HOPE FOR THE ORPHAN

Re-Imagining the Youth Sabbath School



Edited by Joseph Kidder
& Gerardo Oudri

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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

1 Defining the Challenges

THE NEW ORPHAN: YOUTH SABBATH SCHOOL

Steve Case, PhD and Eddie Heinrich, DMin

Youth Sabbath School: Its Importance and Neglect

The theme for the Andrews University 180° Symposium in 2017 is "Sabbath School Matters." Youth Sabbath School serves as the primary venue for youth ministry in a local church. Indeed it matters. While some adults may see its purpose to provide religious education for the youth, anecdotal responses typically indicate that young people attend primarily to see their friends—a social motivation.

With 52 sessions each year, nothing else compares to its frequency. Perhaps for the same reason it's difficult to create and maintain a vibrant Youth Sabbath School. It requires commitment, time, money, and follow through. It's easy to run short on any of these vital elements. As a result, Youth Sabbath School leaders often have to revert to lectures when youth gather rather than utilizing discussion or involvement. They burn out or get discouraged by poor attendance and potential criticism from concerned adults who judge from a distance. This makes it easy to quit and hard to recruit a replacement. With little training, resourcing, or support, Youth Sabbath School rarely registers as a "must experience" for young people. Pastors, the paid professionals who serve as spiritual leaders for a congregation, at times do not attend Sabbath School, which models a lack of involvement. Many parents don't do much better.

Support for Sabbath School

In 1889, Ellen White wrote, "The Sabbath School, when rightly managed, possesses marvelous power, and is adapted to doing a great work, but it is not now what it may and should be. The influence growing out of Sabbath school work should improve and enlarge the church."[1] She also wrote, "The Sabbath School work is important, and all who are interested in the truth should endeavor to make it prosperous."[2] Few would argue with these statements, but fewer seem to follow them.

Frederick Sharp emphasized the importance of Sabbath School for the vitality of the church, including young people. Sharp wrote in *Ministry* Magazine,

> No other department of our organization offers greater possibilities for the growth and prosperity of the church—spiritually, numerically, and financially—than does the Sabbath school. It is through the Sabbath school that men and women, as well as youth, are enabled to develop the ability to tell the message to others and become personal workers for the Master. There they also learn how to sacrifice and give financial support to the mission work."[3]

But Sharp wrote this in 1943. Current articles promoting Sabbath School are not common.

Francis Scott paired Sabbath School with the evangelistic effort of the church. He compared the short-term impact of an evangelistic series with the long-term shaping and transformation through Sabbath School. He claimed that Sabbath School is the most effectual means of winning souls.[4] But that was in 1957.

For something more recent, notice the title found in the *Adventist Review* "Why Attend Sabbath School?"[5] Sandra Blackmer reported that when she asked current church members why they attend, most told of ways Sabbath School blessed them, but some admitted they seldom attend. The reasons gleaned from these members focused on personal spiritual understanding, but hardly any reference to evangelism. Blackmer's article concluded with: "So what about this week's Sabbath School—will you be there?"[6] The answer for 75 percent of baptized SDA adults in North America, is, "No."[7] But that is only an estimate since records on Sabbath School attendance are no longer taken in North America. This low participation stands in contrast to 1926 when the SDA Church had more Sabbath School members than church members.[8]

Dave Edgren blogged a positive endorsement of Sabbath School, identifying it as the backbone of the early Adventist Church. But he claimed Sabbath School is no longer vibrant in many local churches due to a lecture-style rather than discussion, and because the four purposes of Sabbath School have been lost or forgotten. He identified these four purposes as: Bible study, fellowship, local outreach, and world mission.[9]

Sabbath School seems to be off the radar of most Adventists in North America, or languishing. An estimated 25 percent of Adventists in North America attend Adult Sabbath School on any given Sabbath.[10] We consider that a generous estimate.[11] There are no published estimates for Youth Sabbath School attendance. Although nobody is suggesting Sabbath School should be eliminated, based on the decreasing participation, it doesn't seem to be a priority.

The Role of Youth Sabbath School

Just as the church worship service functions as the primary gathering for the congregation as a whole, Youth Sabbath School functions as the primary gathering for young people. Congregations that meet all day on Sabbath for a variety of meetings, meals, and fellowship, might point to the AY meeting (Adventist Youth) or the *Sociedad de Jovenes* (Youth Society) meeting that takes place on Sabbath afternoon. But these take place in only a minority of churches in North America.[12] Sometimes they simply place young people on the platform to mirror adult behaviors. Others use this opportunity for adults named as "youth leaders" to lecture young people on the values and actions expected by God and the church. Still others utilize the time as a filler, relying on games of Bible trivia and quizzes where few young people shine or thrive.

Attendance for a youth meeting rarely compares to the main worship service. Socio-economic status seems to make a difference, with strong attendance by the lower classes who have no other options on Sabbath. Those who are middle class often opt to go elsewhere until eventually a congregation reduces the frequency of the Sabbath afternoon youth meeting. This might be replaced with an occasional Friday evening "vespers," but it often becomes a "hit-and-miss" experience.

Some look to Pathfinders as the major youth ministry for a congregation. In some churches this could be true. But Pathfinders begins in the junior years (ages 10–12). When a person enters adolescence, leaving Pathfinders behind often becomes a rite of passage. Those who remain might do so because of an attraction to a hierarchical orientation, a leader that young people want to continue to follow, or a special activity that has significant pull (such as marching competitions, drum corps, Oshkosh International Camporee, or lots of honor badges and awards).

Most churches don't have a weekly youth meeting. If they do, it's probably youth Sabbath School. But that's no guarantee that it fares better than a diminishing Sabbath afternoon youth meeting. If a Youth Sabbath School begins on time, few are present, which mirrors the Adult Sabbath School. Leadership may be spotty and transitory, or stuck in a rut. The quality can't compete with readily available entertainment most young people have on their phones. Resourcing and training usually are non-existent.

Because most Seventh-day Adventist Churches have a Sabbath School at least for adults, this built-in time frame provides a weekly opportunity to capitalize on an age-related ministry such as youth ministry. The data in this report indicate maybe half of the Adventist churches in North America have a Youth Sabbath School, although few would see it as the strongest ministry in their congregation as a whole.

Pastors Give Their Indirect Input

The North American Division Youth Department sponsored "Mission Lifeguard" from 2014–2015. This initiative focused on reaching out to missing youth and young adults who no longer participated in Seventh-day Adventist churches.[13] While the primary purpose of the phone calls was to help local churches reach out to missing young people, some data collection was inevitable to create strategies for youth and young adult ministry in local churches. This also created fodder for prayer.[14]

When searching for youth ministry programming offered at the local church, slightly more than half (52%) of the pastors didn't report anything. This may have been because that wasn't part of the interaction regarding reaching out to missing young people, or because there was no response from the pastor or congregation after four attempts (phone calls, emails, etc.) to make contact.[15] If we limit our data to the remaining 48% (963) of the 2,015 congregations contacted, here are the most common programs for young people in those churches (see table 1).

Based on this data, just over half of the churches who responded have a youth Sabbath School. Less than a fourth have an AY or *Sociedad de Jovenes* or Vespers gathering. A mere 16% reported having a Teen Pathfinder club, and only 6% had something for youth evangelism. This might not be true in your

specific congregation, but it provides an overview for North America, with input from all nine unions within the North American Division.

Youth Ministry Programs at Local Churches in NAD 2014–2015	
54%	Youth Sabbath School
35%	Nothing
22%	AY or MV or Vespers
20%	Youth Socials
20%	Other
16%	Teen Pathfinders
13%	Youth Service Activities
11%	Small Group Bible Study
9%	Annual Youth Day at Church
6%	Youth Evangelism

With slightly more than half of these churches having a Youth Sabbath School, this is clearly the most common program for youth ministry in the local church. But this gives no indication about the quality of the Youth Sabbath School. It simply notes its existence. And only 28% have a roster of who attends. Less than one fourth of the churches have a Sabbath afternoon or Friday evening program specifically related to youth, but they may consider that as their "youth ministry."

Youth Directors Give Their Input

Because of the concern union youth directors and the North American Division youth department have expressed to resuscitate Youth Sabbath School, at the NAD Ministries Convention in January, 2017 in Tucson, Arizona, conference and union youth directors received a one-page survey about Youth Sabbath School. Not all youth directors were present, and many wear multiple hats and had to scurry from one area of ministry to another. Only 15 conference or union youth director responses regarding Youth Sabbath School were returned. Responses from participants who were not youth directors have been cleaned from this data (see table 2 and table 3).

TABLE 2 Percentage of a Youth Director's Time Spent on Youth Sabbath School	
% of Youth Directors	*% of Time Spent on Youth Sabbath School*
47%	0% of my time
33%	1-9% of my time
7%	10% of my time
13%	25% of my time
0%	More than 25% of my time

TABLE 3 Percentage of a Youth Director's Budget Spent on Youth Sabbath School	
% of Youth Directors	*% of Budget Spent on Youth Sabbath School*
60%	0% of my budget
27%	Less than 5% of my budget
13%	10% of my budget
0%	More than 10% of my budget

While Youth Sabbath School may be the most common program for young people in the local church, it's not common from a conference or union youth director's time or budget. Youth directors seem fully occupied with summer camp and Pathfinders and some large-scale conference events that draw young people away from their local church, not toward it. When asked for the number of churches in their conference, 93% could give the number. When asked about the number of Youth Sabbath Schools in their conference, only 33% could give a number, and that number was less than half of the churches in their conference. No youth director had a roster of Youth Sabbath School leaders. This indicates a broken system in which conference youth directors don't even know who are their local church Youth Sabbath School leaders.

Some may be encouraged that 40% of these youth directors provide annual training in youth ministry. Some may be discouraged that another 40% provide no training. One wonders how local church youth leaders find out about this training when most seem to lack a connection with their conference youth director. One also wonders if local church leaders expect anything from their conference youth director when it comes to youth ministry in their church. None of the youth directors named *Cornerstone Connections*, the official curriculum for Youth Sabbath School, as a resource for Youth Sabbath School. But 33% named "Resources" as one of the top needs for Youth Sabbath School. There seems to be little indication that Youth Sabbath School is currently part of the ministry of conference or union youth directors.

Looking for a Youth Sabbath School in Local Churches

We sent a one-page survey to pastors in one conference in the North American Division, asking about Youth Sabbath School. Of the 125 pastors, only seven responded (representing eight churches). While this number seems paltry and certainly not statistically satisfying, several themes were consistent with these few respondents.

Those reporting had both an Adult Sabbath School and a Youth Sabbath School. While attendance for adults ranged from 3–100, Youth Sabbath School attendance ranged from 3–10, indicating approximately 10 percent for the youth compared to the adults. Only one church reported any training for its Youth Sabbath School leaders.

When asked about the materials or curriculum used for Youth Sabbath School, four reported using *Cornerstone Connections*—the official youth curriculum. One used *Real Time Faith*—the Earliteen Sabbath School curriculum. Three used other materials rather than these official SDA curriculum resources. Certainly,

people have ready access to other resources beyond Adventism, and some may look for non-SDA resources as their first choice. Obviously there is a need to collect more data than just seven respondents, but who will do that when it takes time and money for something that taps the interests or concerns of so few in the church?

Looking for a Youth Sabbath School Director in a Conference

The North American Division contains nine unions and 59 conferences. In February, 2017, we checked the 68 websites of each union and conference to see how much of a priority Youth Sabbath School would appear based on their websites and the personnel and departments listed.

We found no indication of any person or any department labeled "Youth Sabbath School." Perhaps the "Sabbath School" department or personnel would include "Youth" as part of its ministry. Or maybe a "Youth Director" or "Youth Department" would include "Youth Sabbath School" as part of its ministry and responsibility.

Of the 68 websites, only 28% (19 conferences or unions) listed a department called "Sabbath School" and somebody responsible for it. Of the few listed, it was customary to use the label "Adult Sabbath School." With 72% of the websites showing no Sabbath School department and no person giving attention to it, either Sabbath School is able to function without conference or union leadership, or Sabbath School ranks lower than many other concerns and services provided. It doesn't seem that "Sabbath School" from a conference or union perspective includes young people.

Youth Directors and Youth Departments have much more representation than Sabbath School. We found 88% of the websites listed somebody as a "youth director." It wasn't unusual to see additional responsibilities besides youth ministry. Larger and wealthier conferences sometimes have more than one youth director or a second person serving as a "young adult director." Based on the website content, it seems youth directors give priority to summer camp and Pathfinders. Some have an occasional youth rally or short-term mission trip, social gathering or recreational event. Only 7 percent even mentioned the term "Youth Sabbath School" somewhere on their webpage. While about one out of every four youth directors has a separate website from their conference for their youth ministry services, they aren't servicing Youth Sabbath School.

We made phone calls to more than 30 of the conference offices in the different unions throughout the North American Division in February of 2017. About half of these calls resulted in getting through to a live person rather than only a machine. We asked the question: "Who is responsible for Youth Sabbath School in your conference?" The most common response was silence for a while. The verbal response that finally came included the following:

- "Um, I think the youth director."
- "I don't know."
- "Good question!"
- "The Sabbath School department."
- "The Executive Secretary."
- "The Children's Ministry department."

Only once did the person answering immediately identify the Youth Director as the person responsible for Youth Sabbath School.

Resources: People

Without question, the most important resource for a Youth Sabbath School is the youth and those who lead them. Without the people, there is no Youth Sabbath School. In the survey given to youth directors in Tucson in January, 2017, we asked for the number of churches in a conference as well as the number of Youth Sabbath Schools. While almost all youth directors knew the exact number of churches, only one-third had any idea how many of those churches had a Youth Sabbath School. None of them had a roster of who the youth leaders were. Nearly two-thirds reported they provided Youth Sabbath School training annually or every few years.

A general rule of thumb for the duration of a volunteer youth leader is 18 months.[16] Occasionally a "lifer" serves as the youth leader for decades. More frequently it's the parents of youth who serve as their Youth Sabbath School leader. But they probably also served as their Sabbath School leader ever since Cradle Roll and simply continued the graduation from one age group to the next. By adolescence, when young people fully know their parents' beliefs, it's time to test out one's own beliefs with other trusted mentors before they make it their own. Who will be that Youth Sabbath School leader? How many will there be? What kind of training and support will they receive? Currently, each church is on its own. Rarely do you hear statements like, "Our Youth Sabbath School is really making a difference!" Since there doesn't seem to be any person, place, or process to bring about change, the majority of Seventh-day Adventists simply vote with their feet and don't attend Youth Sabbath School.[17] Many attend the church service but not Sabbath School. While the people are the most important resource, we must consider a second resource as well.

Resources: Materials

After people, perhaps the second most important resource would be materials for Youth Sabbath School programming. Starting in 1983, *Cornerstone Connections* provided an all-in-one resource for youth leaders that included Youth Sabbath School, outreach, small groups, social activities, AY, and leadership elements. Eventually it became just the Youth Sabbath School lesson. *Insight* magazine continued with a quarterly publication called *Insight Youth Resource* that contained program ideas for a comprehensive youth ministry for everything but the Youth Sabbath School lesson that continued as *Cornerstone Connections*. But the *Insight Youth Resource* has ceased publication. Currently the only youth ministry resource published by the church is *Cornerstone Connections*, which is limited to the Youth Sabbath School lesson. It is available by the old-school process of making a "standing order" with Pacific Press through an Adventist Book Center, and it takes 4–6 months to activate. It is also available as a free app.

While many other resources, Adventist and non-Adventist, are available online and through Christian bookstores and publishers, few Youth Sabbath School leaders are aware of what is available or how to choose. AdventSource carries a number of supplemental resources that could be used for Youth Sabbath School, but Pathfinder leaders are more likely to be aware of AdventSource

for uniforms and badges than Youth Sabbath School leaders are aware of this as a resource for them.

When the NAD surveyed local churches and asked those under the age of 30 about their awareness of what the specific resources the NAD had produced for youth ministry, the report stated: "The majority of Adventists under 30 years of age are simply not aware of the resources and programs that the North American Division is currently providing to support youth ministry. The most widely known resource is *Insight* magazine and only two in five of the young people have any awareness of it. Just one in four actually get a copy of the magazine even occasionally."[18] And now *Insight* magazine will cease publication because subscriptions have dropped so low that it's not financially feasible to continue publishing a resource people may recognize by name but not purchase or use.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Perhaps some may argue that there is no need for a Youth Sabbath School because there is no mention of it in Scripture. Maybe, others may think that everything is fine as it is—but we don't think so. Here is a list of concrete recommendations for a better Youth Sabbath School:

- If Youth Sabbath School is the main venue for local church youth ministry, then conference, union, and division youth directors should include it as a significant part of their ministry, making cuts or reductions elsewhere.

- To put it more strongly, we see conference youth directors as the most important movers to adopt Youth Sabbath School as a key part of their job description. Our recommendation is that a minimum of 25% of a conference youth director's time and budget be allocated to Youth Sabbath School.[19] This radical change would need endorsement from conference administration. Union and division youth directors are called upon to make this a priority to their respective administrations and to actively support conference youth directors in this change.

- The NAD should repair the broken links in the youth ministry organizational structure from division to union to conference to local church. The NAD Youth Department should adopt the orphan called "Youth Sabbath School" as its own and allocate time and finances to make this the local church venue for youth ministry.

- Conference youth directors need to establish lines of communication with local church Youth Sabbath School leaders. This begins with identifying which churches that currently have a Youth Sabbath School as well as those that would like to start one. It continues by creating a roster of who the current Youth Sabbath School leaders are and how to establish lines of communication with them (email, Facebook, texting, tweeting, snail mail, etc.).

- Local church Youth Sabbath School leaders should start a roster and take record of those who attend Youth Sabbath School. This can inform the leaders regarding their prayers, their planning, their personal contact, and the spiritual development of the young people.

This information should also be passed along to conference youth directors, with feedback from the youth director to the local church, too.

- Local churches are the place to create, experiment, revise, and share resources for Youth Sabbath School. Conference youth directors who connect with local churches should allocate some of their time and finances to spur this. They are in the unique position to then share this with other Youth Sabbath School leaders in their conference.

- Union youth directors should pursue collecting and distributing the freshly created resources deemed the best, looking for a cross-section that has appropriate representation of the congregations within its union. By adding its own funding to this on-going search and development, the union would provide yet another resource that local church Youth Sabbath School leaders could access for their use.

- If Youth Sabbath School isn't the primary youth ministry venue, then another place and/or time should be identified. Maybe 9:30 AM on a Saturday morning isn't the ideal time to target teens in the NAD today. Some swap the church service and Sabbath School on Sabbath morning, but then church attendance lags. Maybe Sabbath afternoon or some weeknight is the better "youth group" gathering time.

- Institutions and entities like the Center for Youth Evangelism at Andrews University could utilize its unique flow of youth ministry talent through the seminary to draw on youthful experience, ideas, and local church involvement to also respond to the need for new resources for Youth Sabbath School. For example, karaoke praise music might be needed in many Youth Sabbath Schools. With so many genres of praise music available, create collections of 5–10 songs of one style, and then do the same for a different style. Other resources could utilize short skits, discussion guides, Bible study lessons with active learning, prayer experiences, testimonials, icebreakers, current issues, intergenerational experiences, and experiences that lead to spiritual commitments.

The local church must be the focal point for ministry from a conference, union, and division perspective. Large scale events have their time and place, but primary consideration and allocations must be given to local church ministry.

Summary

Youth Sabbath School is the hidden gem of youth ministry. It doesn't have to be an orphan. But pity and neglect doesn't make an orphan part of the family. To bring the orphan called 'Youth Sabbath School" into the church family will necessitate vision, hope, investment, recruitment, training, planning, follow through, and a clear dependence on God. Conference youth directors are key in making the adoption of this orphan formal and recognized. Union and division youth directors must make a change as well. Young people themselves should be involved in this process by giving feedback and engaging in both creating and leading Youth Sabbath School. Then we can say not only "Sabbath School matters," but the people who are part of it will truly matter.

Endnotes

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8 McCormack, Sherman. The Seventh-day Adventist Adult Sabbath School: Its Purpose as Described and Perceived. Dissertation, Andrews University, 1992, p. 1.

9 Edgren, Dave. "Sabbath School—Vision & (four-fold) Mission Statement." Restoring Faith and Values. May 7, 2013. http://prdaveonline.blogspot.com/2013/05/sabbath-school-vision-four-fold-mission.html. Accessed March 8, 2017.

10 Serban, p. 3.

11 Based on an email received April 17, 2017 in which a conference administrator reported church attendance records conference-wide to be 40% of membership. This is with two-thirds of the churches reporting in a conference of more than 100 churches and more than 100 pastors. While no Sabbath School attendance records are taken, the estimate is that only half of the church attendance is present by the end of Sabbath School, which would be 20% of church membership. This report of 40% of membership attending church and 20% of membership attending Sabbath School is lower than the current general statements made that only 50% of members attend church and 25% attend Sabbath School. It's possible that these numbers are indeed lower throughout North America, as indicated by one anonymous conference's records.

12 The AY Program on Sabbath afternoon is dying or dead in an increasing number of African-American churches. Immigrant churches maintain the Sabbath afternoon youth program as long as they continue with a first-generation, immigrant target for this programming. One key indicator is keeping the program in the immigrant language rather than English. Another is the necessary approval by established immigrant leaders. But doing this results

in the second and third generation gradually dropping out or attending other churches. This usually isn't noticed or addressed as long as new immigrants or new converts continue to take their place.

13 Pastors of local churches received personal phone calls asking if any young people were missing from their churches, if there was any plan to reach out to any who were missing, and an offer to receive free resources to help them reach out to young people who no longer attended. About 2,000 of the nearly 5,500 SDA churches in North America received phone calls in the two years of this initiative. Occasionally the pastor referred the caller to another church leader or the pastor wasn't available and a church leader spoke on behalf of the congregation. Each of the nine unions in North America was included.

14 It should be emphasized that gathering data was not the primary purpose of these phone calls and servicing local church pastors. But the data collected in the process is telling.

15 The reality of not being able to make contact with a church pastor after repeated attempts baffled those who tried to contact so many unresponsive pastors.

16 This guesstimate is not based on empirical research but is simply hearsay that youth ministry people continue to promulgate. For example: http://after.church/7-youth-ministry-traps-every-church-should-avoid/ identifies the generally accepted 18-month tenure, and then gives Group Magazine's results of a study in which they claim 3.9 years as the average tenure of a youth leader. There is no such statistic for Seventh-day Adventists, a denomination that operates on a completely different paradigm of fulltime and part-time church leadership and pay parity.

17 The same could be said of Adult Sabbath School. In many churches, the children's Sabbath School might be the best-attended age group. The adult Sabbath School is often composed of seniors whose experience in Sabbath School would fit into a "small group" experience with both spiritual and social benefits. Rarely would it be considered evangelistic.

18 Cincala, Peter, Roger Dudley and Monte Sahlin. "Survey of Teens and Young Adults: Mega Study 1." Institute of Church Ministries, 2014, p. 8. This survey was sent to a random sample of 500 congregations in NAD and received 1,215 responses—about two or three responses per church. This illustrates either the low level of responses to surveys or the low number of people under the age of 30 in SDA Churches in North America.

