. Some of these interested non-Adventist friends may well be added to the prospective member section of the Class Record and Directory, or be invited to join the pastor's Bible class in the Sabbath School.

5. *Neighbors and Friends.* Members could be encouraged to visit at least one neighbor or friend each week, inviting them to be their guest at Sabbath School. This type of visit gets results.

6. *Extension Division Members.* Practically every school has one or more faithful members, who because of circumstances beyond their control, cannot attend Sabbath School. The extension division leaders visit these people, but how it would cheer the hearts of many lonely members if others would make it a point to visit them often.

7. *Boys and Girls.* It is just as important that leaders and teachers in the children's divisions visit the homes of their pupils as it is for the senior division teachers and members to visit.

### Who Should Do the Visiting?

- Teacher. No Sabbath School teacher's work is

ended at the close of the lesson study on Sabbath morning. It is altogether possible that the teacher can do far more on Sabbath afternoon, or at some other time, in a 10-15 minute personal visit in the home of that boy or girl or that young person or that man or woman, who is a class member, than could be accomplished in several thirty-minute class periods.

- Members. Most Sabbath School members can become good workers for God in the visitation program. The teacher or care coordinator should facilitate visitation and sharing time. Asking the question, "What can we learn from this?" often facilitates training if answered prayerfully by members. The timid or inexperienced members could be encouraged to accompany one of the experienced visitors, thus new visitors could be trained. The teacher or care coordinator should ask for a report on the following Sabbath from those assigned to visit.

### Be Thou Faithful

The Sabbath School visitation program is ordained of God. It should be a part of every Sabbath School. Those who engage in this wonderful visiting ministry may be sure of God's special blessing and results in the kingdom. Sabbath School officers, teachers, and members have been entrusted with a sacred responsibility in this visitation ministry. If leaders are faithful in this responsibility, there will be those in the new earth who will come to you and say, "It was you who invited me here."

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 41.

2. *Ibid.*

