

## INTRODUCTION

The book you hold in your hands is the product of many hours of discussion. It comes as a result of an event called the 180 Symposium, organized by the Center for Youth Evangelism (CYE) and sponsored by several organizations: Andrews University, the Youth Department of the North American Division (NAD), the Lake Union and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. The 180 Symposium is a unique yearly event that addresses current issues in youth ministry and seeks to generate principles for effective and healthy change through moderated discussion between administrators, academicians and youth ministry practitioners.

In May of 2017 the 180 Symposium event took place, under the theme: “Sabbath School Matters!”; a group of administrators, academicians, practitioners, youth, and resource producers, met in the campus of Andrews University to have an honest dialogue, with the purpose of identifying some of the main challenges affecting the Youth and Young Adult Sabbath School ministry , as well as potential solutions.

We (Joe and Gerardo) have been involved with the Youth Sabbath School in some way or another for more years that we can remember. Joe has been serving in the Adventist Church for decades, first as pastor and lately as professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews. Gerardo grew up in the church and became involved in youth ministry in his local church when he was very young; recently, he served as Conference Youth Director in Ontario, Canada. As pastors we have served in various contexts, and have always been involved with the youth. We both have children involved in Sabbath School. In all of these various contexts, wearing these many different hats (members, fathers, Pastors, Professor, Youth Director), we have learned by personal experience that to be a youth Sabbath School leader is to be confronted with many challenges: lack of involvement, poor attendance, almost non-existent study, are but a few examples.

However, it was not until recently that we discovered something very serious that we did not know before: the youth Sabbath School is an orphan baby. That is, administratively, in most contexts, nobody has ever assumed full responsibility for this ministry. Yes, resources are produced, and yes, at the local church, at least in some corners of God’s vineyard, youth Sabbath school classes do operate. However, at the Conference and at the Union levels (as Tracy and Armando describe in their article in this book), practically nobody has ever taken the role of intentionally seeking the best resources and providing quality leadership training.

The good news is that now, a key group of leaders has (a) acknowledged and clearly stated the problem and (b) assumed full responsibility to seek and find solutions. That means that the future is promising. Maybe not everything will be solved, and probably, the road to improvement will be long. But as you read this book, it is our hope that your faith and excitement about this crucial ministry is rekindled.

This book is comprised of the papers that were presented at the 180 Symposium and has been organized into four sections. The first section, “Defining the Challenges” presents the main challenges in the Youth Sabbath School ministry; the second section, “Exploring Solutions”, deals with some of the potential solutions to those challenges; the third section, “Improving Learning Styles and Models”, addresses more specifically the area of teaching/facilitating, particularly in dealing with youth and young adults; the fourth and last section, “Recommendations for a Brighter Future”, is a report of the findings of three focus groups (Administration, Leadership Development and Resources) that were created at the event and that spent discussing specific recommendations for those three key areas.

It is our sincere prayer that as you read this book, you will be stimulated to become a champion for the youth in your particular context, and that whatever capacity God has called you to serve in, you will be a key influencer to make the Youth Sabbath School a vibrant ministry, a life-transforming place for the youth of the church, where true disciples of Jesus are born, developed and sent.

*Joseph Kidder and Gerardo Oudri*