19 Most conference youth directors are also in charge of summer camp. This takes an inordinate amount of time, and most agree they could spend even more time in this rewarding ministry with a paid staff for a short burst of time. We are calling conference youth directors to reduce their investment in summer camp and allocate time and funds for Youth Sabbath School. For example, instead of traveling the country to recruit potential camp staff from multiple Adventist schools, use those resources to travel throughout your conference and recruit Youth Sabbath School leaders. Invest as much time in training volunteer Youth Sabbath School leaders for year-round ministry as you do in training paid camp staff for a few weeks of the summer. We recommend that a camp staff be comprised of those within your conference instead of trying to cherry-pick the best and brightest throughout the country.

This would force the youth director to grow one's own young people instead of harvesting the growth of others. It could create increased dependence on God and change the staff mentality from seasoned veterans to developing young people to lead for the summer at camp and in their local churches during the school year.

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YOUTH SABBATH SCHOOL CHALLENGES IN THE NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

Armando Miranda, Jr. and Tracy Wood

In January of 2016 the North American Division (NAD) Youth and Young Adult Ministries department leaders held a visioning and strategic planning retreat with Union Youth Directors and ministry coordinators to plan for the next five years. At this retreat there was an appeal from Union Youth Directors to develop resources for youth Sabbath School leadership training. This appeal for youth Sabbath School resources was new to the Youth Department because Sabbath School ministry has never been an official part of Youth Directors' portfolio.

Traditionally the Conference, Union and Division youth and young adult ministry portfolio has consisted of a plethora of ministries (i.e.: Pathfindes, Youth/Young Adult, Public Campus, etc.). Each of these ministries has operated at the Division-level with Advisories and Focus Groups that give direction to the development of resources for leadership training and implementation. However, earliteen, youth, and young adult Sabbath School resources and training have not been included. With so many ministries it has not been feasible for most Conference-level Youth Directors to facilitate Sabbath School leadership training for local the church Sabbath School leaders.

Who is responsible for Youth Sabbath School?

In the NAD, the Children's Ministries department provides training of Sabbath School leaders from Beginners through Juniors using the General Conference Sabbath School lessons and teachers helps with additional resources. For adults, the Adult Ministries department of the NAD provides training of Sabbath School leaders using the General Conference Adult Sabbath School lessons, Teacher's Quarterly, and additional resources.

For Earliteen, Youth, and Young Adult Sabbath School, however, the NAD Youth Ministries department has never assumed ownership or responsibilities. Consequently, Union and Conference Youth Directors have not taken active leadership for youth Sabbath School. Yet, according to the NAD Working Policy 2016-2017 (FY 12 Youth Sabbath School), "The Youth Department supports local churches in the operation of Teen and Young Adult Sabbath Schools, including Branch Sabbath Schools. The purpose of the Sabbath School is to encourage the spiritual growth of teens and young adults through Bible study, fellowship, and involvement in ministry, and support of the world-wide mission of the denomination." While the word "support" has to be unfolded with precision, perhaps it is time to explore how this purpose can be accomplished.

Youth Sabbath School Crisis in the North American Division: Recent Developments

Throughout 2016 there was much discussion about *Insight Magazine* and its financial viability. Subscriptions had been declining for years and the income no longer balanced the publishing and printing expenses. For more than 30 years the weekly youth Sabbath School lesson has been printed inside the *Insight Magazine* and it was this publication that carried the lesson into the hands and the homes of teenagers.

The NAD Youth Department began attempts to determine how many churches throughout the NAD were using the General Conference youth Sabbath School curriculum entitled Cornerstone Connection. In spite of the little response, it was discovered that many Sabbath School leaders were using resources that were not Adventist-produced.

In January 2017 at the NAD Ministries Convention the NAD Youth Department hosted a Sabbath School Advisory to get input and direction from Union and Conference Youth Directors as well as anyone else who was interested. This advisory was open for anyone to attend. There were about 30 in attendance.

Following the Sabbath School Advisory, a Youth Sabbath School Taskforce was developed and met in February 2017. This included the two Associate Youth Directors for the NAD along with three Union Youth Directors. **Three initiatives** were developed from the advisory. **First**, **identify Union and Conference Youth Sabbath School coordinators** who will work with their union and Conference Youth Directors to build or rebuild Youth Sabbath School in the local churches. **Second, develop Sabbath School leadership resources** that can be used by the local church Sabbath School leaders in teaching and facilitating religious education to teens/youth. **Third, develop and provide Sabbath School leadership training for local church Sabbath School leaders** using the resources that have been created. It was determined that these three initiatives would begin immediately in this order.

In March 2017, it was determined by the Pacific Press Publishing Association board that they would no longer publish, print and distribute *Insight Magazine*. The last issue would be printed in June 2017. Also, the *Insight Magazine* website and social media platforms would be given to the NAD Youth Ministries department by Pacific Press. The transfers of the website and social media platforms to the NAD were made in May and June 2017.

In the fall of 2016 the Center for Youth Evangelism (CYE) on the campus of Andrews University and the NAD Youth & Young Adult Ministries department began collaborative planning to host a 180 Symposium entitled "Sabbath School Matters!" This event would gather administrators and youth directors from all levels of leadership, Sabbath School practitioners, academicians, resource developers, and young people to present papers addressing the demise of Sabbath School ministry. The format would be presentations followed by round-table discussions and conclude with recommendations and actions steps toward collaborative solutions. Anticipation was high that the outcomes would be used to create a way forward for the future success of youth Sabbath School ministry. This book contains the papers that were presented and the recommendations that were made at the symposium.

Resources and Leadership Training Challenges

About five years ago the General Conference Sabbath School committee decided to change the Sabbath School curricula for every age level beginning January 2019. This requires extensive work in writing the weekly Sabbath School lessons and developing the teacher resources for each age group. The General Conference develops lessons and teacher resources about three years prior to publication. This lag time poses a challenge to produce relevant and timely resources.

The Earliteen lesson, entitled RealTime Faith, used to be printed in *Guide Magazine* but as of January 2017 it is no longer included. The lesson is only available in a quarterly format and on a Sabbath School app produced by the General Conference. Similarly, the *Insight Magazine* with the Youth lesson, entitled Cornerstone Connection, is no longer printed as of June 2017. As with the earliteen lesson, this resource is only available in a quarterly format and on the Sabbath School app as well.

Currently there is no Earliteen, Youth, or Young Adult Sabbath School leadership training being offered. The only Conference-provided training is done by Youth Directors who have taken the initiative on their own. They must develop and provide their own Sabbath School training materials. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop quality resources for local church leadership training.

Challenges with the Resources Production Process

The General Conference Sabbath School department writes the Sabbath School lessons and teacher helps for each age-level of Sabbath School. These lessons are produced in English and sent to each Division for translation and publication. While this facilitates uniformity in that teens and youth around the globe unite in studying the same materials, at the same time it poses a challenge with a lack of contextualization for various subcultures.

In the NAD, because there is no translation of the materials into other languages, the General Conference sends the materials directly to the Pacific Press who prints the quarterlies and the teacher helps. That means that neither the Division nor the Unions or the Conferences have any input in the development of these resources.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this article, the Youth Sabbath School is facing some important challenges, mainly, three: (a) lack of administrative ownership (at all levels); (b) lack of relevant resources; and (c) lack of leadership training for the local level. It is expected that it will take the collaboration of many entities throughout the NAD to remedy the crisis. This is why the 180 Symposium focused on bringing together administrators and youth directors, Sabbath School practitioners, educators and academicians, resource developers, and young people.

Therefore, it is the anticipation of NAD Youth & Young Adult Ministries, along with the NAD Administrators, that the recommendations and outcomes from the Sabbath School Matters! 180 Symposium will provide insights and direction for putting in place initiatives that will bring solutions to the Sabbath School Crisis.

WILL YOU LISTEN? THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS ENGAGEMENTS IN SABBATH SCHOOL

Jharony Fernandez-Gibbs and Deslynne Roberts

Introduction

Faith and spirituality are important features of young adulthood, yet the decline in youth and young adult engagement in Sabbath School has escalated in the North American Division. Proactive steps to readdress the issue have begun, however the weekly experiences of youth and young adult engagement in Sabbath School remains to be explored. Moreover, Adventist youth and young adult relentlessly seek a more meaningful exploration of their faith and spirituality as it relates with their life experiences.

A number of previous studies conducted by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA), on faith development amongst youth and young adults discovered that whilst faith development is an identifying marker in the overall growth of the church, youth and youth adults continue to disengage from church. Several studies cited by Dudley (2000) highlighted a number of reasons why teenagers leave the church. These factors include "alienation, irrelevance, intolerance, convenience"[1]

The Project Affirmation: Valuegenesis[2] study of Adventist Youth that begun in 1989 was another important landmark youth and young adult study for the SDA church in North America. Assessment on faith maturity and behaviors in various areas identified the two most important religious outcomes. The most important factors that ranked highly for youth and young adults were faith maturity and denominational loyalty. More recently the Barna Report (2013) stated that 57% of young adults remain unengaged in church life, whilst 23% are disengaged with the church life. Moreover, those who attend infrequently report various reasons; 22% report disagreement with the church, 39% report spiritual struggles, whilst 65% report some other reasons.[3]

Currently, the consensus suggests that Sabbath school classes are not meeting the needs of most young adults. Therefore, looking for other resources and communities where their needs are met has become a more urgent need for young adults. This results in a large number of young adults becoming disengaged from Sabbath school, increasing the lack of attendance thereof.

This article deals with a survey conducted on the campus of Andrews University, to find out student's attitudes, perceptions and involvement with young adult Sabbath School. The survey revealed many significant responses about the lived experiences of college campus youth and young adults' engagement in Sabbath School.

Among these responses, four emerging themes describe those experiences: (1) relevancy, (2) faith and spirituality, (3) teaching and facilitation and (4) relationships. Participants' response to the survey indicated varying levels of spiritual maturity and conflicting interests in Sabbath School. The experiences of young adults highlighted that the current Sabbath School model should be altered to facilitate active faith development throughout young adulthood. In addition, a greater emphasis is needed to foster a desire for a mission-minded approach in this ministry, one that equips young adults for the active engagement in religious pursuits within the Adventist Church, and leads to the enlargement of God's Kingdom.

Sabbath School Matters Survey

In this study, 224 respondents completed the online survey, of which 93% were young adults aged 18-35 years, and 7% were youth, ages 15–17. Attendance at Sabbath School indicated that 73% attended Sabbath School in the last 6 months, whilst 23% did not attend. In contrast, 43% attended each week, with 18% attending twice a month, and 11% once a month. Of the 73% of young adults, there is some favourability towards the Sabbath School program; however, some caution should be given to this finding, based on the population sample used for this study and the demographics of this group, since this was conducted on an Adventist college. Had this study been conducted in a different context, perhaps the results would have varied.

There is also a need to provide a broader lens in which to determine the response of youth and young adult from the local church, especially when 49 college students have disengaged from Sabbath School entirely. The actual experiences of youth and young adults highlighted several reasons for the decline in attendance. In general, 55% of respondents stated that they do not attend Sabbath School because they are too tired and 35% state that Sabbath morning's no longer work for them; 37% reported a lack of stimulation; 37% are no longer interested; 29% stated that the topics do not help them grow spiritually, and 25% stated that the Sabbath School lessons do not help them to think critically about their faith and SDA theology, whilst 16% reported that the Sabbath School lesson is too structured.

1) Relevancy

Some respondents described relevancy in terms of purpose and function of Sabbath School, the structure, *engagement*, *location* and *delivery* of the bible study guide. One respondent stated that *"We need to have a clear vision- a goal in mind, so it's not just a 'hangout' club. But have a purpose in what we do. A mission".* It comes as no surprise that in comparison to Gen Xers, Millennials place significant value on contributing to purposeful and meaningful activities, in the hope of making a positive contribution to the world. This aptly describes the need for the Sabbath School model to incorporate a mission minded approach in its structure that is relevant for the post-modern and meta-modern society.

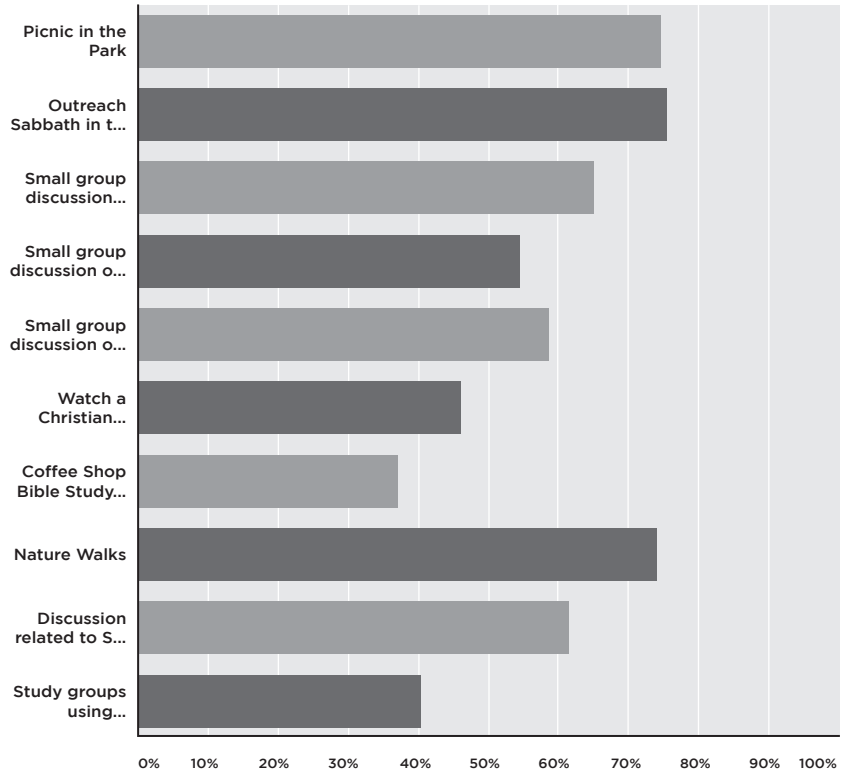
Consideration should also be given to opportunities for active engagement with the wider society. This notion was best articulated by one of the participants in these words: *"have it outside of the walls of the church"*. It is evident that a community focused Sabbath School model, one that goes beyond the church walls, is an expressed need that appeals most to young adults (See Figure 1 below).

The accumulation of these factors can lend to increased relevancy for engaged and disengaged youth and young adults. The survey highlighted that 24% of disengaged youth and young adult want more discussion on social issues, and new interactive ways of studying the Bible, whilst 17% no longer want to use the Sabbath School lesson. In contrast, engaged youth and young adults recognise the importance of re-imagining the Sabbath School experience through a range of activities. The graph below highlights the responses of 143 participants from this survey.

FIGURE 1

Sabbath School Matters Survey (2017). Question 13

Would you want to participate in the following activities/program as part of your Sabbath School group?



The results highlight a number of activities that could peak the interest of youth and young adults and also has the potential to increase their engagement in Sabbath school. The highest-ranking responses include a desire to have Sabbath School picnics in the park (75%), planned outreach activities (76%), and participation in nature walks (74%). A consistent response ranging from 60%–65% emphasized a need for more small groups that facilitate topics such as personal development, social issues and interfaith beliefs.

2) Faith and Spirituality

Faith development throughout young adulthood has many peaks and trough. The terrain is challenging for some, yet for others their faith development is linear. According to faith development theory, faith is determined by internal and external influences. Internal being the intrinsic motivators that respond to a

stimuli, whereas external factors such as religion, doctrine and culture influence responses to faith and spirituality across the trajectory of lifespan development.

The responses that participants gave to issues pertaining SDA doctrine, personal faith, religious belief and how they impact on the faith community varied. One respondent stated that *"My generation long for a Christianity that is genuinely transformative, not necessarily new, creative, or innovative".* While Sabbath School can be the place for spiritual growth and maturity for young adult and their peers, results from this survey highlight an underlying need for discipleship, despite the fact that many young adults believe in God but don't see Him as personal. Transformative faith is likely to arise when young adults engage in the process of discipleship.

Another response affirmed that *"Adventist young adults know the theology of the church well enough, they understand Adventism for the most part, but God has no active role in their lives".* The dissociation between spirituality, faith and religiosity in the life of young adults is apparent in the above response. Simply put, the responses cited seem to validate the need for a discipleship model, one that facilitates more opportunities to empower, equip, connect and educate young adults in their quest for deeper faith; and Sabbath School could be a vehicle to make this happen. In this regard, several participants expressed a *"desire to see more of an emphasis on the simplicity and practicality of the Bible and how to share this with others in Sabbath School".*

3) Teaching and Facilitation

In regards to teaching and facilitation in Sabbath School, the study revealed various views of young adults that will improve their Sabbath School experience. Young adults felt that *"instructors need to talk less and let participants engage more"*. We have to keep in mind that we are working with a newer and younger generation who do not function the same way as those from the Gen X and Baby Boomer generations. Young adults want to be able to engage in their learning experience so they can grow and fully comprehend what they believe in. They want to share their views on current issues inside and outside the church.

While there is the notion that young adults only care about selfies, iPhones, Facebook, Instagram, snapchat, etc., research has demonstrated that young adults also care about service and social issues, and want to be in a church community that is willing to allow them to engage in such activities.[4] If Sabbath School classes provide young adults an opportunity to share their views and tie them with Biblical truths, this will enhance their experience as well as their spiritual growth. Many youth and young adults are saying "no" to church because of the church's stand on cultural issues such as women's ordination, and the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community.[5] Having Sabbath School classes that respond to these current events is essential to their integral growth.

A final point to bring to light is that young adults *"would like to see Sabbath School teaching people HOW to study the Bible for themselves and HOW to pray themselves rather than spoon feeding them premeditated conclusions ABOUT the Bible"*. On a personal note, I recently met an Andrews University student who shared her disengagement and lack of participation in attending church and Sabbath School. When asked why, she simply said that if she feels closer to God outside in nature, and hanging out with friends, then that is what she would do. She also said that in the past two years at Andrews, she did not

need to open her Bible once during church services and Sabbath School. She wanted to study her Bible and grow deeper in understanding the scriptures. She desired depth.

4) Relationships

Young adults also reported that they would like to see Sabbath School *"move to a more relational dynamic instead of the teacher/facilitator at the front of the room".* Building relationships is key to reaching young adults. Authenticity in relationships is vital for them. Sabbath School Teachers need to demonstrate that they care about what they have to say inside and outside of class. Welcoming, caring and authentic Sabbath School classes are needed to retain youth and young adults. Sabbath School should provide what Rainer and Rainer (2008) call a "third place", an anchor of a community that encourages relational interaction between its members.[6] Sabbath School needs to be a place that provides a safe environment for young adults to express themselves and connect with one another. Just as it is important to have a community that guides and mentors in a church, it is also crucial to have that same element within the Sabbath School setting.[7]

Among the responses in this category was the desire for *"shorter lessons and more time for bonding".* Young adults do not want to spend most of the time on the vertical connection with God alone, but also enjoy the horizontal connection with their peers and teacher. This is a positive attribute of young adults. We constantly see Jesus in the Gospels investing not just in His connection with God the Father, but also investing in His connection with His brothers and sisters on earth. Getting to know each other is significant for young adults. Sabbath School can supply that platform for young adults to not just get to know God but get to know one another, following Jesus' example.

It is also vital to note that visitors should be welcomed and received as friends to the Sabbath School class. One respondent stated: *"Always acknowledge visitors. Instructors need to talk less and let students engage more."* According to Stetzer, Stanley and Hayes, we should move from the model of behave/believe/belong ministry to belong/believe/become ministry model.[8] Making young adults feel that they belong to the Sabbath School class can definitely have an impact on their engagement and participation. Nobody wants to be part of a group of people that does not notice when they have been absent for three weeks in a row. There needs to be intentionality in following up commitments, checking on the students, visiting homes, engage in conversation, know when they are sick, notice when they have been missing, etc.

In essence, when the church becomes essential to young adults, then they will know that they are essential to the church. The same applies to Sabbath School. Sabbath School can be essential to young adults if they know that they are essential to Sabbath School. Building relationships with students and visitors attending the Sabbath School classes will ensure that they feel important to the Sabbath School class. This will inspire them to continue to attend and be engaged. Intentionally building relationships with young adults will reflect the character of Jesus.

Limitations

This study revealed some positive responses about Sabbath School engagement among youth and young adult. The sample size provided a range of

responses, yet it was not large enough to investigate the scope of the issue from young adults who do not attended Sabbath School on college campuses. As a result, this particular population group that the survey targeted, may not necessarily reflect the current situation with Sabbath School attendance and engagement of youth and young adults in the North American Division. Culture, age, church attendance and affiliation to the Adventist church are unclear.

While access to college students on an Adventist college campus was convenient for this study, many variables emerged that should be taken into account. Defining the intricate needs of young adults aged 18–35—whether they are in college or not—is multifaceted. Young adults' engagement in Sabbath School is impacted by life transitions such as college life, work, marriage and parenthood. These factors do impact religiosity and spirituality among young adults, which in turn affects their perspective on and engagement with Sabbath school.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations that were gathered from this survey that should be considered in the development of Sabbath School Ministry. Given the sample and methodology used for this pilot study, in order to obtain a more in depth perspective, there would be value in conducting an in depth study of young adult engagement in Sabbath School across the North American Division that include teenagers, youth and young adults in the local church.

Second, the true relevancy of the current youth and young adult Sabbath School model and resources should be analysed in detail. This may require an objective look at how they speak to the lives of youth and young adults; for example, considering the global and techno savvy context of this generation, there should be intentionality in creating a relevant model and resources the embrace the many nuances of young adulthood. Identifying interactive resources for Sabbath School is vital for retaining young adults as well as embracing the diverse learning needs of this generation.

Conclusion

Sabbath School can be a very useful ministry in the lives of youth and youth adults. As their faith matures the evidence suggests that this generation craves for a much more spiritual experience. It is therefore important that the responses of the youth and young adults are embraced and valued as a legitimate expression of their desire to re-imagining the Sabbath School experience. We are living in a world that presents many enticing options for youth and young adults, which cater to their needs. While the church is well positioned to respond, we should not miss the opportunity to listen to the spoken and the unspoken voices of our youth and young adults.

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PUBLIC CAMPUS STUDENTS: SABBATH SCHOOL FOR THE 70%

Scott R. Ward, DMin

The structure of Youth Ministry in Seventh-day Adventist denomination is founded on the belief that the 3 pillars of home, school and church need to work together to form our children spiritually as revealed in the findings of the Valugenesis studies. This Valugenesis research that was based initially on surveys of 24,000 Adventist Academy students indicates that the Adventist church may be losing approximately 50% of these youth that are attending Adventist Academies.

With the absence of clear data on the retention rates of Adventist youth attending public high schools and with clear data indicating that Adventist Education is effective in helping to retain Adventist youth it seems reasonable to assume that we may be losing significantly more than 50% of Adventist youth attending public high schools. It is estimated that there may be approximately 70% of Adventist teens included in this significant at-risk group attending public high schools. Because of the limited reach of Adventist education it is Adventist churches that are left with the primary responsibility of assisting the Adventist homes in reaching this majority of Adventist youth attending public high schools.

For these reasons it is critically important to equip, resource and support the lay youth leaders in our local Adventist churches to reach all Adventist teens with the gospel and with our distinctive Adventist understanding of scripture. For many Adventist churches the main, and sometimes only, existing youth ministry activity that takes place on a regular basis that can serve as the starting point for this process of reaching and retaining our youth is Youth Sabbath School.

Structural Issues

The heart and soul of the Seventh-day Adventist church is the local church. Local churches are the place for individuals and families to develop relationships with other believers, learn about the Bible, grow spiritually and mobilize to live their faith and reach their communities for Christ. Many local Adventist churches also have small elementary schools that they operate and some churches are also constituents of local day academies and boarding academies. Adventist education has developed over the years as a ministry of the local churches and conferences intended to help reach Adventist young people for Christ. For many Adventist churches this is the main form of youth ministry they offer. Some congregations designate more than 50% of their church budgets to support this type of Adventist education ministry.

The two main departments relating to Adventist youth in most local conferences are the youth department and the education department. The education department oversees all the schools within the conference territory with the main goal of Adventist education being to help lead young people to Christ.

Most local conference youth departments in the North American Division (NAD) are structured around providing support for junior youth ministries in the form of Adventurers, Pathfinders and summer camp; and many are also able to provide a limited number of senior youth Bible conferences, short-term mission trips and other youth-oriented ministries. It is also noted that summer camp ministries minister to the youth and young adults who work there as staff along with the younger kids attending camp.

It is important to note that most of the attention of the local conference education departments is given primarily to the existing church schools and in spite of their best efforts for the past several decades many of these local church schools and academies are closing at an alarming rate. The point being made here is that the local conference education departments typically are not having a significant impact on the churches that are not affiliated with a local church school—rather than expanding they are fighting desperately to keep the schools they have open.

It is also important to note that many local conference youth departments are focused more on junior youth ministries than they are on senior youth ministries. Often times the local conference youth departments work closely with the education departments because they are both reaching out to the larger churches that have enough youth to warrant a church school ministry and there is a great deal more opportunity to find and recruit youth for ministry events where there are larger numbers of Adventist young people in one place. For example: it is common for summer camp directors to recruit students for camp by visiting all of the conference elementary schools and it is common for the summer camp directors to also visit Adventist academies and colleges to recruit summer camp staff. On the other hand, it is much more difficult and time consuming to find the Adventist young people that are scattered in smaller numbers throughout the greater number of Adventist churches that do not have enough young people to warrant having local church schools.

In some union conferences within the NAD there are youth departments that help to support local conference youth ministries and there is also youth ministry support for local conferences and unions coming from the NAD but these levels of the church structure are not the topic of this conversation because they primarily exist to support local conferences and unions rather than directly resourcing the local churches.

The interesting thing to note here is that the General Conference, which is the highest level of Adventist church structure, is the entity that has been delegated the task of creating Sabbath School materials for local Adventist churches around the world. The concept has been that our denomination would have one lesson produced each week that can reach all young people from all walks of life from around the entire globe, thus bypassing the local conference, union and division youth ministry and education departments and thereby taking these departments out of the conversations regarding Sabbath School and effectively eliminating this vital church ministry from their structures. In fact some local conference youth departments do not have a good feel for what is happening in local church youth Sabbath School classes because it is under the local conference Sabbath School department rather than under the direction of the youth ministry professionals. So, within the current system, the GC creates one youth Sabbath School curriculum that is passed down to local conference Sabbath School departments to be distributed to local churches along with

all the other Sabbath School department materials completely bypassing the existing local conference youth ministries conducted by Adventist education and youth ministry departments.

For this reason we find ourselves in the situation where our existing youth ministry structures are focused on the significant task of reaching Adventist young people associated with Adventist schools and church congregations large enough to warrant the presence of a youth pastor or other youth ministry professional. With so much work to do with this significant number of youth in our schools and larger churches and with the budget and staffing constraints of attempting to keep these ministries alive and functioning and with Sabbath School somewhat off the radar for all of these youth ministry and education professionals we find that our denomination in North America has come to the point where it is very difficult to see and identify Adventist youths that are scattered throughout our smaller churches and only marginally involved in the existing "system" of local conference youth and education ministries.

For these reasons it seems clear that as the discussion about providing new youth Sabbath School materials moves forward we must keep in mind that the significant group that is being missed by our existing organized youth ministry structures is primarily the approximately 70% of Adventist youth attending public high schools and that are associated with our churches that are too small or too poor to have their own Adventist schools or youth ministry professionals.

Young Adult Retention must Begin in High School

For many years the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in North America has been investing millions of dollars into Adventist education and has also been spending even more to study the effectiveness of Adventist education with the Valugenesis research. The results of this research have made it very clear to most Adventists that we are losing far too many of our youth despite our best efforts and well spent money. The common number that is most widely talked about due to this research is that we are losing approximately 50% of Adventist youth. What most people may not be realizing is that the Valugenesis research indicating this approximate 50% loss is based solely on surveys of teenagers attending Adventist Academies—public school youth are not involved in these studies or statistics and as stated in the abstract above is seems reasonable to assume that the Adventist denomination is losing far more of it's youth than previously thought when the loss of youth attending public high schools is factored in.

What if we could find a way to make youth SS the springboard for reaching out to the majority of our teens attending public schools? With the millions of dollars being spent on Adventist Education and on studying the effectiveness of Adventist education would it seem wise to also designate some funding to develop youth ministries specifically targeted to reach the large numbers of Adventist teens that are only marginally being reached by the existing system?

Several years ago the NAD identified young adult retention as one of it's top priorities. Funding has been allocated and new young adult initiatives have been implemented to help stem the loss of our young people and progress has been made. It is important to note, however, that some youth ministry professionals agree that many of our young adults that are leaving the church made the decision to leave while they were still in high school—they just didn't have the

freedom to leave, in many cases, until they turned 18 and graduated. For this reason it is important to state clearly that young adult retention and stemming the loss of our young people must begin in high school and with the clearly identified structural difficulties and limits of Adventist education and youth ministry a new direction must be considered.

Our denomination seems to be having better success with investing into our junior youth aged children with elementary schools, Adventurer and Pathfinder ministries along with summer camp ministries and other activities designed for this age group. For those students who are able to continue on from these ministries and attend Adventist academies the full array of ministry opportunities continues to exist and provide effective ministry. The problem is that when many Adventist children graduate from Adventist elementary schools they also grow out of Pathfinders and summer camp ministries at around the same time. The problem is compounded because far fewer options for attending Adventist schools during high school exist than there were for elementary school.

Thus, it is all to common for Adventist churches to invest heavily in junior youth ministries and then have very little to offer during the high school years for those students unable to continue on to an Adventist academy. When this happens we often times lose much of the investment made during the elementary school years as we fail to build on that foundation.

Once again, it seems that Sabbath School is the one structured Adventist ministry to youth that still exists in some form that can be strengthened and built upon to capitalize on what we have already invested in so heavily in our young people as children. It is also important to note that it is during these critical high school years when young people begin to take control of their lives and go from being told what to believe to deciding for themselves if they will believe what they have been taught spiritually. It is during these critical years when the decisions to be Christian or not and wether to be Adventist or not are being made. And, as stated above, it is often times the decisions that are made during this time of life, in high school, that determine wether our young people remain involved in church as young adults or walk away.

More than an Hour on Sabbath Mornings

As has been discussed above, youth Sabbath School has the potential to play a major role in helping to educate and develop Adventist teens spiritually and to help retain them in our churches as they become adults. Also, as noted above, churches that are large enough to have a youth ministry professional on staff and/or are large enough to have an academy nearby often times have youth Sabbath School leaders that can create their own resources or are familiar with enough other resources that they don't need as much help as the youth leaders from churches that don't have these human resources. For these reasons the suggestions laid out here for helping to recreate youth Sabbath School will be primarily targeted to the smaller churches and poorer inner city churches that have fewer human as well as material resources and are often times the churches trying to minister to many of our youth who are unable to take advantage of the benefits of Adventist education.

As we begin to imagine what youth Sabbath School could be it is important to see it as more than just one hour per week on Sabbath mornings. If our lay youth leaders, who are mostly not youth ministry specialists, see Sabbath School as

merely fulfilling an obligation for an hour per week or merely as something to "get through" we have lost the battle before it has begun because the youth will immediately notice the lack of interest and immediately walk away—if not physically—then mentally.

It is critically important to create resources that can effectively reach our youth by helping our lay youth leaders to find easy and natural ways to create meaningful, spiritually nurturing relationships with the teens they are serving. So, rather than focusing only on programming that is attention-getting, the focus needs to be on building trust and genuine, caring relationships. Plug and play dynamic programming gets old in a hurry when it is devoid of deeper relationship. Therefore, the place to start youth retention is by learning their names and interests and this can happen anywhere at church—including, but not limited to, Sabbath School.

Trying to get to know a small group of teens, or even one or two, can be rather intimidating for many adults so it is important to bring out what may be obvious to many but not all. With teens there is no better mood setting, conversation starting, relationship building tool than food. There are good reasons why so many business meetings and socials take place in the context of a meal. It gives you something to talk about, gives you something to do rather than merely fidgeting with something else and just makes everyone more comfortable in most cases. The food can take on many forms depending on the comfort zone of the particular church but the point is to use this proven tool to help break the ice and warm people up. More traditional youth group ice breaker games can work well in larger groups, but in smaller groups food and often times a little background music can serve to ease tension and help everyone to feel welcomed and a little more at ease.

As students come in to Sabbath School and start checking the table to see what kinds of food are smelling so good one of the next natural steps in human relationship building is to greet the students and ask them how their week has been. These conversations should be informal and the real goal is to get to know everyone's names, interests, where they go to school, etc. Another goal of this weekly "get to know you" time is to help kids learn about each other and to help them to develop relationships with each other as well. This also helps the youth leader to know what kinds of activities to propose engaging the kids in outside of Sabbath School and also serves as a time to discuss what they might like to do for some kind of social activity. There are a lot of small group books on the market that can be helpful in giving more suggestions for doing this type of group/team building.

The next step in relationship building that will be suggested here is to take prayer requests and praises. This is a time to take all the things you've learned about each other to God in prayer. It is important to try to keep track of the different prayer requests so that you can follow up week to week with what is happening in the students lives. This helps them to know that you care and is a tangible way of demonstrating the practical love that Jesus has for each one of them as well. The formula is: meet some felt needs, show them that you care, and then help them learn more about Jesus. Actual programming structures and ideas are beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusions

1. The Seventh-day Adventist church in North America needs to take a serious look at it's youth ministry structures and begin addressing it's current weaknesses and blind spots so that it can more effectively address how to minister to and retain the large numbers of Adventist teens attending public high schools.

2. The Seventh-day Adventist church in North America needs to recognize that young adult retention begins in high school and target more resources to this vital area that is often times dramatically under-resourced as compared to the variety of junior youth oriented ministries that these students have often times just graduated from.

3. As new youth Sabbath School resources are developed it must be kept in mind that helping lay youth leaders understand that, (a) relationship building is the primary goal and that (b) programming is secondary, is vital. Relational lay youth leader resources, training and support are of critical importance and will help to develop youth Sabbath School as a foundation for all other youth ministries that local church congregations can provide.

AUGMENTED RELEVANCE: CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

By Nik Velinov

A Reality Check

Even if you are not familiar with "augmented reality", you are most likely already living in its world. The way we learn, interact, socialize, work, produce, experience, and live has changed dramatically; and our Sabbath School experience is due for a major upgrade to take it out of the 2D world.

Reality is not what it used to be, and if you are not convinced, just wait to see some Pokémon chasers pass nearby. Mixing the real world with the digital one opens up dimensions unexplored before. You have probably heard of Google glasses, but if you haven't checked Microsoft's HoloLens, I urge you to do it. "Your world is the canvas"[1], as they like to say.

While entertainment and games with creatures coming out of the walls and crawling on your couch, may not be everyone's cup of tea, just think about a live hologram or video skype call connecting you to someone that can help you fix your plumbing problem by guiding your moves and pointing you to the right places. Imagine being able to digitally extract the physical piece, to look at it from any angle, quickly find all relevant data about it, experiment with it, and then apply the best approach on the physical item. What if you were able to physically see the actual kitchen cabinet in its real space, before you bought it or built it? How about looking at a human brain, or studying the human nervous system through a realistic hologram superimposed on your real world, along with all relevant data, pictures, videos, etc. to empower your experience and decision making? How much more would you appreciate a place that you are visiting, if you can visualize the culture and history surrounding it?

This is the world in front of us; this is the world where reality is augmented with the power of data, accumulated knowledge, artificial intelligence, and the capabilities of technology. The Sabbath School may be considered as an example of spiritual augmented reality, where our real world is superimposed with the spiritual experience and the super natural that God is bringing into our lives. It is powerful and no technology will ever be capable to match that. However, through the way we do Sabbath School, we are augmenting either its relevance or irrelevance for those involved and therefore I believe that it is time for a general makeover.

The Study

The main purpose of the Sabbath School is education and study of Scripture. What I dislike most in a Sabbath School group is when the "teacher" assumes the role of "teaching". In the same time my best memories from my church life are from Sabbath School, because it was not about someone teaching, but about us all researching, brainstorming, discussing. I remember carrying a heavy

briefcase with big books: bible dictionary, concordance, commentaries, different Bible translations... to our Sabbath School meetings and how fun it was to dig deep into the study. Looking at the issues from different angles, challenging our understandings to make sure that they make sense, and enriching them with individual personal perspectives – this is what excited us and stimulated us to study during the week. If Sabbath School is limited to a Saturday morning encounter, without personal study, it's losing its heart.

One of the main challenges for Sabbath School today, the way I see it, is the study format. We learn differently today. Compare the excitement of looking at the world through HoloLens to what we currently have as study guides. They need to be able to compete for our limited time with lots of other distractions. We could always blame the "students" for not making time for the serious things, for not being serious enough to study, but this should not be our excuse. The spiritual journey is the most exciting adventure ever, it is life transforming, and the walk with God is never boring. It is our privilege and responsibility to create and maintain an environment to stimulate and nurture growth. We need to tap onto the technologies available and accommodate to the way we process and digest information.

The Fellowship

Sabbath School is the favorite church time for many, because this is the time when you are not just a spectator, but a participant and you can share your thoughts, questions, experience and you can listen to what your friends or other church members think. This is where church becomes more personal and relational. However, it could also be a very awkward time when there is nothing to say or share, or when someone takes over and drives his own views.

The reason why people can be passive or seem disengaged, is not always because they don't have anything to say, or because they are not interested. They may interact better and participate more through other means, like social media, trivia style games, or just when they are in different setting. It makes a difference when the conversation is built through the week, through the study, rather than just once a week in a formal setting. The Sabbath School should provide resources and means for facilitating such conversations.

The local Sabbath School leaders have a crucial role to play in building such discussions and engagement, but they need to see and understand the vision. They also need support and resources: applications to streamline the conversations; resources to enrich them; tools to track, motivate, evaluate; and creativity to make the experience engaging and to augment it. Such things can make a difference between wanting to skip the Sabbath School segment of the church service and not being able to wait for the next encounter.

Outreach

The post-modern person is not interested in what our religion teaches, he/she is interested in our personal experience and our story. Sabbath School is the best avenue where he can learn about us, about our values, and about our beliefs. However, it can't happen if it looks and smells like a religious school or religious exercise. If we can build the study and fellowship as discussed earlier, we will also reshape Sabbath School and open it for everyone around us. There is hunger for meaningful conversations, for deeper engagement, for spiritual motivation, and for people that you can trust and share with. Sabbath School

is a powerful outreach tool, but if it loses its relevance and feels outdated, it becomes just a tradition and religious practice that is not only unattractive, but cultivates the wrong fruits.

Technology

Technology has reshaped our lives and transformed our culture, but our mentality as church is slow to adapt. We have a powerful message, an important testimony, and the greatest relationship that exceeds the boundaries of our world, but we need the help of the Holy Spirit to help us speak and understand the language of our time.

It's not just about creating software and contemporary media, but about building a mentality for the new augmented reality. The church has people skilled in technology, with love and passion for it, but there is a huge gap between those that can help build technical tools, and those that strategize how we live, portray, and grow our spiritual experience. To build the right technology that can help us excel in new dimensions, we need to be building solutions for specific problems and engines that overcome current limitations. It's an exciting time to live in.

Infrastructure and Operations

The way the church operates and functions needs to adapt. We should not "pour new wine into old wineskins"[2] (*New International Version*, Matthew 9:17). There is a need for a new way of budgeting and identifying priorities. Building the right technology is not cheap. It requires time, agility, determination, and funds. The prism through which costs are evaluated though, is often distorted. It may seem too expensive to build certain app or another tool, but we fail to compare it to the amounts currently spent with their level of effectiveness. The current administrative structure in our organizations is built around the concept to provide the product, support, or service in house. We hire directors with support staff and assign them budgets for travel and few resources and ask them to go and serve. Instead, we need to hire visionaries that can be assigned budgets to build solutions through outsourcing. Solutions that can serve and empower employees, pastors, and volunteers. It's a shift, but it's not about us, it's about being builders in ministry, shaping a mentality, growing and developing with the opportunities of our time.

Relevance

I feel privileged to live in the present. Seeing and experiencing how God works in our world every day fills my heart and lifts me closer to Him. The ugly face of evil is everywhere, but God's touch makes a difference and there is nothing more powerful than sharing this experience. We are not reading fables or cold doctrines. What we have is not just for the poor, the uneducated, and the naïve. We are given access to a reality that our mind can't grasp, and we are obliged to do our best testifying about it and growing in understanding about it. It has to make sense. It has to be relevant.

The Sabbath School is not a segment of the church program. It's not a place or time. It's the church in study, fellowship, and mission. This is us conversing, digging deep in spiritual matters, learning more about each other, and growing together. The doors of a world different than the surrounding mere reality

are being opened for us. Will we let some traditions or fear of change to keep us prisoners of low dimensional restrictions?

Endnotes

1 Microsoft, "Microsoft HoloLens", 7 Feb. 2017, <https://www.microsoft.com/microsoft-hololens/en-us>

2 *New International Version*, Bible Gateway. Web. 7 Feb. 2017.

2 Exploring the Solutions

SABBATH SCHOOL: AN AVENUE FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Ronald Pickell, M. Div., D. Min

Decline in Sabbath School

There was a period in my teen years when Sabbath School served an important function in my spiritual and social development. It was the closest thing I experienced to youth church. I was raised in a small church where my family was the youth group from kindergarten to youth, with a thirteen-year spread between myself and my oldest brother. My poor mother taught each of my three brothers and I. Needless to say—my Sabbath School experience was completely transformed when we moved out of state and attended a church many times the size of the one I had grown up in with an actual youth Sabbath School class. In this new environment, we had a real Sabbath School program and youth focused bible study/discussion. I even looked forward to Sabbath School since there were other teens my own age.

All you have to do is show up for Sabbath School at any given Adventist church on any given Sabbath morning to see how times have changed. Sabbath School as well as general church attendance in the North American Adventist church with the exception of children's Sabbath School, is in decline. Some have suggested the reasons for this decline range from spiritual lethargy among members to the need for improved Sabbath School format and relevant bible study resources.

Exploring A New Paradigm

For some the decline in Sabbath School attendance is a negative spiritual trend that must be reversed if the Adventist church is going to maintain a strong emphasis of consistent bible study and spiritual growth. However, I want to offer a different perspective. What if the decline in attendance is an indication that Sabbath School as we have experienced it over the years has served its purpose and Bible study and spiritual development demand a whole new process? What if we stopped trying to save Sabbath School, and instead focused our efforts on discipling and mentoring our youth?

Process vs. Program

The Great Commission calls us to make disciples, but nowhere are we commanded that the discipleship process must involve Sabbath School. The pro's for keeping Sabbath School include practice and convenience. Sabbath School is an ingrained part of our Sabbath worship practice and once a program becomes a practice it's hard to give up. It is also a convenient time just before divine worship to discuss a bible study lesson plan together. However, routine and convenience are not strong enough reasons to hold on to a practice that has less than half of the church involved.

Pros and Cons of Sabbath School for Discipleship

The cons for keeping Sabbath School are many. Though some see Sabbath morning as the most convenient time for group Bible study and discussion—obviously, many others do not, since they are avoiding the Sabbath School experience altogether. The truth is, Bible study time just prior to divine service may not be as convenient a time as it once was. Thom S. Rainer in *Growing Healthy Churches Together* blog reminds us in the article, "Five Reasons Why The 11 O'clock Hour is Disappearing" that the most probable theory for the 11 o'clock worship hour was an agrarian society. "Farmers had multiple chores that had to be done in the morning. They would finish the chores and then go to church."[1] 11 o'clock was the best time for them to complete their chores. Sunday School developed as a great educational program for teaching youth. As Sunday School developed in America classes were scheduled after the divine service, during or before service, but eventually were most often held leading up to the divine service which seemed the best time for a rural society.[2] Indeed, the 9:30 a.m. Sabbath School was a convenient time back in the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist church. It may still work for those living in rural areas where chores come early in the morning. But, for most of us having a little more time to rest on Saturday morning makes a lot of sense in keeping with the Sabbath command after a long workweek.

The current Sabbath School schedule just before divine service may also be inconvenient for another reason. A one-hour discussion time is often not enough time to really connect with everyone in the group and have a good discussion. I have personally experienced many Sabbath School discussions that are just getting into a great rhythm only to be cut short to disburse and prepare for divine service. Our current Sabbath School model doesn't afford the necessary amount of time for a healthy discussion and intimate small group experience.

Remembering the Purpose of Sabbath School

Sabbath School is not independent from other important dimensions of church life. In considering saving Sabbath School we must ask what part of the overall mission of the church does it serve? Pastor Rick Warren has identified five main purposes of the church in "The Purpose Driven Church."[3] These include Evangelism, Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship and Service. Keeping these five areas in mind and developing strategies to fulfill each area will help a church grow organically and automatically. Regardless of the mission values, every congregation must wrestle with how the Sabbath School program helps to fulfill the mission of the church.

In the Church Manual of the Seventh-day Adventist church, the section on Sabbath School clearly delineates the purposes of this important ministry: "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. The General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department distributes the Sabbath School Bible study guide for all age levels, provides designs for Sabbath School programming within the

[1] http://thomrainer.com/2017/02/
five-reasons-1100-worship-service-disappearing/

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunday_school

[3] "The Purpose Driven Church": Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission by Rick Warren, 1995. Grand Rapids: Zondervan

context of the various world division cultures, provides resources and training systems for Sabbath School teachers, and promotes world mission Sabbath School offerings."[4]

Ellen White also talks about the purpose of the Sabbath School as follows: "The Sabbath school is an important branch of the missionary work, not only because it gives to young and old a knowledge of God's Word, but because it awakens in them a love for its sacred truths, and a desire to study them for themselves; **above all, it teaches them to regulate their lives by its holy teachings**." (CSW, pages 10–11, emphasis provided).

Sabbath School should help serve the dual purpose of fellowship and discipleship since members meet in smaller groups and are encouraged with daily bible study throughout the week for group discussion in Sabbath School. In his dissertation, "The Role, History, and Decline of the Sunday School" Darren Thomas writes that the Sunday School went through its own evolution becoming the most effective evangelistic tool of the church. From the early 1800's on, "The evangelical Sunday School became the primary outreach of the church."[5] I'm not sure that the history of the Seventh-day Adventist church would reveal the same about Sabbath School. However, small groups may be the most effective entry for non-Christians to connect with God and believers. Attending a traditional church service will probably not be the first step in coming to faith in Christ.

Sabbath School then, should serve the purpose of fellowship, discipleship and even evangelism. However, as mentioned already, our current Sabbath School experience struggles to provide this. Sabbath School classes are open groups with different members attending each week, which discourages deeper fellowship, and as has already been pointed out—the time factor precludes any real Bible study discussion. It is also, for most churches, not the first church experience we would invite our friends—who are making their first steps toward God—to.

Discipleship at LIFE Adventist Church of Berkeley

Our answer to this dilemma at LIFE Adventist Church of Berkeley—where I pastor a predominately college and young adult congregation—is to youthenize Sabbath School. By youthenize I mean we are putting our focus on fellowship, discipleship and evangelism instead of the Sabbath School per se. By youthenize, I also mean that we are making it about our students, members and new believers instead of the program. We are focusing more on the process of our own spiritual development and discipleship than the Sabbath School program. Sabbath School is all about the areas mentioned above: fellowship, discipleship and outreach. Sabbath School is no longer about practice and convenience. Our focus is on group time, a deeper experience in God's Word and a place we can invite our non-churched friends to.

Here's what it looks like: We have moved to a small group approach to fellowship and discipleship in place of the traditional Sabbath School format. We have four groups operating in our church. The main group is our college group,

[4] "The Church Manual of the Seventh-day Adventist Church": Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

[5] https://eridan.websrvcs.com/clientimages/36689/historyofthesunday-school.pdf

which meets on Friday evenings. We begin with a meal together prepared by our students who take their turn in preparation. Following the meal, we move to another room for group Bible study. This semester we have been reading and discussing the parables of Jesus. Students stay until 9:30 p.m. to sometimes 10 or 11 p.m. discussing and hanging out together. This provides the kind of time it takes to build the deeper fellowship and a more rigorous discussion of the text. Students also feel comfortable inviting their non-churched friends.

We still have a Sabbath School gathering on Saturday's at the church. It is open ended and everyone is invited. However, fewer attend this since most have already participated in a small group Bible study experience sometime during the week. We have three Sabbath School options on Saturday morning. We have a children's Sabbath School for the kindergarten group, a traditional study of the prepared Sabbath School lesson and a non-traditional study that reads and discusses a passage of Scripture parallel with the sermon in the divine service. The non-traditional study is developed by the speaker and is intended to open people up to the topic being presented in the sermon. We have found this to be a great way to help people prepare for the sermon and we are not so concerned about getting through the lesson since the speaker will also be covering the topic in the sermon. The discussion is quite informal. We also provide hot drinks and bagels as part of the Sabbath School experience.

The Journey Bible Study Series

In fulfillment of the discipleship process, we also conduct a life group Bible study experience using the Journey bible study series. Journey is great for seekers and new believers. Currently it is a four-part Bible study series that introduces participants to the mission and message of Jesus in series one—*Invitation*. Series two—*Greater Things* covers discipleship according to Matthew and takes participants through the gospel of Matthew. Series three covers some of the main teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church in an overview of Bible truths through *Cherishing God*. The final Journey series is from the book of Acts—*Acts on Campus* and emphasizes sharing our faith in whatever context we find ourselves. Journey is our discipleship process for the church and especially our students.

Let's Youthenize Sabbath School

Sabbath School has been a wonderful program that has served the church well for many, many years especially by enhancing fellowship, bible study and evangelism. However, Sabbath School is not an end in itself. When a program is no longer serving its purpose, we need to get back to the overall purpose of the church and ask how we are creating space for real fellowship and study of the Word. Discipleship is a necessary component for the spiritual growth of each member and the entire church family. Youth also need to be growing in their knowledge of God and in their relationships with one another. I would invite you to join me in youthenizing Sabbath School by refocusing our efforts on the spiritual fellowship and discipleship of each member. In essence, let us focus not on saving a program but on fulfilling our God given purposes. If in some churches, the Sabbath School program is the best vehicle to accomplish discipleship, fellowship and evangelism, then those churches should of course maintain and seek how to improve Sabbath School. But if for other churches, Sabbath School as a program needs to cease in order to make discipleship, fellowship and evangelism happen, then that should be the focus. May God help us all focus on and work towards His purposes.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY: A VITAL INGREDIENT FOR A HEALTHY SABBATH SCHOOL

Joseph Kidder

"And let us consider *one another* in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another,* and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24, 25).

One of the key components of a healthy Sabbath School, is that of fellowship; the Church Manual clearly indicates so. However, this key ingredient is often reduced to a short time of prayer requests shared and/or members taking turns to pronounce short sentences describing how the week went. In the case of youth Sabbath School, some churches—depending on the creativity of the teacher—add an ice breaker here and there; but in most cases, this is typically done within the framework of a program, with relatively limited time and with a venue and a set up not always conducive to the experience of deeper biblical fellowship.

This article explores how Sabbath School should function within the context of the most important and fundamental biblical concept of Christian community, and provides practical suggestions on how to live it out in the day-to-day and week-to-week life of the church.

Community: A Gift From God

Community is one of God's greatest gifts. It is the gift of a rich and challenging life together. Christian community is simply sharing a common life in Christ. It moves us beyond the self-interested isolation of private lives and the superficial social contacts that often passes for "Christian fellowship." The biblical ideal of community challenges us instead to commit ourselves to experience life together and to encourage each other to grow as one in God. We have a perfect example of this kind of fellowship in the book of Acts:

> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–47).

The church described in this text was a praying and studying church, a worshiping and praising church, a giving and ministering church, a place where most people would want to belong and celebrate unity, and grow in maturity towards Christ-likeness.

We know this maturity takes time as well as the support of our sisters and brothers in Christ. It is a process that is revealed in the "one-another" language of the New Testament: love one another, forgive one other, teach and correct one other, encourage one other, pray for each other, serve one another, and submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. This list reminds us that we need the same environment that the early church had, which led to their growth and maturity in Christ, so that we can do the same.

The only prayer that Jesus taught us to pray begins, "*Our* Father," not "My Father." Jesus calls us into a living, active, worshiping community that regularly meets together. We partake in communion together; we sing together, pray together, confess together, grieve, heal and rejoice together. God gives us brothers and sisters in the faith; He gives us small groups and community; He gives us mature Christians to emulate and He gives us those far from the heart of God so that we can share our faith with them.

The church embodies a specific, personal way of life together in Christ. It strengthens us to live the life to which we are called. It also conveys God's life and power to the world at large. In essence, Christianity is not a solo endeavor. We believe that personal, deepening, supportive, faith-building relationships with God are best developed in a community of other believers.

Community: A Way to See Christ in Others

One of the most important ways the community helps us is by embodying Christ's continuing presence on earth. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35). Paul makes it clear that when we imitate his life we are also imitating Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:1). He also wrote:

> "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19–22)

When my brothers and sisters love and accept me as part of the household of God, I feel Christ's love, too. When my brothers and sisters forgive me, I know that God forgives me, too. When they pray for my brokenness, I know that they are sharing in the healing work of Jesus. When we feel the crush of hostility and of our own failures, the members of our Christian community surround us with compassion and encouragement. They lighten our loads, strengthen us, and give us the courage to keep on going. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

Community: A Source of Accountability and Guidance

Christ's community is also a place where we teach each other and hold ourselves accountable to one other. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." (Galatians 6:1. See also Colossians 3:16.) When I submit to the guidance of my brothers and sisters, it forces me to grow and to be accountable. When I hear what God is teaching others, it teaches me, too.

Such accountability does not need to have overtones of checking up or scolding. Instead, it works to encourage us and to help us in our growth and commitments. For example, we may ask for guidance about how to handle a difficult relationship or how to have a meaningful family worship. The community gives us a place to air our struggles, successes, and failures, and guides us more fully in the ways of Christ. We are urged to do this in the love of Christ "and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

Community: Where Prayer and Worship Takes Place

The community also helps us to grow, as it becomes a place for prayer and worship. We are called to live a life of prayer, worship, and praise. (Acts 2:42–47; see also Acts 4:32). There seems to be a tendency in many Christians today, to be spectators instead of being actively involved. However, being spectators is simply not enough to have a vibrant Christian life. We need to pray for other people and have other people pray for us personally. In James' words: "Pray for one another, that you may be healed." (James 5:16, see also Ephesians 6:18).

Many Sabbath School members are never really prayed for, beyond a brief mention in a quick list of prayer requests. I once privately offered a simple prayer of blessing for a friend who had been in public ministry for many years. I was overwhelmed when he said to me afterwards, "No one has ever prayed for me like that before."

Similarly, as we learn the ways of worship in the small community, we not only deepen our own spiritual lives, but also enrich our own experience of public worship. Community in the context of Sabbath School is at its best when it becomes a workshop, teaching us more about prayer and worship.

Community: A Place to Serve

The community is also where we learn to strip away our self-interest in order to serve others. It is here that we learn to share what God has given us, whether it be material goods or spiritual gifts. It is also here that we learn to be served, even though we are sometimes prideful and reluctant like Peter who balked at Jesus for asking to wash his feet (John 13:2-10). Sometimes we are the washers and sometimes the washees, but in many ordinary ways we can learn what submission and service mean. "Serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13) Or, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." (Romans 12:10)

One community I know gave time and money so a mother worn down by the demands of her young children could take a spiritual retreat. Others have found more practical ways to help one another such as swapping mowers, ladders, and childcare. I have even seen people abandon a special outing to fix a friend's leaky basement. Community means watching over one another for good, knowing that as we serve, all of us are growing stronger in Christ. I love the words of Paul to the Corinthians "Have equal concern for each other." (I Corinthians 12:25) The Bible is full of statements urging us to care, love and pray for one another. A good example of a Sabbath School that has made service a core value is the "Something Else" (ministry driven) Sabbath School class lead by Chris and Yolanda Blake. Since they started the class, over the years, they have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to help people in need in their community.

Community: A Witness to the World

Christian communities, by their character and action, witness to the power and presence of God in the world. They are models of what God wants for humankind. Jesus' disciples are to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16), shining like bright stars (Philippians 2:15), reflecting the brightness and the glory of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). The unity and mutual love that distinguish Jesus' disciples will demonstrate that Jesus was, in fact, sent by the Father to be the Savior of the world (John 17:23).

Christian communities everywhere can radiate the good news of God's loving intentions for all creation. People from the outside will look at these clusters of Christians and see them serving and honoring one another. They will see love and acceptance, compassion and kindness. They will see the stark contrast of these communities compared with the world around them, and this is a very compelling witness. This kind of love led many to accept Jesus and become part of that love filled community (Acts 2:42).

These communities not only demonstrate God's love; they also mediate it and carry "the ministry of reconciliation" to those around them (2 Corinthians 5:18). This brings God's compassion and healing power into a broken world. They do this by being intentionally focused on spreading the good news of the hope and grace of Jesus Christ. Each community with its particular mission is a rescue unit establishing a beachhead for God's peaceable kingdom in a hostile world. From those outposts, God's love flows freely.

Witnessing and mission is (should be) at the heart of the Sabbath School ministry. There are many ways in which community can be built and deepened through service to the community. In fact, this may be one of the most critical aspects in being effective with youth and young adults: involving them in relevant, ongoing, outreach activities in and for the surrounding community.

A Call to Community

God never intended that we should go through life alone. We simply cannot experience fully the power and delight of life with God without also being drawn into life together with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Without experiencing such life together, we will not discover how wonderful the good news about Jesus really is. The reward of living in community is to enter into life as God intended it to be lived.

Practical Ideas to Enhance Community

Genuine fellowship helps us move from just sharing small talks and food to being a safe community where we can be transparent with one another. Here are some simple but effective steps a small group or Sabbath school in your church can take to build and encourage this kind of genuine community:

- **Offer new people a history of the group.** Have everyone—including the first-timers—share a little bit about their family and a few of the activities they enjoy doing in their free time. This will bring the group closer together and help them minister to each other.

- **Provide ice-breakers.** Sometimes the silliest questions or activities are best. These help people get to know one another in a safe way.

- **Celebrate milestones.** Help foster community by celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and other special events in people's lives. This helps the group members feel valuable and appreciated.

- **Celebrate victories.** In addition to job promotions and other achievements, make sure you celebrate spiritual victories and answers to prayer.

- **Plan a retreat together.** Arrange for a weekend when the members of the group can be together. The time spent in fellowship on an overnighter is equivalent to many weeks of group meetings. I took my church on two retreats every year, one in the summer, and one in the winter. The testimonies I heard was that this was some of the best times they spent as a community. It build strong relationships and bonded the church.

- **Host a "Fun Night."** Instead of the usual study time, surprise the group with a night full of games and fun. Such a change of pace is both healthy and refreshing for the group.

- **Institute a hot seat.** Sit a person in the center of the circle and have everyone shower him or her with heartfelt affirmation. Statements can begin with, "You're important to our group. We love how you have made a difference in our lives." Everyone needs this kind of affirmation from time to time. Then have the group's members pray over that person. I instituted this when I was a pastor at my board and committee meetings. Before we instituted this practice, people hated to come to board meetings, but then afterward, when they saw that we were serious about loving each other and praying for each other, people started to look forward to being at the meetings.

- **Tell stories.** Plan a brief activity that encourages face-to-face interaction between members. This could be as simple as letting people share a story from the heart, such as when they accepted Jesus, got engaged, or got married. It could also be a time of sharing a personal story that is relevant to the study. When people share about their personal stories, community deepens.

- **Pick up the phone.** Follow-up calls strengthen community. When people are absent from the group, call to check on them. If a prayer need has been brought up, follow up to let them know you are praying. Those phone calls can go a long way toward affirming community. Be sure to also call or send a card to people who attended your group for the first time.

- **Print a directory.** A group roster is a simple but important tool for building fellowship and fostering community. Make it easy for people to connect outside of group time by sharing e-mail addresses and phone numbers.

- **Keep a scrapbook.** It's very cool to be able to turn the pages of the book and retrace the journey the group has traveled on together.

- **Take on a cause.** This can be a ministry project or mission trip that the group can do together or sponsor someone to do it.

- **Make sure that the essentials are taken care of.** The study of God's Word, prayer, worship, mission or Ministry togethersocial activities at least once a month (Acts 2:42–47).

When genuine Christian fellowship offers a safe environment for knowing and being known, true community will result. God wired us to love and be loved and accepted. This experience moves us beyond merely doing activities to being bonded together as brothers and sisters in Christ. We need each other and we are stronger together than we are individually.

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[1] All Bible quotations are from the New King James Bible unless otherwise they are specified.

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iBELIEVE BIBLE: A WITNESSING RESOURCE FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Adam Fenner, PhD

The foundational impetus behind the North American Division's iBelieve Bible Study is to witness to young people *not where we want them to be*, which of course, is in church and Sabbath School, *but where they are*, which is in the digital realm. The iBelieve Bible Study is an online curriculum designed to strengthen the faith of youth and young adults in and outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church. iBelieve Bible is made up of four main components that are released incrementally throughout the week including: short blog posts, short videos, social media interaction, and online Bible studies.

iBelieve Bible is only partially an event and community occasion like traditional Sabbath school and Bible studies traditionally are. Instead, iBelieve Bible is a regular interjection of Biblical themes and topics into the daily lives of people that culminates on Friday afternoons leading up to and in preparation for the Sabbath. Utilizing social media iBelieve Bible provides a sequentially strategic stream of information, resources, and questions that builds on itself throughout the week. It is the hope of the iBelieve Bible staff this inclusion of Biblical topics and themes will not be distinct from the lives of young people, but rather a integral part of what they consume and interact with in their daily living, much of which is spent online.

21st Century Challenges

Ministering would be wonderfully straightforward if all young people in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, between the ages of 18 and 35, regularly attended church and Sabbath school. The unfortunate reality for many Adventist young people is that they do not attend church and Sabbath school on a consistent basis.[1] The best data available suggests that approximately 72 percent of Adventists under 30 years of age participate in either Sabbath School or a small group Bible study. In our modern era, when we talk about Sabbath school for Seventh-day Adventist youth and young adults, we are really talking about Sabbath school for only 72 percent of them, more than one fourth of our young people are "unchurched" or "under-churched."

Furthermore, the idea of a unified or systemic approach to young adult Sabbath school curriculum is currently not a reality. In the North American Division, no official Sabbath school curriculum has existed for decades for this demographic. In sum, too many Adventists young people are unsurprisingly foregoing the unplanned and under-resourced Sabbath school experience. It's difficult to find verifiable/corresponding estimates of how many young people leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but authorities on the subject indicate only 3 out of 10 remain in the Church when they enter adulthood.[2] Undoubtedly, there are a multitude of reasons why this retention rate is painfully low, but certainly, some of the explanation lies in the fact that there is no official and

highly relevant Sabbath school curriculum in the North American Division. The evidence suggests that the curricula that do exist, regardless of how relevant and impacting they potentially could be, are not reaching the intended audience.

In the twenty-first century's hectically fast-paced society, the average person in the United States spends only 2–17 minutes a day doing some kind of religious or spiritual "activity". When this is contrasted alongside the fact Americans are spending 4½ to 6 hours pursuing "leisure activities," there's obviously a disconnect.[3] Additionally, knowing that youth and young adults spend on average 9 hours a day engrossed in some kind of digital entertainment, it leads one to the conclusion religion has only a marginalized presence in the digital realm.[4] With a rather simple and straightforward logic, it could be concluded that if young people are not attending religious services in large numbers with any regularity, but instead are spending much of their time consuming digital media, ministering to them means ministering to them online.

Benefits of iBelieve Bible

iBelieve Bible takes the traditional learning objectives and faith strengthening principles found in Bible study curricula and delivers it throughout the week via social media. Following the NAD Education Bible Standards for grades 9–12, iBelieve Bible is founded in Biblical principles and the 28 Fundamental beliefs. Topics and themes shared each week via social media are designed to show the relevance of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Bible, and Jesus Christ in the lives of those who might be questioning their faith or have no faith at all. Examples of topics include: immigration, environmentalism, gender equality, fornication, salvation, drugs, and hypocrisy.

Some present-day critics may claim the Bible and its teachings only have relevance in agricultural or pre-industrial societies,[5] but this simply isn't the case. Although the issues modern youth deal with today obviously take different forms than they did 2,000 years ago, the Bible is still, beyond question or debate, relevant and useful to our modern lives. I don't think anyone reading this would disagree with this notion, but the packaging and delivery of how Biblical truths are approached does need to be carefully considered for modern audiences.[6]

iBelieve Bible content on topics like fornication and narcotics is presented honestly and without being overly "sanitized." Rather than avoiding difficult issues and questions simply because they may be offensive or viewed as potentially "dangerous," iBelieve Bible instead approaches them as a prospective learning moments or spiritually engaging opportunities. To put it bluntly, instead of coddling our audience and viewing questioning by youth and young adults as troublesome or dangerous, we see it as an opportunity. Young people are not blind to reality. They know drinking alcohol can be quite enjoyable, that smoking marijuana can be fun and has scientifically proven medical applications, and that the human body is designed for sex. The iBelieve Bible staff is firmly committed to the notion the all too commonplace aversion by church leaders to eschew difficult issues and questions has led many young people astray. Young people ask questions, it's what they do. As a community of believers, we can either decide to answer their difficult questions as best and imperfectly as we can, or as is sometimes the case, we can ignore and even chastise them for asking them in the first place.

The iBelieve Bible staff is honored and happy to help those who seek answers find satisfaction in a non-judgmental Adventist environment. From time to time, iBelieve Bible content is criticized for "leading people astray," "encouraging dangerous questions," and "not being Adventist." However, studies have shown "positive interaction" for Adventist young people often means not feeling judged by their faith community and being accepted for who they are. Furthermore, young people in our Church are often "very comfortable with ambiguity and nuance," even when older generations are not.[7] iBelieve Bible tries to create an online experience free of judgment about personal religious beliefs and life journeys, and nurtures an environment that lends itself to exploring important spiritual issues without overtly imposing all the answers. This means intentionally inviting spiritual questions and debate, and also cultivating relationships in the online arena.[8]

iBelieve Bible entertains thousands of social media interactions weekly, and although many of these posts are sometimes somewhat superfluous to our faith strengthening efforts, many are deeply meaningful exchanges with Adventists and non-Adventists. For example, Maxwell Aka, iBelieve Bible's Creative Manager, was able to minister to a young man dying of cancer. The terminally ill young man reached out to Aka on Facebook and shared his challenges of increasing isolation from friends and family, severe financial struggles, and the stresses of dying. Aka was able to minister to the young man by sharing prayers and scriptures with him before he died. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was there for this young man when, as he indicated, his family and friends were not. In my opinion, it would have been more beneficial for Aka to be physically by this terminally ill young man's side, but serving others takes many forms and in this instance ministry took the form of social media interaction.

Another meaningful exchange took place with Jonny Moor, iBelieve Bible's Social Media Pastor. Moor ministered to a young man willing to publicly identify himself as an atheist in the midst of Christians reinforcing their faith on a Facebook thread. Not only did Moor share the Gospel with this young atheist, but he was able to affirm him as an individual that was cared for and was welcomed to share his voice loud and clear amongst Christians.

The iBelieve Bible staff is committed to the idea of "member care." Our "members" are those that interact with the materials we provide on social media, and because social media is not only about delivering content but also engaging in a conversation, we are able to build relationships. The importance of the idea of "member care" should not be underestimated. For hundreds of thousands of those that interact with iBelieve Bible content, it could be their only encounter with Seventh-day Adventists. This could possibly be the Church's only chance to engage with a particular person, making the experience a positive one could mean the difference between leading someone to the Church and leading them astray. In sum, we encourage "members" to engage with our online community by sharing their thoughts and beliefs, because we want them to have a positive experience with our Church and our beliefs.

iBelieve Bible content is designed for young people and built by young people. Because iBelieve utilizes the talents and expertise of youth at all levels of production and delivery, the staff feel the product has a much higher chance of being relevant to its intended audience. Gone are the days when generations could easily relate to one another because of a common or shared human experience. The world and its various cultures are evolving at a mindboggling

pace that makes generational divides more acute and more prevalent.[9] This is not to say that a 50-year old cannot effectively minister to a 20-year-old, but rather that it is more difficult than in times past. Language, extracurricular interests, technical abilities, entertainment forms, and historical events all make it harder for generations to find common ground on which to build a relationship where intergenerational witnessing and mentorship can occur.

Even the forms of communication between generations are distinctive; with Generation Z preferring to communicate through hand held devices and apps, Generation Y (Millennials) text messaging and social media, Generation X email and text messaging, and Babyboomers favoring the telephone.[10] Witnessing online, to a significant extent, necessitates utilizing the efforts and talents of digital natives from your intended audience, because they understand the nuances of the culture and digital environment they are already operating (*living*) in.

Empowering youth to do youth ministry has two notable outcomes for the iBelieve Bible Study. First, it gets us closer to ensuring that our content is delivered using the jargon, tone, voice, culture, philosophy, and aesthetic expectations and norms of twenty-first-century young people in the North American Division. Second, it helps us prepare another generation of leaders for service to our Lord. Too often we are guilty of "including" youth and young adults in ministry by relegating them to song service and potluck cleanup.[11] Asking young people their opinions in focus groups and studies, and then going out and building content based on their responses isn't enough. In today's world young people understand and navigate technology in ways older generations will never understand. If we fail to include them in the leadership of technology based ministerial initiatives, we will not only run the risk of producing something that misses the mark, but also of losing the leaders of today, not tomorrow. The iBelieve project is built upon content created by young adults for young adults. So it stands to reason that young adults would know best how they can be reached.

The social media approach to making iBelieve Bible content available and interactive anywhere and anytime helps eliminate the dichotomy of secular vs. spiritual space and time. Whether a person is on an airplane, bus, in class, or at home, they can interact with iBelieve Bible content and fellow users (believers and non-believers). To increase utility, maximize investment, and support numerous demographics within and outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church, iBelieve Bible materials are also designed for use in a variety of settings and applications beyond the online environment. iBelieve Bible content can be used in regular social media posts of the Church and its followers, Adventist schools, home school devotions, family worship, personal worship, vespers, public high school evangelism, and of course, youth and young adult Sabbath school. Sabbath school has traditionally been an event a person had to physically be present for, iBelieve Bible attempts to brings the same kinds of discussions and content a person would typically interact with in Sabbath school, and brings it to them wherever they might be. We also have begun using Facebook Live sessions as a way to engage our audience in the more typical "event" approach often favored by religious communities. The Facebook Live approach takes on a conversational tone with questions being asked by the audience and answered by our pastoral team. Although additional experience and research is needed in this area, this online real-time discussion format may prove another worthwhile approach to Sabbath School.

In the twenty-first century, people want to watch videos. Studies show that consumers of digital content are 4 times more likely to "watch a video about a product than read about it." An astounding 25% of digital consumers "lose interest" in companies that don't include video in their marketing. And, approximately 80% of people say videos about "a product or service...is important."[12] Reading text in our fast-paced and aesthetically demanding world is simply losing its appeal for many audiences. Because of this changing reality, iBelieve Bible staff attempts to produce at least one to two high quality videos per week. We also rework videos to be shorter and platform appropriate. For example, on Twitter, shorter videos are marketed rather than longer ones, because people using Twitter interact with content differently than they do another platform like Facebook.

In early September 2016, the iBelieve Bible Study was launched, and since that time the initiative has seen significant compounding success. In February of 2017, over 1,004,441 people were reached on Facebook with over 165,000 people viewing videos. With help from Jamie Schneider, the North American Division's Digital Strategies Project Manager, we utilize Facebook's ads algorithm combined with a mix of sharable content that has allowed us to grow rapidly in a short amount of time while reaching our target demographic—90 percent of the people reached on Facebook are under 35 years old. The Facebook page has exploded from 0 page likes to over 14,300 in a less than six months.[13] iBelieve Bible reaches people both in and outside the Church, and has a regular domestic and international audience numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

Closing Remarks

iBelieve Bible is constantly exploring what meets the needs of young people in the North American Division. The staff is committed to failing on some smaller projects in order to find a larger rhythm of success. This requires an adaptability in our style and production that can vary from week to week, but being able to respond in a spiritually meaning fashion to everyday events and issues means being flexible. A willingness to change and adapt is the nature of the online and especially social media worlds. Not being responsive means not being relevant. The old adage of "slow and steady" doesn't apply well in the digital realm. It is our hope and prayer the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America develops and adopts a Sabbath School curriculum for youth and young adults that can respond to their needs quickly and with efficacy. iBelieve Bible has demonstrated a market exists for spiritual topics online, and perhaps with more study and careful planning the Church can develop an official Sabbath School curriculum, informed by iBelieve Bible's findings, that meets the needs of twenty-first century audiences.

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SABBATH SCHOOL: REDISCOVERING THE "LIFE BLOOD" OF THE CHURCH

Timothy Simon

General Overview

Statistics from just about every denomination suggest that church growth is either at a standstill or declining. Few denominations are experiencing what might be termed as measurable and sustainable growth. I believe the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School is the key to attracting and retaining more members, and in particular, teens and young adults. In this article, I will discuss two Sabbath School formats that have been extremely successful. The first format was incorporated at the College View Church in 1990 when I served as Youth Pastor. The second format is an adult Sabbath School called "Something Else" that has been in existence at the same church for over 18 years. Both formats could serve as a "springboard" to help local SDA churches attract and retain more individuals, who in turn, will be committed to grow spiritually and witness in their communities.

The Current State of Affairs

Most of us would agree that Sabbath School attendance and participation has fallen off in recent years. Adventists are not alone; many denominations across the United States struggle to attract and retain individuals to the "Study Hour". For example, statistics that confirm this can be found in books such as Calvin Miller's "The Vanishing Evangelical," Frank Newport's "God is Alive and Well," and Thom and Sam Rainer's "Essential Church?—Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts."

An Ideal to Pursue

Sabbath School should offer individuals, particularly youth, opportunities to socialize, pray, study,[1] ask questions, participate and be heard. Dr. Don Clifton, a life-long educator and former CEO of the Gallup Organization, told me that "individuals do not learn until they hear the sound of their own voices." I believe the key to attracting and retaining individuals to Sabbath School is the creation of a dynamic environment where individuals look forward to participating and being heard each and every week. Traditional SDA worship services limit the involvement of each person.

It is the Sabbath School where individuals can best learn and grow spiritually. Frank Newport, Gallup Poll Editor-in-Chief, states, "Growth will come to branded churches to the extent that they emulate non-denominational approaches and highlight community, togetherness, and social fabric ties."[1] In this position

[1] Newport, Frank. *"God is Alive and Well."* New York: Gallup Press, 2006. 243. Print.

paper I will discuss two different Sabbath School formats I have experienced personally, both of which highlight the very same "ties" Newport speaks of. Seventh-day Adventists churches can experience growth and spiritual engagement if they are willing to spend more time "retooling" their Sabbath School formats.

College View Youth Sabbath School

I became the Youth Pastor of the College View Church (Lincoln, NE) in 1990. Immediately our team of volunteers set out to change the Sabbath School format. In this large SDA church, the class was averaging approximately 20 students per week, and many students either did not come or visited with each other throughout the church services. Offering averaged about $8 per week. There was little interest in the denominationally sponsored lesson study. Students were not involved in any community service projects except those sponsored by the local day academy.

Rather than blame the young people for not being spiritually engaged, our team felt it was our job to offer alternatives and opportunities. We believed our youth would respond if given a reason to attend Sabbath School. The new format consisted of five segments or ministries that included food, social time and music, prayer, offerings for various community projects, and lesson studies that included current events.

Each week a parent or volunteer was assigned to donate and prepare brunch for the youth. Our thinking was not just to place donuts or juice on a table with paper plates. We used linen tablecloths, glassware, and provided a motif each week. Every Sabbath the brunch looked like it came from a nice restaurant or hotel. Students responded by not only eating brunch each week, but acting like they were in a nice restaurant or hotel. We simply did not have food fights and spills, though the critics warned us this would happen. We played Christian music during this time and students enjoyed the relaxing atmosphere.

Our next ministry involved introductions, candy bar or gift card giveaways for birthdays or special events, and more. We then launched into prayer time and tried not to rush this time. It took a while, but eventually students were raising their hands and asking the group to pray for a friend, or neighbor, or even someone in the news. Prayer time helped all of us realize that Christianity is more than just thinking and praying about your own problems.

Students also began to appreciate the power and blessing that comes from financial giving. We incorporated community fundraising projects to get the group thinking about sustained giving each week. Our first project was the "Sneaker Fund" fund, which was used to buy shoes for children throughout Lincoln. We used money that was given each week to purchase sneakers and then displayed them in Sabbath School. The thinking was that individuals are 70% emotional and 30% rational. When students saw the number of sneakers displayed in the room and growing each week, giving increased. Over a period of about 6 months and with the help of local retailers who gave us a discount, the Sabbath School purchased 300 pairs of sneakers for needy children and teens.

Another project was called the "Insight Out Challenge." Chris Blake, then editor of "Insight" magazine" had a real burden to publish a magazine for youth who did not know Jesus. Chris wanted Adventist young people to sponsor

subscriptions to "Insight Out" and send it to their friends. Chris proposed that any youth group that sponsored 50 subscriptions would have their picture placed on the cover of "Insight." The College View Church Youth Sabbath School raised $448.50 in less than a month and appeared on the cover of "Insight" on February 1, 1992. Chris told me this particular group was the only one to take up the "Insight Out Challenge." These are only two examples of our projects. From 1990–1992 the average weekly offering went from approximately $8 to $60 per week.

For the lesson study, we chose a different topic each week and used the time in Sabbath School to study it. Sometimes topics carried into the next Sabbath. Topics included current events and how they affect Christians. We also scheduled interesting speakers that included an Adventist member of the church who was 21 and involved in the Gulf Conflict at the time, an athlete from the University of Nebraska, and various musicians and artists. In the two years I helped lead this program our attendance went from approximately 25 to about 55.

There were things our team would have done different, including getting the students more directly involved in some aspects of the overall program. But in the two years I was part of this Sabbath School, we reported measurable growth in attendance, bringing non-Adventist friends to class, offerings, and community service. Twenty years after I left this position, I took on a new role with the Gallup Organization. During my thirteen years at Gallup I did some work in the Faith Practice Division. I learned that "fully engaged" church members exhibit a number of traits that can be measured, including inviting others to church, serving their church and community, and increased giving.[2] I did not know this in 1992, but we were measuring the results of what Gallup terms "spiritual engagement" in our CVC young people. The key ingredient to spiritual engagement is to help the students feel they are part of a "community" and create an atmosphere of "togetherness," just as the research indicates.

"Something Else" Sabbath School

In 1995 Chris and Yolanda Blake began an adult Sabbath School class at the College View Church in Lincoln, Nebraska called "Something Else Sabbath School." This class consists of five ministries that include prayer, social time, money ministry, time ministry, and a lesson study. Chris asked me to be part of his team and I gladly accepted since this new kind of Sabbath School was just what I was looking for after leaving my work as a Youth Pastor in 1992.

Twenty-three years later our class continues to thrive. I was the original leader of the Money Ministry team. We always take up offerings for Sabbath School and Missions, but also include an offering appeal for various projects. Our first project in January 1995 was to raise $350 for a local center for abused women. The adults seemed as excited as the teens in my Youth Sabbath School class to give money for these projects. Our next project was to help a student with clothing needs and the class raised $440. Since 1995 the members and guests continue to give to Sabbath School and Missions, but have also raised over $300,000 in funds for local and world-wide projects.

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[2] Winseman, Albert L. *Growing an Engaged Church* New York: Gallup Press, 2006. 39–41. Print.

I love the projects that we do in this Sabbath School. At the same time, there are many who give their time and energy to Prayer Ministry or Time Ministry or other important parts of the class. The key is that we learn and grow spiritually by getting involved in the class and work together as a "community" of believers. Sabbath School is more than a class; it is part of who we are spiritually. Many individuals have commented that they look forward to Something Else Sabbath School, especially after a busy and hectic week.

Though I have been a member of "Something Else" for many years, I recently experienced what Brian McLaren speaks of in "A New Kind of Christianity." He wrote: "the Kingdom of God is not a distant reality to wait for someday, the kingdom is at hand, within reach, near, here, now."[3] For a number of years I was on the road as a teacher and consultant. I averaged about 270 days on the road and was often tied up in airports late on Friday evening, and stranded many times until the next day. In addition, I was dealing with a number of family issues that I had to take care of on the weekends. I either missed Sabbath School because I could not get home or had to deal with issues at home.

Though I never left the SDA Church or the basic tenets of my belief, I was for a time AWOL in terms of church attendance. Over time I decided to switch jobs and get off the road so I could stay home more often. I also had two bad hips for over 20 years and needed hip surgery. While in the hospital for the second operation, some dear friends from Something Else Sabbath School visited me one Saturday night. It had been a long time since I had contact with them and I was pretty embarrassed. They treated me as if we just spoken the day before. Kathy brought a lemon pie and said, "We miss you". For the next two weeks different members of the class: Bob, Sarah, Vicki, Ron, Jim, Terri, Lil, Derald, Shirley and Sherri made sure I was fed and taken care of. I began to think how much I missed the camaraderie and community of this Sabbath School. It was not the Second Coming or the Sabbath that helped to bring me back into the fold, nor was it a pastoral visit or 3ABN. Like McLaren, I began to realize that the members of this Sabbath School believe the Gospel is "here and now", and that took the form of lemon pies and potatoes casseroles, along with phone calls and visits to my house while I was recovering. Today I am so thankful a group of church members who belonged to the Time Ministry Team were just as excited about their work as I was on the Money Ministry Team.

Conclusion

Sabbath School has always been the "life blood" of the SDA Church. Sabbath School offers members and guests opportunities to actively participate and be heard, and this is crucial to spiritual growth and retention. Declining participation in Sabbath School does not mean it has to be a thing of the past. Local churches must offer Sabbath Schools that emphasize community and togetherness. Though College View Church is a large church, the basic principles I spoke of regarding the two Sabbath School formats can be incorporated or "tweaked" to any type or size church. If local members are committed to change, any Sabbath School can develop engaged youth and young adults to carry the Message of Jesus to their communities and throughout the world.

[3] McLaren, Brian D. "*A New Kind of Christianity.*" New York: HarperCollins, 2010. 140. Print.

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SABBATH SCHOOL: A PLACE FOR HEALING

Deborah Silva

Healing began the first day I stepped into the Sabbath School class of Kretchmar Hall in the fall of 1992. The small auditorium lecture hall was filled with a mixture of people intently focused on the class facilitator standing in front of the blackboard. Discussion was lively and varied. I had arrived on the campus of Walla Walla College/University (WWU) as a 34 year-old mother of three to obtain an education. As a Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) of nearly nine years, no upbringing in Christianity, and carrying the bitterness of hurt experienced by the "church," and wondering if I even wanted to remain a SDA, I was in need of healing. Thus, the seeds were sown and ultimately grew into a research program in group communication within the local SDA church. What follows is a synopsis of the research process, findings, and potential application for youth in the church.

Organizational Identification

Scholarship over the past few decades has focused on the relationship between individuals and organizations by examining the construct of organizational identification (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Morgan et al., 2004). Organizational identification generally refers to the extent to which an organizational member shares and expresses the organization's values and decision premises (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987). The quality of the individual organization relationship has important implications for both individuals and the organizations to which they belong.

Although many studies center on individual identity and organizational identification, they generally implicitly assume a direct link between the two and tend to ignore the role of groups in this relationship. Understanding the role groups play in the individual-organizational relationship can provide a number of important practical insights. In particular, such knowledge would be of help to leaders who seek to facilitate positive outcomes for both individuals and organizations that can result from useful member-organization relationships.

Broadly defined, identity refers to a sense of self. Selves are fundamentally subjects in social presentations and we encounter our sense of identity whenever we interact with others (Goffman, 1967). As Scott (2007) noted, ''One's organizational membership creates a very important social identity for many individuals'' (p. 125). Identity is not static, however, but rather an ''ongoing story we tell about ourselves'' (Freud, 2001, p. 336). Communication is central to this dynamism (Scott, 2007).

The concept of identification has evolved over the years from a perception of sameness and connection with others (Lasswell, 1935) to the more administratively-focused definition put forth by Cheney and Tompkins (1987): ''A decision maker identifies with an organization when he or she desires to choose the

alternative which best promotes the perceived interests of that organization'' (p. 194). Communication scholars highlight the negotiated and dynamic nature of identification, demonstrating how individuals continually, and communicatively, negotiate their identities (Scott, 2007). Applying structuration theory specifically to organizational identification, Scott, Corman, and Cheney's (1998) model explicitly addressed the link between activity, identity, and the communication used to express identification.

Sabbath School and Organizational Identification

The study I conducted focused on Sabbath School classes at the Walla Walla University church examining individual, group and organization identification. To obtain the information, 33 interviews were conducted with class members, ages ranging from 19–76 years old. The questions identified the members' perceptions of their relationship to the larger organization and communication practices in the group context that enabled (dis)identification with the organization. Further, videos of the classes were used to analyze the communication in order to validate consistency between interview results and actual behavior. Results revealed three ways groups link individual members and the organization via identification.

1. Connection: groups provide members with local co-present linkages to the organization and an environment in which to express their connection/relationship to the organization. One participant explained that the class influenced his identity as an Adventist by providing a place to explore or a process of ''finding out what I thought'' about Adventism. The act of voicing his opinions became a vehicle for further connection with the church organization. One participant put it clearly, stating, ''My class is one of my ways of staying connected to the church.''

Another described the importance of the group for her identification with the larger organization, explaining, ''It's changed in that I see the church has now included the group that I am in'' in contrast to how she saw herself prior to her group experience, as an outsider versus a part of the church. In a clear statement of organizational identification, one participant succinctly stated, ''In very simplistic terms it actually makes me feel good that I'm associated with this group of people and they are Adventist…it just makes me feel better about being an Adventist.'' During another group discussion, a participant explained the connecting function of the group, by stating, ''in[a] way this [is] my only participation in the church. Because it is a larger area and it is harder getting involved and stuff… I would say more than affecting my outside of my class, [the class] is one of my ways of staying connected to the church.''

2. Restructuring: groups also enable members to restructure/adapt conflicting individual and organizational identity. When individuals' identities conflict with that of the organization, they often experience tension and uncertainty regarding continued membership in the organization. Group interaction in the SSCs helped individuals manage such tensions by providing opportunities for discussion and learning that functioned to restructure their organizational identity.

Interview participants noted how group discussion helped manage tensions members experienced between their individual identity and their identification with the organization. As one participant explained, being exposed to more ideas in the group ''broadens my understanding of the church as a whole, more

than just me'' and ''helped me to better understand...the church and how I fit into the church.'' Hearing a wide spectrum of thoughts, from ''conservative to liberal'' helped individuals determine how they fit into the overall organization. Such discussions were important to members' development and negotiation of organizational identification; as one participant explained, ''It [group discussion] has really helped me to settle into being comfortable not with just being a Christian but being an Adventist.'' Another participant explained, ''it [group discussion] spins my wheels and gets me thinking a little bit more than what I hear in the church service.'' Thus, conversations in the group locale functions to transform and restructure the relevant organizational identity.

3. Buffering: lastly groups afford a buffering function enabling members to dis-identify with a portion of the organizational identity and still maintain a sense of organizational identification. Although group discussions often helped members restructure different identities in ways that helped maintain their identification with the larger organization, occasionally members chose to accept, rather than resolve, conflicts between their personal identity and the organization's identity. In such cases, the groups functioned as a buffer between the individual and the organization. The groups provided a safe and comfortable environment for acknowledging and expressing different identities.

Interview participants explained that the SSCs provided a context in which to express their disagreement with the larger church, noting that the group was a place where they could more freely share their opinions and beliefs. As one interview participant explained, ''it is wonderful to go and share my views and talk with other people who share their ideas. And that is so refreshing after a week of keeping my personal opinions to myself.'' Another highlighted the buffering function by explicitly acknowledging her perception of the fluid nature of her own identity compared to the identity of the larger organization, stating, ''This class has made me even more aware and makes me think about my responsibility, you know, that I, we can't change anyone else, we can't change the Church, we can only change ourselves.''

One interviewee provided an illustration of the group's buffering function recounting a recent period during which she experienced serious doubts about the local SDA organization. At that time, her son went to prison and her husband lost his job at the SDA college in town. She felt her family had been treated unfairly compared to other SDA members and she felt unsupported by the church. The SSC group helped her through that experience, not by helping her restructure her identity to be consistent with that of the organization, but instead by providing support and allowing her to disidentify with the organization. As she explained:

> When our son went to jail for the first time, I had a really hard time with that and when [my husband] lost his job at the college I had a really hard time with that. I had a harder time, I think, than he did. There were people in the college who, for instance, had gotten divorced for what didn't seem to be really good reasons and they were still there and he was let go and [I thought] ''God why is this happening?'' After a long time the one thing that really helped me during that time was my Sabbath School Class...[it] really helped me to understand that I was to stay close to God...that I had to divorce the church from the [SDA] institution. I had to do that for my own sanity...My Sabbath School Class supported me during that time...

This example illustrates the stress that can result from a disconnection between one's individual identity and the organization's identity, and the important role groups play in helping individuals deal with that stress by providing a buffer between the individual and the organization. The buffering function, therefore, enables members to simultaneously decline to restructure conflicting personal identities and still maintain organizational identification and membership.

Application

Church leaders could benefit from recognizing groups, specifically SS classes as a crucial resource for maintaining links between individual members and the larger organization. As necessary as organizational identification is to the church, individual identity is equally important to the member. Positioning groups as locales between the potentially divergent needs of both can provide ''zones'' where church members are free to examine and adjust identity and identification. In other words, groups help make church and member connections to the church, more palpable and ''real.''

I offer a case in point. My son and daughter in-law moved to a medium sized city where few young adults attended church. Soon they met several young people in the community who were raised a SDA and didn't attend church due to the angst felt toward the church organization. My children established a SSC where these people were invited to come without any "strings" attached. After experiencing a group/class environment where they were able to share frustrations and sort out disconcerting ideas and experiences in a safe environment, most eventually started integrating back into the local and larger church leading to changes that further attracted others to the church.

Similar to my own experience where a SS class became a place of healing and reconnection with the SDA church, these group contexts, enabling members to create a purposeful and strong sense of community and connection, can provide a strong platform for member satisfaction and identification. Ideally groups such as these will be instrumental in producing a stronger more vibrant church where both old and young can flourish.

3 Improving Learning Styles and Models

DEVELOPMENT AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODELS

Jasmine Fraser

A growing concern among youth leaders, and mentors within various churches is the need to develop methods of teaching and learning that incite and nurture young adults' interest in issues of faith. The turn of the millennium gave rise to numerous studies and discussions regarding young adults' posture on matters of faith, and many assumptions have been made.[1] Based on some of these findings the need to find innovative ways to attract and retain the interest of young adults becomes an important challenge for youth leaders, mentors and teachers in faith communities.

Studies show that almost 60% of children leave the church after age fifteen.[2] One supposition is that "three out of every five kids in church youth group will eventually shrug off the institution entirely"(Gregston). Research conducted within the Adventist church indicated that among those baptized in their mid-teens, "40 to 50% will drop out by the time they are halfway through their 20s" (Dudley). The question as to why young adults in this era struggle in their commitment to matters of faith may be attributed to several factors[3] and calls for ministry with intention. This intention is to holistically address the needs of young adults in a way that eases their apprehensions and their apathy to issues of faith. Such response merits the need to understand the psychosocial developmental process[4] that inevitably influence the lifestyles and choices of youth, and to some extent their posture on faith. It also summons the need to revisit the teaching and learning process that takes place within the church.

The Place of Developmental Theory

The notion of development is embedded in God's plan of redemption, which seeks to restore His image back in humanity. Christ's model of teaching engenders development. In His interaction with people His emphasis was on issues such as life, abundance, wellness and rest (John 17:3; 10:10; 3 John 1:2; Matt. 11:28). Subsequently, Christ's quintessential method of discipleship promoted wholeness of those He endeavored to draw to Him (Matt.11: 28; John 10:10).

Today a holistic view of the developmental process encapsulates the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual entities. It is essential that one understand these entities in the context of young adults' developing needs, not just their spiritual needs. Seeing and addressing the big picture of their entire world is necessary in attending to issues of faith. This can help youth leaders and mentors plan and implement ideas and activities that are beneficial and relevant to their needs.

One aspect of development that is integral throughout a lifespan is the psychosocial transitions that contribute to survival and identity needs of the individual. As proposed by Erikson (see table below), there are eight stages of life experiences that contribute to the ultimate self-actualization. Two of these eight

stages encompass the timeframe of the adolescents' years to that of young adulthood.

Stage	Basic Conflict	Important Events	Outcome
Infancy (birth to 18 months)	Trust vs. Mistrust	Feeding	Children develop a sense of trust when caregivers provide reliability, care, and affection. A lack of this will lead to mistrust.
Early Childhood (2 to 3 years)	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Toilet Training	Children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence. Success leads to feelings of autonomy, failure results in feelings of shame and doubt.
Preschool (3 to 5 years)	Initiative vs. Guilt	Exploration	Children need to begin asserting control and power over the environment. Success in this stage leads to a sense of purpose. Children who try to exert too much power experience disapproval, resulting in a sense of guilt.
School Age (6 to 11 years)	Industry vs. Inferiority	School	Children need to cope with new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of competence, while failure results in feelings of inferiority.
Adolescence (12 to 18 years)	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Social Relationships	Teens need to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Success leads to an ability to stay true to yourself, while failure leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self.
Young Adulthood (19 to 40 years)	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Relationships	Young adults need to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. Success leads to strong relationships, while failure results in loneliness and isolation.
Middle Adulthood (40 to 65 years)	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Work and Parenthood	Adults need to create or nurture things that will outlast them, often by having children or creating a positive change that benefits other people. Success leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the world.
Maturity (65 to death)	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Reflection on Life	Older adults need to look back on life and feel a sense of fulfillment. Success at this stage leads to feelings of wisdom, while failure results in regret, bitterness, and despair.

TABLE 1

Erikson's Stages of Development[5]

The period of *identity versus role confusion* is that time when adolescents "form a philosophy of life, and learn to establish a coherent sense of self in relation to their desired ideological, moral, and sociocultural identities"[6] Several entities including family and cultures within society influence this stage of an individual's life. However, it is important to note that the media has an indelible influence on the philosophy of teens.[7] This issue challenges the church as it seeks to impact the teen population in matters of faith. As the need to assert their identity drives young adults to search for and find meaning in places such as the media, the church must find innovative ways to counter any negative implants.

The next phase, that of *intimacy versus isolation*, is defined as a period of early adulthood. It is a time when individuals assert their needs for independence, and establish "healthy and mutually satisfying relationships". Based on research findings this phase seems to be the demarcation of young adults' waning interest in faith issues. Although all the stages of the psychosocial development are equally important to individuals' lives, the stages of adolescents and early adulthood require much attention especially from those involved in influencing youth in matters of faith.

Practice Makes Sense

To influence and develop faith takes more than dogmas, behavior modification, or merely verbally defining its concepts. To do so requires practicing the tenets of faith in ways that are relevant to the time and needs of the young adults, and the society at large. Faith[8] in this context is embedded not just in belief in doctrines, but in the God highlighted in the doctrines. Faith also means to trust in God, to explore His character, and ultimately to understand and be able to personally express what it means to be in the following relationships: Relationship with God, with others, with self, and with the environment. It is important to note that the mandates of relationship are dynamic encounters that become the situation for faith development and demonstration. It is incumbent on leaders, mentors and teachers within the church to "effectively use conceptual material in an experientially learning" environment (particularly in group settings). Doing so invites participation in a context that integrates cognitive and emotional experiences[9] that creates meaning and leads to change.

The relational encounters that come through participation are relevant in meeting certain needs, and addressing some of the issues young adults face regarding issues of faith. Participation is also a way of engendering active lifelong commitment to God, and to the church. Evidently, "groups in which teen and adults experience life and explore faith together go a long way toward enhancing the lives of today's teen".[10] The basic assumption is that:

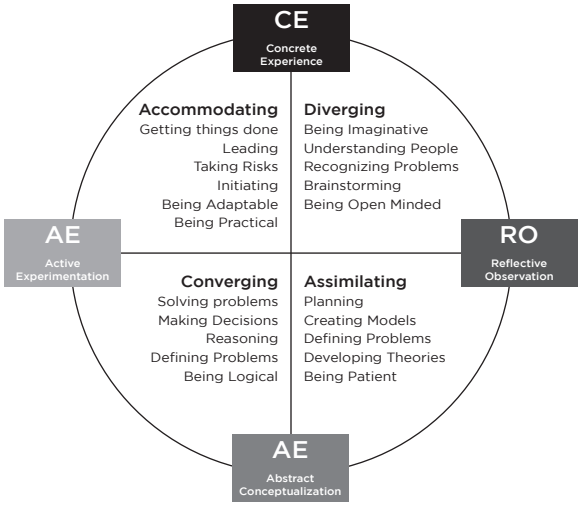
> Teens who participate in religious youth groups are much more likely to enjoy their religion, value religious group involvement, believe in God, believe that God cares about them, experience God's presence, and display high level of honesty, politeness, and compassion than either regular church attenders who do not belong to religious youth groups or non-religious attenders.[11]

Because participation is essential in the process of faith development, it is necessary to find methods that yield to an environment where faith is not taught or coerced through persuasive methods. But through experience, reflection, and reason and the work of the Holy Spirit faith is illumined in the hearts of each individual. Such an environment can be created through the adaptation of an experiential learning model.

The Value of Experiential Learning

Education specialist Kolb (1984) discusses the process of experiential learning as a sequence involving four cyclical elements that engage individuals' cognitive, interpretative and active response in the course of learning and development.: *1. Concrete experience; 2. Reflective observation; 3. Abstract conceptualization; and 4. Active experimentation.* (See table below) At the stage of *concrete experience* the individual instinctively engages in accomplishing a given task. The engagement is instinctive assuming that the initial encounter happens inevitably without much thought or reflection about the experience.

TABLE 2
Kolb Learning Style Model



The notion surrounding *reflective observation* is that it involves the act of mentally pausing and recounting the experience. Here the individual is able to outline a mental map or form a theory based on her or his perception of the experience. At the stage of *abstract conceptualization* the experience extends beyond recalling facts as the individual moves to the point of reason and analysis. It is assumed that at this point one is able to make associations, and the experience is seen in connection to a meaningful aspect of life. At this point the experience is not viewed as merely an isolated occurrence. Instead it is seen in relation to some personal phenomena that are likely connected with different phases of one's development.

The fourth stage active experimentation is significant in that it engenders active response that contributes to change. Change is vital in the outcome of learning and assessing where one is, and where one ought to be. This phase is important in that the response at this point creates a new experience that calls for further reflecting, conceptualizing and ultimately more active response, hence the cyclical nature of the model. In summary the experiential learning procedure can be simply described as the way in which individuals perceive (sense, and think about) and process (reflect/observe, and act in response to) life's encounters, prompting them to find meaning and make changes.

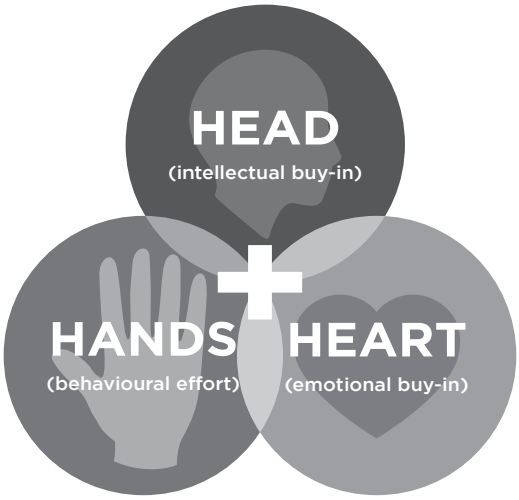
In collaboration with the method of experiential learning, Osmer[12] proposes a simplified understanding by interjecting four inevitable questions:

- What is going on
- Why is this going on
- What ought to be going on
- How might one respond?

In every ministry encounter these are questions leaders, mentors and teachers need to help young adults answer for themselves. Each leader, mentor or teacher is called to facilitate climates that challenge individuals' critical thinking skills. It is within these contexts that learning and change (transformation) happens.

Interestingly, the tenets of the experiential learning model tie in with the Sabbath School's discipleship goal[13] : that of influencing the head, heart and hand (see diagram below). The Sabbath school, as the major system of non-formal religious education within the church is designed to be the lab in which individuals through trial, error, and conquest develop faith. Encounters and evidence of faith come through meaningful relationships with self, God and others. Such relationships happen through the study of God's Word, fellowship with others in, and outside the community of faith, and ultimately feed one's desire to serve the world in the cause of Christ.

TABLE 3
Head, Heart, Hand



Conclusion

This article has proposed that Sabbath School classes have to move beyond a knowledge-base learning model, to a participatory and experiential one. According to Erickson's stages of development, both for adolescents and young adults, healthy relationships are key as these age groups seek their self-identity realization. This implies that Sabbath School leaders should make an extra effort to focus intentionally in facilitating meaningful relationships, both inside and outside of the Sabbath School meetings, if they want to be relevant.

Similarly, Kolb's model can be used as a catalyst to purposely design a Sabbath School format that facilitates experiential and participatory learning, where every aspect of life is involved: head (intellect), heart (emotions), and hands (behavior). The challenge now to everyone who influences the life and ministry of the youth is to find effective and creative ways of redesigning ministry events and activities to reflect the experiential learning model.

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Endnotes

1 George Barna research proposes varied reasons other than faith-related experience, as to why teens attend church. One key factor is that they are there because their friends are there. Barna concludes that "in order to keep them coming, the church is challenged to give them something that they are not getting elsewhere" Real Teen: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture (2001)

2 Barna Report (see Mark Gregston article on "Why Teens are leaving the Church")

3 (Dudley) 2000, *Why Our Teens Leave the Church: Personal Stories from a 10-Year Study*, (Gregston) 2012, "Why Teens are leaving the Church", and (Paulsen) (2013) *Let's Talk: Conversations with Young Adventists about Their Church*, discuss several reasons young adults are frustrated with faith

issues. In summary the church seems irrelevant, uncaring and oblivious to their needs. The church seems to practice double talks/double standards/

4 Erikson proposes eight stages of human psychosocial development, from infancy to late adulthood (*trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame/doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, integrity vs. despair*). Each stage describes individuals' adaptation to life and their environment, and how they gain understanding of self as a unique being "Childhood and Society" (1963) pp. 247–274. The 'identity vs. role confusion' and 'intimacy vs. isolation' phases are integral in adolescents/young adults development and merits the attention of teachers, mentors and youth leaders, as they create and implement ministry ideas.

5 Taken from, http://www.counsellingconnection.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/erikson1.jpg (Accessed January 19, 2018)

6 Erikson, 18.

7 Barna,198.

8 (Osmer *Teaching for Faith: A Guide for Teachers of Adult Classes*) (1992) proposes that there are many sides of faith. "Each side represents an important aspect of a relationship of trust in God". "At any given time, one dimension of our relationship of trust in God can be described, but other aspects of this relationship need to be kept in mind". p.17, 16

9 The concept of faith requires an environment where through practical relational encounters it is transformed into experience. (Steele and Burke) (1970) explores the problem of "how most effectively to use conceptual material in experientially-oriented learning programs", proposing that conceptualizing about experience can make a difference in the way a person learn; that the integration of ideas, concepts and emotions is essential in experiential learning. "Integrating Theory with Experiential Learning in a Training of Trainers Seminar" Religious Education Vol.65.1 pp.30–35.

10 Overholt and Penner, 8.

11 Ibid.

12 (Osmer *Practical Theology: An Introduction*) 2008 proposes a practical theological model that is parallel to the four elements of experiential learning: descriptive empirical, interpretive, normative and pragmatic. In these elements simply calls attention to four basic questions (based on the "what" "why" and "how" concept) that aids the learning experience.

13 GC Sabbath School, 3.

DON'T JUST TEACH: FACILITATE LEARNING

Randy J. Siebold, PhD

Throughout the world important learning is happening in Sabbath Schools, and this is an important part of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist church. In fact, certainly it is a most important work in equipping of the church. Thoughtful Sabbath School teachers plan lessons, they show up, and as they enlighten their classes with what they've learned in their study, they engage them in a bit of discussion; from my experience in much of the world, this seems to be a typical routine.

But what if **what** people learn during Sabbath School is not as memorable, not as interesting, and not as powerful in shaping their lives as it could be? What if some people have attended Sabbath School, just to find that the whole experience seemed more like church members just talking about the same things, week after week?

It seems that if many found this crucially important time of the week less than engaging, we would find the attendance at Sabbath School shrinking. People just wouldn't take the time to come. And what would motivate them to come? If they take the time to attend and find that little in the whole experience speaks to their soul, we can see why they would, eventually, cease to attend and find something more productive to do with their time.

While many factors impact the overall Sabbath School experience and each of these, of course, should be addressed, this paper focuses on a framework for understanding the learning process addressed in Sabbath School, as well as suggesting practical help for Sabbath School teachers. Specifically, I will address, briefly, some of the challenges with the traditional model of teaching—lecture with discussion—that appears to be a common model used by many Sabbath School teachers use to lead their weekly classes. Then, I will share a framework for creating effective learning experiences with features similar to mentoring, coaching and discipleship. Using this framework to develop Sabbath School experiences potentially promises a significant return on investment for those willing to learn from the school of Christ. Finally, I will give a few examples of how this framework could be applied in Sabbath School settings. In short, giving an alternative to the traditional teaching approach, I will show how to facilitate true, deep learning in the Sabbath School.

Before I begin, however, it seems important to make a crucial point: "It is not the capabilities you now possess or ever will have that will give you success. It is that which the Lord can do for you. We need to have far less confidence in what man can do and far more confidence in what God can do for every believing soul" (White, 146). It is our personal connection with and trust in God that is the fundamental qualification of any good Sabbath School program. Thus, while learning principles and methods are clearly important and, in fact, the

primary purpose of this paper, it must be clear that a spiritual personal preparation is an essential prerequisite.

Problems With Teaching

The act of teaching, especially in schools, has been well researched over past decades. It seems clear that much of that research has focused particularly on highlighting the improvement of teaching as a way to improve schools. Yet, the results from decades of focus from many brilliant researchers with abundant financial support, the new methods and suggested practices end up merely tweaking the system and finding little overall improvement. In fact, around the world, school reform is a hot topic and the calls for change are not getting quieter. Somehow, it appears that the fundamental organization of schools, or perhaps the way we conceive of the role of a teacher may be at odds with the best way to facilitate learning.

More and more, however, the idea of learning is becoming increasingly relevant outside of schools. With disruptive innovations in the workplace and our ever-changing technologies permeating nearly every aspect of our lives, learning has become more that just something for school—it has become our very way of life. The days of learning what you need to know, and applying that same knowledge to the same task, day after day, are gone. We need to understand how people learn and then, how to facilitate learning. The focus on teaching, especially traditional teaching, is the wrong approach altogether.

When we focus on the task of teaching instead of the task of learning, we focus on the wrong outcome. While it could be argued that the purpose of teaching is for others to learn, it is, unfortunately, not always the case. As suggested previously, studies on teaching and learning have been proponents of change in the way schools operate for decades. Sadly, there has been little significant change in the actual practice of teaching in schools. Too often teachers share what they know and expect that they are causing the students to learn. But, true teaching is far more than telling, learning is much more that hearing, and education is more than just telling and listening.

Helping Others Learn

Ellen White (1903) wrote about this same challenge in the first paragraph of her book *Education*. This one paragraph does an amazing job of packaging three key principles to understanding how one truly learns: through a life-long approach, a whole-being approach, and service approach.

> Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursual of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come (Education, p 13).

The critique given in the first half of this paragraph clarifies that our understanding of education, of learning, of teaching, is flawed and mistaken. She contrasts the view we too often take. We see education as the taking a class

or a course in a fixed time period in preparation for some great activity in the future; it should be seen as a life-long pursuit with the great actives as part of the educational process. We see education as primarily a mental activity; it should be seen as effecting our whole being—body, mind and spirit. We see education as a way to make us more knowledgeable, to help develop ourselves into being the best we can be; it should be seen as a process as a way to help us help others, to serve them more completely.

I believe we must start to see the role of the Sabbath School teacher in a broader light than just the 30–50 minutes on Sabbath. We must think about how our members learn, how they become truly educated. For this, we have a Divine model—the training of the disciples by Jesus.

The Teaching Process of Jesus

When one reviews the far-reaching and earth- encompassing results from a dozen so-called followers, it would be hard to argue with the statement that indeed, Jesus "is the greatest teacher the world has ever known" (Fundamentals of Christian Education, p 450). So just what are these practices and what implications might they have for our Sabbath Schools today?

Not surprisingly, Jesus also modeled the same principles found in the first paragraph of the book Education. Further, Jesus used an approach that is exactly opposite from our traditional approach to learning. Rather than starting with lecture, theory building and the like –as we find so commonly in our current system of education– He began His "teaching" by modeling the behavior and thinking that He wished His learners to use and have. After a time, He sent them out for them to have a personal experience. Upon returning, He called them apart to receive their report, and then He expanded on teaching. This brief overview (to be expanded below) reveals a different kind of educational process.

"And Jesus said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men'" (Mark 1:17). These words of Jesus, used when calling His disciples, are not only a description of their outcome—to become fishers of men—but also included an description of His method—"Follow me." Here, at the beginning of their educational journey, He does not call them to sit and listen to Him lecture, He does not give them assessments, nor does He at this point explain the life-giving principles of the kingdom of God. No! He knows better. He bids them to follow Him, walk along side of Him, and work along side of Him. In short, He bids them to observe—listen and take part as they are able. In effect, He starts by helping them experience what He wants them to be.

At the beginning of the training of His disciples, Jesus was active in ministry—walking from place to place, teaching, preaching and healing. His efforts in the process of training and educating His disciples was to expose them to His example—to the ultimate Exemplar of service and sacrifice. Looking at His activities from the perspective of instructional theory and believing that everything He did was by design—to achieve the best results—He clearly recognized His disciples first needed a demonstration of the goal to be achieved; they required the "fishers of men" theme to be modeled; they needed a behavioral example to follow. And, while the lecture was a tool He used to teach the disciples (i.e., Sermon on the Mount), it was not His first, nor was it the tool He used most often. This should cause us to consider our use (or overuse) of lecture when we teach Sabbath School, or we should see the teaching of Sabbath School as a small part of the process of becoming more like Jesus.

After following Jesus for some time, being active with Him in His ministry—watching Him heal, listening to Him teach, seeing the hearts of the listeners touched with the Divine call of the Good News—the disciples now needed another phase of their learning process. So, He sent His disciples out to do what they saw Him do. In giving some preparation for this phase of their training, Jesus gave to His disciples assurance that they could do what He did. From an instructional perspective, He gave them a chance to practice what they saw demonstrated. But they were not sent alone. They were sent two-by-two, and more importantly, they were given a Helper (Mark 6:7–8, 12–13).

In this process of letting the disciples out on their own, they shared what they had learned. This, again, is a principle of learning. "We can impart only that which we receive from Christ; and we can receive **only as we impart to others**. As we continue imparting, we continue to receive; and the more we impart, the more we shall receive." (*Desire of Ages*, 370, emphasis supplied). This experience helped them to learn in a new way and opened their minds for additional learning to come.

Upon returning from their mission, Jesus gathered the disciples together. Here, He appeared to use an instructional technique called debriefing. Debriefing, in its many forms, is often an effective way of facilitating reflection and thus helping grow from the learning experience. "The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught" (Mark 6:30). This is often the first step in debriefing, to discuss what happened, stating in a descriptive way what had just transpired. Then, Jesus said, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while" (v31). Looking at this experience from the lens of an instructional theorist, this appears to be a call to continue the debriefing process and gain valuable time for bonding, reflection and peer learning.

After this, the disciples returned to following Jesus as His ministry continued. Later, there was a repetition of the sending out. This time, Jesus sent out a larger group, the 70. When they returned, they are recorded as sharing with Jesus some of their activities (starting in Luke 10:17). After this, the disciples are once again following Jesus. He continues in His active ministry in different places, still healing, still preaching, still teaching.

In essence, looking at the overall educational approach used by Jesus we find a striking contrast. Rather than starting with bringing His disciples apart (into a classroom) and sharing the principles of His kingdom in lecture, it seems He left this part for the end of their training. And, while it seems the long-term goal of most educational endeavors is to allow you to have practical experiences some day, Jesus used practical experience as His primary method of instruction.

Principles and Practices for Sabbath School Teachers

The implementation of a biblical perspective of teaching—of facilitating learning—may prove to be difficult when the world's most common approach is quite the opposite. As we seek to better understand and implement these principles, we may find much failure before finding much success. Yet believing that the ways of God are higher than the ways of men is an essential starting point for achieving the results God designed for us.

To simplify attempts at following Jesus' instructional approach, I have distilled the teaching strategies of Jesus into a set of principles—a framework for

facilitating learning in Sabbath School and beyond. After presenting an overview of the framework, I will give a brief overview of each of the principles and then provide some practices that may be consistent with the principles.

The Framework

1. Personal Preparation
2. Active Ministry
3. Debriefing & Reflection
4. Lecture & Discussion

Overview of Principles and Recommendations for Practice

1. **Personal Preparation.**

The first principle in teaching—or in guiding others to learn—(in fact in any worthwhile pursuit) must be Personal Preparation. While the preparation of the lesson materials, the location, etc. are all important, clearly the preparation of one's self for the service of God must be paramount; a connection with Christ through His Holy Spirit is the only means by which we can be successful. This lesson becomes crystal clear in the life of Jesus. Not only did He spend His first 30 years in preparation, once He started His active ministry and became a Teacher in Israel (The Teacher), He was still, often found in prayer. Only when the teacher meets The Divine Teacher, can any learning experience, hope to facilitate learning that will prove to be a "savor of life unto life" (White, 5T, p 716).

Recommendations for Practice

- *Prayer.* Fervent supplications with a clear recognition of the teacher's inability to complete anything by themselves will be heard and answered. The teacher needs to follow the model of Jesus' prayers, as well as His recognition that without the Father, He could do nothing (John 8:28).

- *Bible Study*. Of course, studying the messages and stories of the Bible is a cornerstone of a relationship with God.

- *Personal ministry to others*. Personal, sacrificial service to others is a balancing activity. Too often we can think ourselves being "godly" when we have studied Scripture and prayed intently. Active ministry to others keeps us from getting too disconnected from the reality of those we wish to serve. And, recognizing that Jesus' personal service for others did not start with His public ministry, it is clear that for us, experience in personal service is a non-negotiable to help train others to do the very same thing.

2. **Active Ministry.**

After calling the disciples to follow Him, Jesus' first task was to take them into active ministry. This is how the disciples spent most of their time with Jesus, in active ministry. Today, it is clear that active ministry brings more than just demonstration to those learning; it creates situations of bonding. Within these times of challenge and success of active ministry, members build trust in the teacher, as well as in God and among themselves.

When looking at the methods that Jesus used with His disciples, it becomes clear that His first request for them was to follow. But then, later in the ministry,

He sent them out to be active, two-by-two. This "follow then lead" approach gives an opportunity for the learner to observe the culture and learn much tacit knowledge about the ministry. However, observation is not enough for truly deep learning. The process of leading and working outside of direct oversight brings one into a new understanding. The sense of responsibility is heightened and learning is taken to a new level.

Recommendations for Practice

- *Lead your Sabbath School to be active*. Be active in ministry. For many Sabbath School levels this principle will be difficult to implement. Yet many youth leaders have already discovered the insatiable craving for action in those in the transition years between children and adulthood. Further, just because this practice will be difficult to implement, we should not be discouraged. Some may find more initial success in working with a sub-group of those with stronger interest and time. Also, Sabbath School groups may at some point be strong enough to sustain service activities outside of the regularly-scheduled Sabbath School meeting time and even come to the point where there are another set of leaders for these regularly scheduled service times.

- *Keep Sabbath School activities mission-focused*. While there can be a tendency, especially in youth divisions, to cater towards entertainment, activities that are focused on reaching people's needs are often deeply fulfilling and bring lasting happiness.

- *Partner with current church ministries*. Often para-church ministries or departments of the church are looking for volunteers to help with current projects. These collaborative efforts can bring quick "wins" to help encourage progress in implementing a more active Sabbath School approach.

- *Encourage individual ministries*. While Jesus worked much directly with His disciples, He also sent them out two-by-two to engage in active ministry by themselves. Because we have much to learn about how to engage in active ministry in each given situation, it seems essential for members to find ways to engage their gifts for the service of others.

3. **Debriefing & Reflection.**

In this principle, I combine the activities of debriefing (primarily with groups) and reflection (primarily an individual activity) as they are closely tied together both in practical function, as well as in Scripture. Remember what Jesus did after the two-by-two ministry of the disciples; Jesus listened to His disciples share what happened, and then brought them apart, "to rest awhile." This approach seems to point to the activities involved in the instructional practices of both debriefing and reflection. Debriefing can be framed by following three questions.

- *What happened?* This first step focuses on answering the question with facts. When two or more are debriefing the same event, this question helps to get a more objective account of what happened and also helps to clear up misconceptions.

- *What was your response to what happened?* Here the emotions have permission to come out and those being debriefed can have a chance to tell their experience or reaction to what happened. This gives each one an opportunity to describe how they have made sense of the experience(s).

- *How do you want to respond in the future?* This question deals with clarifying the learning and projecting it into future thoughts, emotions and actions. It helps bring the conversation of the experience towards a learning outcome.

Reflection is an important personal practice in self-learning. John Dewey, it has been claimed, made the statement, "We don't learn by experience, we learn by reflecting on experience" ("John Dewey Quotes" n.d.). Regardless of who made the statement, it is important to recognize the power of reflecting on important learning experiences.

Recommendations for Practice.

- Facilitate a formal debriefing after ministry events. The power of a well-facilitated debriefing can be quite strong. Times of ministry are often filled with many conversations, interactions, and observations. Debriefing helps to expand ones' own personal perspective as they hear other perspectives and also helps to hone in on the most important outcomes from the event. Use the above three-question process to facilitate the debriefing.

- Recommend journaling to your Sabbath School members. Journaling can be a powerful way of facilitating learning through reflection. With short class times and active ministry times, it may be difficult to facilitate a specific time for reflection. However, once learners experience the power of journaling to strengthen their learning as well as their intellectual and emotional growth, they are often excited to continue the practice.

4. **Lecture & Discussion.**

When used in support of active learning experiences, lecture is an essential component for teaching to facilitate learning. The benefits of lecture are obvious. Chief among these must certainly be the efficiency and effectiveness of communicating concepts and ideas. Further, when lecture is combined with discussion, it becomes even more powerful in individual and group learning.

Recommendations for Practice

- *Keep lectures relevant and short*. To be effective at all, lectures must be relevant to the listeners. Studying students in higher education, Middendorf and Kalish (1996) explain the importance of keeping lectures short (about 15 minutes or less). However, when members of a Sabbath School are coming with the intention to discuss the lesson, it seems any lecture should be much shorter.

Conclusion

The way Sabbath School is often done today is more about teaching rather than learning and teaching is too often a lecture with, perhaps, discussion. Yet the model that Jesus followed is an activity-first approach. He asked His new

disciples to "Follow Him." In this command, He shared an important principle of learning—activity is the basis of understanding. Of course, His methods were more comprehensive than just activity. The framework proposed in this chapter included:(1) Personal Preparation, (2) Active Ministry, (3) Debriefing & Reflection, and (4) Lecture & Discussion. Following brief descriptions of each of these principles, suggested practices were recommended. I am confident that as we rely in Him who created heaven and earth, He will be faithful to support us in our work to "follow Him." Because, "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

MULTISENSORY SABBATH SCHOOL: A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO FRAGMENTED AND LOW-BRAIN STIMULOUS LEARNING

Cory Wetterlin

Fragmentation

There has been a decent amount of research done of the fragmentation of life which the modernist enlightenment project has created. This is based on the atomistic view of reality found in proposals of physics by ancient Greek philosophers.[1] It was believed that the world was made up of small static particles, called atoms separated from one another by empty space. It was also believed, if a person could break something down to its smallest components for the purpose of study and understand the way these components interacted with each other, one could have full understanding of the object being studied.[2]

It is now understood, however, that the cosmos is made up of much smaller particles than atoms and that they are constantly changing and interconnected.[3] The problem is the atomistic world-view shaped the way in which reality was perceived. If the best way to understand something was by its smallest components then this must also be the best way to conduct an efficient life.[4] The hard sciences were fragmented from the social sciences called by some the Non-overlapping magisterium. Science would stick to the study of empirical evidence not to comment on the religious or philosophical life. Religion would therefore stick to the study of more conceptual things and leave the empirical evidence to science.[5] This separated the empirical part of life from the spiritual, social, and emotional part of life.[6]

In youth and children's ministry fragmentation has been voiced by students saying something like this, "Christians are hypocrites, they say one thing and then they do the other. My dad is a completely different person when he is at his office compared to when he is at church." I used to respond to this by saying all Christians are hypocrites because we claim to follow Jesus who set such a high standard, which we all fall short of. I have more recently recognized that the fragmentation runs deeper than this. The modernist view of reality has taught people to look at their lives compartmentally.[7] Work is a separate box from the church box, from the family box, from the social box, etc.[8] It is not a problem, therefore, to act one way at work and another way at Church.

This has affected the way one is taught as well, which means that it has affected Sabbath school. The priority for a modernist education is to share objective facts which can be demonstrated. The emotional health of those being taught was not considered relevant and therefore emotions where something to be pushed aside. Consider the way that a child learns what a duck is. When they encounter their first duck, their parent may point to the bird and say, "duck." The child then follows by example pointing to the bird and saying, "duck." The child comes across the next bird in the park calls it a duck. The bird, however, is actually a goose. The parent then corrects the child that this bird is a goose

and the other one is a duck. This is the objective informational exchange to teach a child. There is much more involved however.

The subjective or emotional connotation of this learning process still needs to be explored. If the child learns what a duck is on a sunny day while tossing bread to the duck with much joy and laughter, then the child has a positive emotional connotation regarding the duck. If the child however offers the newly acquainted duck a piece of bread to be chased and bitten by the duck, then the child has a negative subjective connotation for the duck.[9] The result ultimately being a child wanting to run away from the duck the next time he or she sees it.

When a student comes into a Sabbath school class to learn about the love of God, there will most likely be logical information shared with the child about the love of God. They will learn memory verses and perhaps hear a bible story about Jesus dying on the cross for them to show them God's love. If this is taught in a dingy classroom on hard seats by a teacher with no enthusiasm what-so-ever the emotional connotation of the love of God will not be a very positive one.

If instead the love of God is taught in a well-lit classroom, with comfortable chairs that are soft to the touch, holding a sweet tasting cup of hot chocolate in their hands, after being greeted by a socially loving teacher (both inside and outside the classroom), then the emotional connotation of the student regarding the love of God will be much different. Which learning experience is more likely to draw them towards the love of God in the future?[10]

Another significant category of fragmentation to keep in mind in connection to the Sabbath School experience is that of personhood. In atomistic thinking, individuals are identified as a person by their thoughts. This follows the Cartesian influence regarding dual substances and Descartes's famous statement, I think therefore I am. Because of the atomistic focus on the objective view of reality as the most important part of life, the objective-cognitive function is the most definitive understanding for a person to know who they are. One could argue that as long as you have your thoughts and feelings, you will always be you. The criticism of this however is that personhood is also made up of relational aspects as well. A study was done in Bali asking if a woman was turned into a duck, but still kept her thoughts and memories, would she still be the same person. The response was given in the negative, because she could no longer function in her societal roles or maintain her relationships with others in the same way.[11]

The small group setting of Sabbath school has the potential to help build a more corporate personhood. If the setting is a welcoming one which encourages interaction with other students as part of a discussion, creative project, or service opportunity to the community, this will help to build the social personhood of the students. It will also give the student a better sense of belonging within the church body in general. A positive multi-sensory environment can help to keep students coming back, because it has become part of who they are.

A multi-sensory Sabbath school experience can help to reverse some of the effects of fragmentation on the learning process and experience of students. Fragmentation goes much deeper than the disregard of emotional learning. Fragmentation can be tied to the individual, societal, ecological, temporal, and

other concerns. For the sake of focus and space, this paper will be limited to the short discussion of fragmentation described above.

Low Brain Stimulus Learning

The advances in brain research have allowed for educators to discover some very interesting results concerning the environment of the classroom. Similar to how there are many different shades of the basic colors on a color wheel, there are various senses related to the five factory senses usually recognized. One researcher described a day down at the creek looking for crawfish as an example of the different senses available. The day was sunny and warm. The author at age 8 and her older brother were playing in the cool creek. They could feel the gravel between their toes, they could sense how close they were to one another. They felt the temperature of the warm sun on their backs and the barometric pressure of the moisture in the air. They of course could see the scene around them and the house at a distance, and they could also sense the magnetic grounding of their location.[12]

The researchers describe up to nineteen different senses that a person can engage in an outdoor context like this one. They call this a learning context of "being there." The senses are nearly cut in half when the class moved inside of a classroom, even one that is immersive in the subject that is being studied including a pond that is created in the classroom out of a small wading pool and decorative objects around the walls. By the time the experience is reduced down to a typical classroom where the knowledge is transferred by symbols of spoken and written words alone the average number of senses involved is only two.[13]

The connection of this research to brain health has discovered that the more senses that are engaged the more dendrites are produced in the brain. The brain becomes denser and more active through these truly multi-sensory experiences.[14] This also increases the retention of the knowledge which is being shared through the teaching experience. This has encouraged in certain circles a push for an outdoor classroom emphasis for children.

Compare the rich sensory experience of the day at the creek with the average Sabbath school class in a church on Sabbath morning. It is true that our children's divisions will often decorate the room, have stuffed animals, songs with motions, and a great deal of movement and interaction. These multi-sensory experiences are really valuable. If, however, the Sabbath school class consists of children coming in to sit at a desk and listen to, or read a story, the learning experience has been reduced to the symbolic level of learning and engages only two senses. The brain growth is way down and so is the retention of what is being learned.

Often by the time our children move to junior, earliteen, or youth Sabbath school, gone are the decorated rooms, the songs, the stuffed animals, and the creative mind stimulating movements and projects. The students enter a room with a circle of folding chairs in order to open their bibles, read, and have a discussion. It is no wonder that the learning retention, let alone student retention, goes down.[15]

A Case Study of a Multi-Sensory Youth Sabbath School Program

When I was the youth pastor at the Pleasant Valley Church in Happy Valley, Oregon, I had a very creative group of Sabbath School teachers that I had gathered around me for youth Sabbath School. I decided that I wanted to have a multi-sensory learning experience for the students when they came into Sabbath School. I didn't understand any of the research that has just been shared in the previous sections of this paper, I just knew that I wanted to engage multiple learning styles and make Sabbath School a worthwhile experience. There are several factors that were involved as we made our plans. I will share some of the general factors that were a part of every Sabbath School lesson as well as some specifics for a study we did on Ezekiel.

The first general factor that was a part of the every-week experience was the **atmosphere of the room**. With the help of a church member who was also an interior designer we made a warm and welcoming environment for the students to walk into. We had to be very intentional about this because we were meeting in the fellowship hall so the decorations had to be set up and taken down every week. We bought large plants, candle holders, pillows, curtains, other decorative items that could be spread around the room. We bought floor lamps, which allowed us to change the lighting in the room to a warmer atmosphere. We also bought large (20+) photograph frames to insert photos of the students from Sabbath School and other youth events.

The second general factor was **breakfast**. There was a rotating team of parents that would come in every week to make breakfast for the students. Nothing can raise youth out of their beds and get them to church on time like knowing breakfast is waiting. It also increases the sensory input. The care and affection of the church for the youth could be seen, felt, and tasted every week.

There was also a **student music team**, which would choose and lead worship music every week. The screen was also taken advantage of, not only for song lyrics but also for illustrative graphics and videos for teaching illustrations.

There was also a **multi-sensory teaching team**, which came up with specific creative ways to teach the content of the Sabbath school lesson. For the study in Ezekiel we set up giant canvases made out of queen size bed sheets stretched over 1"x1" pieces of wood. We then brought in drop clothes, old t-shirts, and a bunch of house paint and brushes. When the students came in, we turned on an audio recording of Ezekiel chapter 1 over the speakers and instructed the students to paint what they heard. Once the paintings of wheels-within-wheels, whirlwinds, and four-faced cherubim had been finished, we waited for them to dry, cut them out, and put them up on the wall. The rest of the 13-week series on Ezekiel had the paintings from the first week as a backdrop. There were other weeks when catapults were built with popsicle sticks and a pile of Styrofoam bones were piled around the class room waiting to be brought back to life.

Another intentional step taken for a different lesson series included the involvement of **small group leaders and mentors**. Adult leaders where selected and at a certain point in the lesson time the students would break into their small groups for the discussion time. This was a hard-hitting life issues based series and asked some significant and personal questions. These small groups gave the students a context in which to share and grow closer to those in their small groups.

How does this multi-sensory Sabbath school class help to meet the concerns of fragmentation and healthy brain growth? First, the atmosphere creates a positive subjective experience for the learning that takes place every week. The students have a sense of ownership of the space, which means that they can feel that they belong to the church. This helps to lessen the fragmentation often felt between the rest of the church and the youth ministry. Multiple adult volunteers being involved heals the generational fragmentation from both the side of the students as well as the adults. This was especially true with the use of small groups during the lesson time.

The stimulating atmosphere and activities also caused the greater growth of the brain, engaging more of the brain, and increasing retention of the material being taught. I will never forget the first chapter of Ezekiel as I think back on those paintings. It is a more strait forward process to teach science in an outdoor class room. You can easily go on a field trip to the local pond and have the "be there" experience. But how do we do this when we are trying to teach the biblical narrative and theological concepts? Emersion is the next best option. It is financially prohibitive to travel to Jerusalem every week, but perhaps we can bring Jerusalem to the classroom. Going to the throne room of heaven is something we are still waiting for, but with artwork, food, and social experiences perhaps we can get closer to an experience of heaven in the classroom.[16] Once again, mentioning the small groups is important here. One of the senses that the researchers mention is the proximal sense, how close one is to the person sharing in the experience with them. It is more than possible to increase our students Sabbath School experience beyond the two senses found in typical symbolic education (auditory and visual).

Summary and Conclusions

Creativity can often bring on criticism. Church members may ask questions regarding why we are entertaining our kids instead of doing serious bible study. The truth about multi-sensory Sabbath Schools is that they actually increase the learning potential of the Scriptures that are being taught. We have many examples of multisensory learning experiences in the Bible: the sanctuary, communion, baptism, etc. Multi-sensory classes also provide a more holistic and positive connotation surrounding the learning process, reversing the effects of fragmentation within our church and thus our society. This is demonstrated both with the incorporation of the subjective learning experience as well as the connections with the other students and teachers in the class, creating a sense of belonging. With a valuable rationale and an intentional plan to help kids stay connected to the church, the criticism will often die away, when these things are communicated.

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Endnotes

1 "The atomic theory, which was first proposed by Democritus more than 2,000 years ago. In essence, this theory leads us to look at the world as constituted of atoms moving in the void. The ever-changing forms and characteristics of large-scale objects are now seen as the results of changing arrangements of the moving atoms. Evidently, this view was, in certain ways, an important mode of realization of wholeness, for it enabled men to understand the enormous variety of the whole world in terms of the movements of one single set of basic constituents, through a single void that permeates the whole of existence. Nevertheless, as the atomic theory developed, it ultimately became a major support for a fragmentary approach to reality. For it ceased to be regarded as an insight, a way of looking, and men regarded instead as an absolute truth the notion that the whole of reality is actually constituted of nothing but 'atomic building blocks,' all working together more or less mechanical." (Bohm 8–9)

2 (Hoyt 10–11)

3 This is physics that is based on the theory of quantum mechanics. David Bohm understands the physical nature of reality to better be described as a great sea of energy. While this kind of thinking can lead to pantheistic or panentheistic views of reality, which must be guarded against, it is important to help recognize that things are much more connected then we once thought they were. (Peters Science, Theology, and Ethics 98) (Peters "David Bohm, Postmodernism, and the Divine" 205, 07)

4 (Peters Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society 45)

5 "Science and religion are not in conflict, for their teachings occupy distinctly different domains.... The net of religion extends over questions of moral meaning and value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry (consider, for starters, the magisterium of art and the meaning of beauty). To cite the arch clichés, we get the age of rocks, and religion retains the rock of ages; we study how the heavens go, and they determine how to go to heaven." (Gould 16)

6 Douglas Sloan brings out the classic complication of the modernist emphasis on reason to the detriment of all other parts of the individual. For the Enlightenment reason is king and no other part of the human is more significant for gaining knowledge, which as Bacon says is power. Sloan points out that this "false divorce" between reason and emotions has led to the neglect of things like "schooling of the emotional life." (Sloan 22)

7 Compare this to the work of the scientists who were developing the atomic bomb. The compartmentalization spurred on technological advances while separating those advancements from the moral question as to whether they should be building the bomb at all.

8 "What complicates the matter in the 20th century is the segmentation, if not outright fragmentation, of daily life. We divide life into a number of functional sectors: home and workplace, work and leisure, white collar and blue collar, public and private. Such sectoring suits well the needs of large corporations which operate bureaucratically and impersonally. We cannot live all day long in an impersonal atmosphere, of course. So, for our own mental health we find we have to secure a domain for the personal. To do so we draw a line between the impersonal atmosphere of the work or public sector, on the one hand, and the personal domain of home, family and private leisure, on the other." (Peters Science, Theology, and Ethics 256)

9 This illustration is used by Paul Hiebert to demonstrate the need for understanding the subjective side of learning rather than purely focusing on the objective side of learning. The objective side includes the information which has been shared while the subjective side includes the experience of the child while learning. (Hiebert 90) Edge Hoyt also includes touch and movement in the educational process as significant. When describing a dance class in in Bali, he notes that the instructor is not simply standing in front of the class demonstrating the movements. The instructor stands behind the student and moves their bodies to the movements in order to give fuller instruction. Now while we will not be giving dance lessons in our Sabbath school classes, it is significant to note the way that kids learn songs better when they have hand motions to accompany the meanings of the words. (Hoyt 108)

10 There is of course many more multi-sensory things which could be done to demonstrate the love of God involved with the cross. Using charcoal to cover the hands of the students with dirt which can then only be washed away by a warm red wash cloth representing the blood of Christ.

11 (Hoyt 44–45)

12 (Susan J. Kovalik 1.7–1.8)

13 See the table and chart referenced. (Susan J. Kovalik 1.10–1.11)

14 (Susan J. Kovalik 1.3–1.4)

15 Kovalik and Olsen share that the non-use of the newly developed dendrites in the brain will eventually cause the loss of those dendrites. It is necessary to continue the stimulation in order to keep higher brain function. (Susan J. Kovalik 1.4)

16 I am not advocating a spiritual understanding of heaven. I believe it is a real place.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO BUILD COMMUNITY WITHIN THE SABBATH SCHOOL PROGRAM

Denton Grady

Observations About Current Sabbath School Programs

In my current role as Youth Director, I have many opportunities to visit and observe local church Youth Sabbath School classes. A few of these take place within the context of large, metropolitan congregations. These Sabbath School groups will typically be well staffed; the participants will be similar in ages and the experience will contain diverse programing components. And while the classes won't successfully attract 100% of the church's youth, they will be well attended (especially as the clock approaches 10 a.m.).

The far majority of my visits take place in the small, rural churches of Virginia. The Youth Sabbath School groups of these smaller churches often function with a dedicated streamlined staff and the participants often vary in ages from 14–25 years. Other than a few announcements, the program will consist of a monologue from the teacher with a few questions thrown in as an attempt to generate some discussion. I don't fault these teachers, especially the ones from the smaller congregations, as they are doing the best that they can with the resources and knowledge that they have. But you can certainly see why a young person may struggle to get excited about their Sabbath School class and will be tempted to find any excuse not to get there on time, if at all.

The Washington Brazilian Youth Sabbath School Class

To say that I was surprised the day I walked into the Youth Sabbath School class of the Washington Brazilian Church would be a gross understatement. The congregation is not a large one, but the Youth of the church make up a large portion of the membership. The Sabbath School program started like many large programs do. A very proficient group of singers lead out in a robust session of praise songs. But once the song service concluded, that was the end of any similarity to anything that I had witnessed before, or since, in a Sabbath School program. While the components of the program were familiar, every other aspect was revolutionary to me.

The leader of the class stood up and indicated that it was time to hear a mission story, from Angola. And it was live, from Angola. On the projection screen was one of their own church youth who was now a missionary who was currently serving in Angola, and by way of Skype, related a story of how God was using them to reach the un-churched in the community where they were stationed. Because it was live, the Sabbath School leader was able to pose some follow-up questions. Following the mission story, the leader stood up and drew everybody's attention to the screen for the special music, which was being performed by the Brazilian King's Heralds, live from Sao Paulo, just for them! Again, it was transmitted to them by way of Skype. And again, the leader was able to communicate with the musicians and express his appreciation for the lovely music.

At this point I'm thinking, "OK, This was pretty cool. I know how it's done. But, is it really any different than just popping in the Mission Spotlight DVD or bringing up some inspiring musical group on YouTube?" Then it was time for the lesson study. The SS leader stood up and introduced the topic for the lesson and indicated that the discussion was going to be lead by an expert on the topic, who happened to be a pastor friend of his from Canada. And to make a true discussion we would need to be able to dialogue, to pose and answer questions. So he invited us all to take out our phones. And he threw a number up on the screen. When we had questions or wanted to give an answer to a question posed by the presenter, all we had to do was send our question or comment by texting it to the number on the screen and the presenter would get it. To make it easier for the presenter, a camera was set up at the front of the room so that the presenter could see the audience that he was speaking to.

Wow! What an experience! First class music; first hand testimony; and first-rate teaching. This could have been done anywhere, and it really could have been seen by anybody with a computer screen, iPad, or even a smartphone. My mind began to think of the implications. The more I think about what I observed that day the more I become convinced that this could be put to greater use. Not for the benefit of just a single church youth group, but for the enjoyment of unlimited youth groups. Here are a couple of my current thoughts on the topic.

1. Enhancing Community Between Two Or More Youth Groups

Imagine for a moment being a member of a small, rural youth group. You rarely see fellow youth who share your same values and beliefs who aren't your siblings or extended family members. You don't have a church school to attend. Your Sabbath School is made up of kids ranging from middle school to college. You may have had the same Sabbath School teacher since you were in Primary. Imagine on Sabbath morning being able to join together, with the help of technology, with a sister youth group or groups from your geographical area, share experiences, discuss topics, and maybe even perform music for each other. Perhaps your little, rural Sabbath School class is paired up virtually with a larger, resource rich, metropolitan Sabbath School class/es. Thus, the Sabbath School experience could potentially get a lot more interesting. Sabbath School leaders could share the teaching load. Social events could be coordinated.

2. Enhancing Programing Quality

Perhaps another way that technology can be used is by serving as the link to quality resources. As with the Brazilian Youth Sabbath School class, a local resource office (i.e. The local Conference Youth Department) could line up a schedule of live virtual Sabbath School programs, for example once a month, using this same technology, to provide special features or guest presenters to any number of church youth groups within the same time zone, who choose to subscribe.

The resource office has potentially broader contacts with many resources, than a local youth leader does. This would include: specialists who are willing to share their expertise, talented musicians, local members engaged in overseas mission endeavors, etc. With some legwork, one person could set this all up enriching the Sabbath School program for a whole host of Sabbath morning participants. If a local church community doesn't have the resources to provide

this level of enrichment in person, the next best thing would be to provide it through the use of the technology.

Conclusion

When talking to those who put this technology to use, their motivation was very clear: they were striving to make Sabbath School a more interesting environment for their youth, so that the Gospel would be better heard and God's Word would be better studied and better lived out. Most importantly, it was a low-cost venture: it only required a computer, a projector, a couple of microphones and a camera. Certainly, this church can serve as a model for other churches on how to use simple technology to enhance the learning experience of the Youth Sabbath School.

4 Recommendations for a Brighter Future

FINDING PURPOSE AND PRACTICES FOR YOUTH SABBATH SCHOOL

Steve Case, PhD and Hubert Cisneros, DMin

Why We Do What We Do

When it comes to any youth ministry activity, few people even ask, "Why do this?" If pressed, the answer might be personal, specific, or vague, such as: "Because we want to," or "It seemed like a good idea," or "We've gotta do something." Rarely does a person ask, "Why are we doing Sabbath School" or "Why are we doing this particular thing for Sabbath School." But this basic question should be asked; and answered. Table 1 provides a simplified list of the common reasons youth leaders do a program, such as Sabbath School, for young people.

TABLE 1
10 Common Reasons Youth Leaders Do Programs

1. Something	Just fill the time that was given.
2. Nothing	We don't do anything; we do nothing.
3. Anything	Better than doing nothing; do anything.
4. Everything	Super busy, hyperactive, lots of activity.
5. One Thing	Focus on just one thing, like SS or AY.
6. Best Thing	We only do high-quality programs.
7. Same Thing	We're in a rut, highly predictable.
8. New Thing	We only do the latest; we love fads.
9. Old Thing	It's what we've always done.
10. My Thing	Whatever I want, I don't need a reason.

Without a clear purpose for Youth Sabbath School, or any other component of youth ministry, planning becomes either non-existent, pedantic, or an aimless experiment. Lacking a clear purpose, we unconsciously evaluate by attendance ("We had more people than last week"), or how a person feels at the moment ("I liked it"), or level of criticism ("At least nobody complained"). But such statements could be equally true for just about anything—going to the movies or lunch at the cafeteria or getting something on sale at Macy's. What does this have to do with Youth Sabbath School? Can we identify a purpose or a goal for this weekly gathering? It seems that would be helpful in making a difference when it comes to planning, evaluating, and impacting the lives of young people.

Coming Up With a Purpose

To come up with a purpose for Youth Sabbath School, simply ask the question: "Why?" In other words, "Why are we doing this?" (see figure 1). Your purpose or goal should answer that question.

FIGURE 2
Youth Ministry Programs and Purpose



If you don't have a purpose, it's time to do some brainstorming, and feel free to get input from others. Ideas might include: Go to heaven, have a relationship with Christ, keep youth in the church, or reach the community. Adding these to the previous figure yields figure 2.

FIGURE 2
Youth Ministry Programs and Purpose



Either immediately or over time, some of the purposes will probably be adjusted and improved. Others will fall by the wayside. We suggest the overall purpose of CHRISTLIKENESS.[1] It includes accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord, and that involves broad and unique discipleship by living God's kingdom now as well as in the future. The Bible says: "He [God] knew those who would be His one day, and He chose them beforehand to be *conformed to the image of His Son* so that Jesus would be the firstborn of a new family of believers, all brothers and sisters." (Romans 8:29, The Voice translation; italics supplied) There may be short-term goals that lead to this overall goal, but identifying the big goal enables a person to take sequential steps to move toward that goal.

You can start your plan with the goal and then move to the program called Youth Sabbath School. But instead of asking "Why?" you would ask the question "How?" The program should provide the answer to "How?" (see figure 3). As you move from right to left, ask: "How?"

FIGURE 3
Starting With Your Purpose/Goal

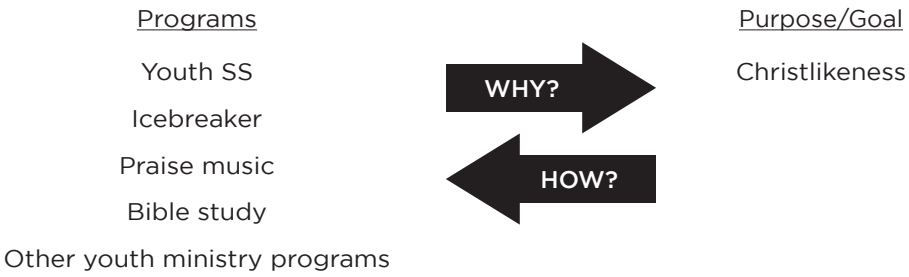


In addition to the entire program called "Youth Sabbath School" you can also take the program components and ask the "Why?" question for each one. For example, why have an icebreaker? Why have praise music? Why do Bible study? The purpose, or a step towards that purpose, should answer that simple

question. If it doesn't, then don't do it. You may need to tweak things so they fit your purpose.

Asking "Why?" should be applied to all programs for young people. A simple planning grid can give your plans the focus they need (see figure 4). Ask "Why?" as you move from left to right, for any program or part of a program. Or you can move from right to left, and ask "How?"

FIGURE 4
The Relationship Between Youth Ministry Programs and Purposes



One more step completes the planning grid. This has to do with your *philosophy* of ministry. Some would label this your values. We suggest a five-part philosophy called "Fostering relationships that build responsible servant leaders." That needs to be unpacked and explained.

"Fostering relationships" forms the foundation of youth ministry and Youth Sabbath School in particular, because Christlikeness is all about a relationship with Jesus Christ and with each other. We want the young people to become Christ-like, so we make sure our Youth Sabbath School has a lot of relationship building elements. Building relationships includes horizontal relationships with others and one's vertical relationship with God.

Another component of the method/philosophy is **"leaders."** A broad understanding of a "leader" is someone whom someone else follows. It doesn't require a large group to empower a leader. In a Youth Sabbath School this means different participants will serve in various capacities rather than one leader running the entire program. It calls for full participation to empower leaders rather than sitting passively as a spectator. For more on leadership, see *Building a Great Team*.

The **"servant"** component of the method/philosophy addresses the common adolescent challenge of self-worth. Service enhances self-worth by going beyond words of affirmation to actions that make a difference. Applying this to Youth Sabbath School, one would expect the youth themselves to find options and opportunities to serve others inside and outside of the church rather than expecting all others to serve them.

The word **"responsible"** usually resonates more with adults than with young people. Adults want the youth to be "responsible," while teens prefer "freedom." The two are related and can actually be two sides of the same coin. For a person to be responsible, that person must have the freedom to choose; otherwise responsibility is a ruse. Anyone who has freedom also carries the responsibilities of what they choose with the freedom they have. In practical terms, this means the Youth Sabbath School serves as a laboratory for young

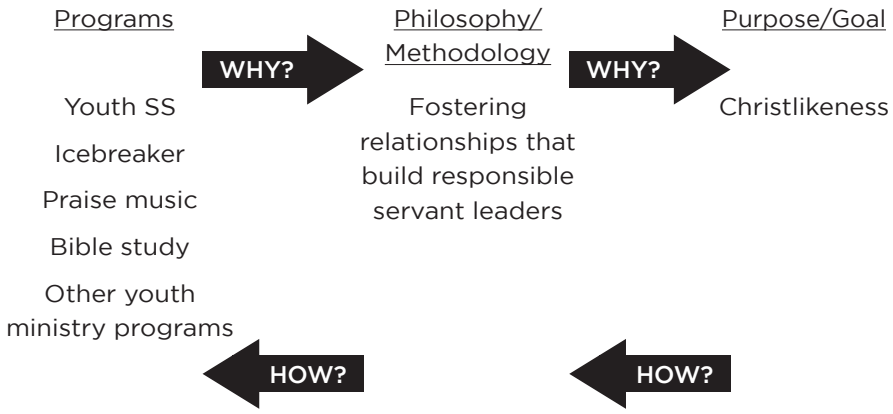
people to be given the freedom to choose what will happen during Sabbath School, and then they must follow through to make that happen.

We have almost entirely described the concept: "Fostering Relationships that Build Responsible, Servant Leaders" except for the word "**Build."** We think the best way to build young people is to provide a strong relational foundation for security and then move them out of their comfort zones for positive change. Human beings naturally seek to be comfortable, whether that's something as simple as room temperature or as complicated as avoiding interaction with strangers or people who aren't already friends. But when things become too comfortable, they end up being predictable and boring. While young children and older adults crave predictability and stability, young people prefer liveliness and something more. Risk-taking, experimentation, and "going for it" characterize young people more than other age groups.

The Bridge Between Programs and Purpose

The philosophy/methodology provides a bridge between the Youth Sabbath School and the purpose/goal of Christlikeness. You can start with the program, Youth Sabbath School, and ask "Why?" The philosophy now answers that question. You can also start on the right side and move to the left, asking, "How?" Take the purpose/goal of Christlikeness and ask "How?" Your philosophy/methodology should answer that question. As you keep moving from right to left, ask "How?" again and your program or what you do in your program should answer that question. If it doesn't, you need to change something so it will. Figure 5 shows the relationship between youth ministry philosophy and programs and purposes.

FIGURE 4
The Relationship Between Youth Ministry Programs and Purposes



While Youth Sabbath School fits under the "Program" portion, any part of youth ministry could be put in this section. You goal and philosophy will become stable over time. Your programs can and should change, or else they will become neutral/boring. When people ask, "Why are you doing this in youth ministry?" answer with the *purpose* instead of defending the *program*. You can also point out which element(s) of the *philosophy* you are using in that particular program.

Putting It Together

Rarely can a person identify the purpose for a Youth Sabbath School. Without a clearly understood purpose, Youth Sabbath Schools will continue their aimless target. The time slot might be filled, but who really cares? Young people who do attend will go through the motions with low expectations and little or no change. The weekly cycle will turn into a "hit and miss" ministry experience.

In contrast, a Youth Sabbath School with a clear overarching purpose of *Christlikeness* can provide a focus for planning, implementing, and achieving the very thing Christ desires for His followers—to become like him! A philosophy of "Fostering Relationships that Build Responsible, Servant Leaders" explains the methods of doing Youth Sabbath School so that each component answers the "Why?" question. Or you can begin with the overall goal of Christlikeness and ask the question "How?" By implementing the philosophy in each part of the Youth Sabbath School, you can make your youth ministry count.

In the following section, we list a series of concrete recommendations for the various organizational levels of the Adventist Church: Division, Union, Conference and the local church. We hope that as you read these recommendations, you will prayerfully consider moving from reflection to concrete action.

Recommendations

Based on the need for Youth Sabbath Schools to have purpose, we recommend the following:

For Division Youth Directors

1. Make a self-evaluation of what the NAD youth department is doing in terms of its own programs and purpose, and the relationship between them. For example, "Why is Youth Sabbath School part of the NAD Youth Director's job description?" If it's not, then the question would be, "Why is Youth Sabbath School not part of the NAD youth director's job description?" The youth department's purpose should answer this question. Also, evaluate how the NAD youth department practices the five components of the philosophy/methodology—relationships, leadership, service, responsibility, and non-neutral environments.

2. Identify expectations for union youth directors to report annualy their evaluation of their programs and purposes and the relationship between them in measureable terms. In addition, report an evaluation of the five components of the philosophy/methodology the union youth directors follow. The NAD youth department should then follow through with both accountability and affirmation for union youth directors.

3. Establish and implement Youth Sabbath School leadership certification in conjunction with union and conference youth directors. Certification will require a determination of what content is needed, plus the preparation of trainers in order to train others. Resources need to be identified and new resources created. Plans, financial investment, scheduling, and follow through are necessary, starting with the NAD Youth Department. But the local church Youth Sabbath School must be the focus for personnel, training, and resources as NAD networks with unions, conferences, and local churches.

4. Establish a Conference Youth Sabbath School of the Year Award of $10,000 for one conference each year for five years. This will be based on increasing the percentage of churches with Sabbath School leaders certified through annual youth leadership training, sending monthly reports to their local conference, and whose youth groups are fostering relationships that build responsible servant leaders. Use the money for Sabbath School.

For Union Youth Directors

1. Make Youth Sabbath School part of your job description. Initiate this with your union president. You will have to either let something else go or reduce the percentage you currently invest in some parts of your ministry for a change to occur.

2. Coach the conference youth directors in your union to include Youth Sabbath School as part of their job description. Have them initiate this change with their conference president and be supportive of them in this action.

3. Provide resources and training for conference youth directors to train local church Youth Sabbath School leaders. This should be done in conjunction with the NAD certification.

4. Communicate with the NAD Youth Department on needs you have, the conference youth directors have, and the local church Youth Sabbath School leaders have. Share with NAD the resources local churches have found effective.

5. Establish a Youth Sabbath School of the Year Award of $5,000 to be awarded once a year for five years. This will be based on the local church Sabbath School leaders becoming certified, sending monthly reports to their local conference, and fostering relationships that build responsible servant leaders in their church's youth ministry. Funds would be restricted to domestic or international outreach projects or mission trips.

For Conference Youth Directors

1. Make Youth Sabbath School part of your job description. Initiate this with your conference president. If you are not going to do this, recruit a "Conference Teen Director" (paid or volunteer) to oversee this and empower them to represent and act on your behalf so Youth Sabbath School receives conference support and action for the local church.

2. Discover which churches in your conference have a Youth Sabbath School. This will take time, especially if little or no relationship currently exists between you and the local church.

3. Identify who the Youth Sabbath School leaders are in the churches that have a Youth Sabbath School.

4. As these contacts with local church Youth Sabbath School leaders are made, listen for feedback on what is happening in the local church Youth Sabbath School, what is not happening, and how the conference youth department can best serve them in their church.

5. Allocate time to research and respond to the needs expressed.

6. Develop a network of communication in which you are able to share the good news of what others are doing and solicit help and interaction with fellow Youth Sabbath School leaders in the conference.

7. Provide certification training for local church Youth Sabbath School leaders. Two resources already published and available include *A Place to Belong* and *Building a Great Team.*[2]

8. Prepare to share resources for Youth Sabbath School, and ask what others are using and their evaluation of them. AdventSource carries many youth ministry resources.

9. Establish a Youth Sabbath School of the Year Award of $1,000 to be awarded once a year for five years. This will be based on the local church Sabbath School leaders becoming certified, sending monthly reports to their local conference, and fostering relationships that build responsible servant leaders. Funds would be restricted to domestic or international outreach projects or mission trips.

For Local Church Youth Sabbath School Leaders

1. Have an overall purpose for your Youth Sabbath School. If you don't have one yet, develop one as described in this paper or in *A Place to Belong*. You can do this by yourself, but it's usually better to do it with a group of those invested in youth ministry (see *Building a Great Team*). Implement the philosophy/methodology so each component of Sabbath School connects with your purpose. Use this for your planning and evaluation.

2. Connect and share with other Youth Sabbath School leaders from other churches.

3. Always be training young people to be leaders in various ways in the Youth Sabbath School. Expect them to graduate and continue to serve as spiritual leaders wherever they go, and start training the next individuals that come into the Youth Sabbath School.

4. Connect with your conference youth director and ask for input. Get certified through the certification process recommended to the NAD Youth Department.

5. Share with the conference youth director what you're doing and not doing, as well as needs you perceive when it comes to Youth Sabbath School.

Endnotes

[1] Nevin Harner used this term in 1939 to name the church's objective in educating church members. Klaus Issler used the same term in 2001 to identify the goal to which we educate in the church. In 2014, Steve Case and Hubert Cisneros labeled "Christlikeness" as the broad, overall goal for all youth ministry.

[2] Both of these resources have six sessions from which a person could choose to provide youth ministry training. These are available from Advent*Source*.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Joe Kidder and Gerardo Oudri

The last day of the 180 Symposium, the participants were divided into three focus groups, and each group was asked to discuss and share ideas on a specific area related to Sabbath School: **a) Administration:** this group discussed recommendations for administrators at all levels of the Adventist church; **b) Resources:** this group explored recommendations regarding resources for Youth Sabbath School. **c) Leadership:** this group focused on how to identify and develop strong leaders for the local church.

In this section, we report the final recommendations made by these three focus groups. While not all recommendations apply to all readers equally—for example, some apply to administrators, while others apply to local church Sabbath School teachers—we do encourage each reader to prayerfully consider those recommendations that may be relevant and applicable to their context, and to wisely move from reflection to action, as we all strive for a better Youth Sabbath School.

Recommendations for Administration

The group began by reading some relevant sections of the church manual. Important questions arose: Who is going to own (administratively) Youth Sabbath School? Why would they own it? What administrative structure can best support the Youth Sabbath School? Here are some of the key recommendations made by the group for the various levels of our church:

Recommendations for the Local Church

- *Influence the influencers.* Start by influencing the Pastor and the leadership of the church, and help them understand the vital role of the Youth Sabbath School to disciple the youth.
- *Improve Communication.* Seek ways to improve communication between all levels of the denomination (Division, Union, Conference) and the local church.
- *Foster Mentorship.* Identify Elders who have a passion for Youth Sabbath School and pair them with a younger person so that they can work together in Youth Ministry.
- *Network.* Create a network for Sabbath School with other churches.
- *Involve Youth.* Meet with the youth and seek ways to involve them in Sabbath School.

Recommendations for the Conference Youth Department

- *Sabbath School Inclusion.* Make the Youth Sabbath School an integral part of your ministry. Include this in your job description.

- *Develop Recruitment Resources.* Brochure, video, USB card, etc., explaining the need for and what is required of youth leader.
- *Celebrate Leaders.* Recognition of outstanding Youth and Sabbath School leaders at Camp Meeting.
- *Provide Training.* Organize training events specific for Youth Sabbath School leaders and teachers (facilitators) regularly.
- *Cast a Wider Vision.* Cast a vision for an integral Youth Sabbath School (one that includes discipleship, community, ministry and evangelism).

Recommendations for the Union Youth Department

- Support Conference Youth Directors in their Youth Sabbath School leadership training efforts
- Make Sabbath School a vital part of your ministry
- Promote Youth Sabbath School vision and ideas at Union Youth Advisories
- Intentionally work with the other levels of the denomination to develop relevant resources for Youth Sabbath School

Recommendations for the Division Youth Department

- Appoint someone at the Division level to be responsible specifically for the Youth Sabbath School ministry
- Give direction to Youth Sabbath School (vision, resources and materials for the local church)
- Facilitate networking with Unions and Conferences
- Develop resources

Recommendations for Leadership Development

The goal for this group was to think of concrete ideas to identify and develop Youth Sabbath School leaders and facilitators. Here is a summary of their recommendations.

- Move from program to people making discipleship the main focus.
- Be sensitive to differences between youth and young adults
- Involve the youth in the planning and executing
- Be intentional on mentoring
- Involve parents in leadership
- Consider the following key factors for Leadership Development
    - Define the type of leadership you are looking for (Disciple-makers, mentors, facilitators, etc.)

- Seek ways to identify the leaders (Gift-based, passion for Youth Ministry, etc.)
- Train how to lead
- Create effective leadership network
- Create a fresh Youth Sabbath School leadership manual (Different modules: earliteen/youth/young adults)

Recommendations for Youth Sabbath School Resources

This group worked on specific recommendations for the development of quality and relevant resources for Youth Sabbath School. They began by attempting to answer the question: What is the most pressing thing right now when it comes to Youth Sabbath School resources? Here are the main responses:

- Variety of teaching methods should be utilized
- Adventist curriculum that is multi-sensory, media-rich, easy to use, easy to train
- Training resources, not necessarily certification but with skills
- Resources that focus and give a higher priority on the group and creating conversations rather than on the curriculum as the primary thing
- We need access to a variety of resources
- Contextualized resources
- Provide resources in a digital format

The group then transitioned into considering some key notions on resource development. Three areas where identified: a) People as resource; b) Materials as resource; and c) Delivery systems. Here is a summary of their findings.

People as Resource

- People are the number one resource. Without people, there would be no ministry in the church.
- Presently, there is no methodology to access the people who are involved in Youth Sabbath School; no way to connect resources to the leaders. There is no effective communication system between the Conference and the local church. Youth Director is key to this. We need new ways to connect with churches—church leaders, youth leaders and teachers.
- Create a database of Youth Sabbath School leaders
- Use the Adventist Learning Community (ALC) for resources. https://www.adventistlearningcommunity.com
- The leader needs to have access to resources that take little time to use (Sabbath School in a box)

- Provide a forum for youth leaders to communicate with each other. Facebook could easily be this spot.

Materials as Resource

- Contextualized materials. Cultural groups and ethnicities—what about Hispanic youth and others? Regional churches? There's no way that one curriculum can meet every need. Also class sizes, geography, urban and rural; institutional vs. non-institutional. Can we customize? At what cost? With what effectiveness? Can there be some elements that can be customized and scaled based on size? Which items are universal and which items need to be individualized?
- Good resource to consider as basis to create resources: "Teaching that Makes a Difference", by Dan Lambert.
- We need more illustration material in audio-visual format.
- Build on the iBelieve video clips.
- If a local church creates something, upload it to a place others can get it.
- Consider something like the Haystack website (thehaystack.org). It was launched in 2014, and it houses videos, podcasts, blogs that a good number of Adventists are doing. There is a screening group and then there is a library. In other words, develop a media hub for Adventist young adults.
- "Slack.com" is an example of collaborating. Global Adventist Network has joined Slack.
- We need a central spot for Adventist resources.
- AdventSource supports resources for NAD. For example, Pathfinder supplies. There are some resources, but not a lot for youth and young adult, and no curriculum. The target group is local church leaders. Email, Facebook, Twitter, Vimeo, etc., but many people still don't know about it.
- We need a central, recognizable brand.

Delivery Systems

- Pacific Press, R&H, ABCs are the delivery system currently in place. Pacific Press is a wholesaler with ABCs and their website, magazines, Facebook and Twitter, limited on YouTube. A lot of resources for children and youth, but policy doesn't allow them to compete with SDA curriculum from the GC.
- Challenge: the youth are not the ones who purchase this; adults or other gatekeepers are the ones who make that decision. Who are the gatekeepers? Some of these adults want items that wouldn't necessarily be what the youth need or identify with. Whatever resources are developed, adequate attention must be given to convince the actual potential buyers, to actually do so.

- Online might be the place to put more current and potentially controversial items so they are "optional" rather than the standard fare.
- Another challenge, we lack a mechanism to communicate directly to local churches and their leaders. The best way currently for PPPA to let people know about a new resource is to use snail mail to a generic: Youth Leader at the local church. We don't know who to connect with.
- We need a marketing strategy to reach different groups. The Haystack gatherings—with food and showing videos, etc.—is an example of something we simply haven't tried.
- It would be good to have some youth ministry kits identified. ABCs could do this better.
- Would a simple SS app be THE answer to Youth SS? Not necessarily! It can certainly be useful. The main need, however, is to train people AND the creation of and access to materials.
- Have an app for training.
- There is still value in print material. We want to be media-rich, but don't stop print, either.
- For the North American Division: Fund, coordinate, create a strategy, and follow through.

"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." — Joseph Kidder and Gerardo Oudri, Editors

Hope for the Orphan is a compilation of reports given at the 180 Symposium themed "Sabbath School Matters!" At this event a group of administrators, scholars, practitioners, youth, and resource producers met for an honest dialogue with the purpose of identifying some of the main challenges affecting youth and young adult Sabbath School ministry, as well as potential solutions.

The presentations are divided into four sections:

- Defining the Challenges
- Exploring the Solutions
- Improving Learning Styles and Models
- Recommendations for a Brighter Future

Of particular interest to readers will be the recommendations included in the final chapter of this book, "Report from Focus Groups."



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