



# SABBATH FELLOWSHIP GROUP



# SABBATH FELLOWSHIP GROUP

SOCIAL MEETINGS

# MISSION:

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Hebrews 10:23-25

The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken. If he can control minds so that doubt and unbelief and darkness shall compose the experience of those who claim to be the children of God, he can overcome them with temptation. { GW 161 }

That simple faith which takes God at His word should be encouraged. God's people must have that faith which will lay hold of divine power; "for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." [Ephesians 2:8.] Those who believe that God for Christ's sake has forgiven their sins, should not, through temptation, fail to press on to fight the good fight of faith. Their faith should grow stronger until their Christian life, as well as their words, shall declare, "The blood of Jesus Christ ...cleanseth us from all sin." [1 John 1:7.] { GW 161 }

Now our meeting is drawing to a close, and not one confession has been made; there has not been a single break so as to let the Spirit of God in.

Now I was saying what was the use of our assembling here together and for our ministering brethren to come in if they are here only to shut out the Spirit of God from the people? We did hope that there would be a turning to the Lord here. Perhaps you feel that you have all you want.

When I have been made to pass over the history of the Jewish nation and have seen where they stumbled because they did not walk in the light, I have been led to realize where we as a people would be led if we refuse the light God would give us. Eyes have ye but ye see not; ears, but ye hear not. Now, brethren, light has come to us and we want to be where we can grasp it, and God will lead us out one by one to Him

EGW { 1888 152-3 }

# HISTORY AND BACKGROUND



## John Wesley 1703-1791

1735 - At one point in the voyage a storm came up and broke the mast off the ship. While the English panicked, the Moravians calmly sang hymns and prayed. This experience led Wesley to believe that the Moravians possessed an inner strength which he lacked.

May 24 1738 - "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Daniel L. Burnett writes: "The significance of Wesley's Aldersgate Experience is monumental ... Without it, the names of Wesley and Methodism would likely be nothing more than obscure footnotes in the pages of church history."

“Methodism was an experiential system; many church leaders were telling people what they ought to do, while Methodists were telling each other what they were doing. There was no discussion allowed which was theoretical, hypothetical or Speculative.”



# John Wesley

- Vegetarian
- Temperance - “Thanks be to God, since the time I gave up flesh meals and wine I have been delivered from all physical ills”
- Separation of Church and State
- Abolition

In his day, John Wesley was fighting a spiritual battle. Wesley desired a true Christian revival. He addresses this in his sermon, The Almost Christian. He believed that people were showing the outward form of Christianity by not doing anything that was expressly forbidden by the gospel. His call to change was to get people to make that inward change of the heart through loving God and neighbor (Outler & Heitzenrater, p. 62-68). The inward change that Wesley so desired to see in people is the purpose behind the Methodist societies, classes, and bands. After John Wesley's death the structure of these Methodist groups began to deteriorate. (Krisp – John Wesley and Class Meetings)

1842 – Ellen Harmon age 15

I had never prayed in public and had only spoken a few timid words in prayer meeting. It was now impressed upon me that I should seek God in prayer at our small social meetings. This I dared not do, fearful of becoming confused and failing to express my thoughts. But the duty was impressed upon my mind so forcibly that when I attempted to pray in secret I seemed to be mocking God because I had failed to obey His will. Despair overwhelmed me, and for three long weeks no ray of light pierced the gloom that encompassed me. { 1T 26.1}

I now confided all my sorrows and perplexities to my mother. She tenderly sympathized with and encouraged me, advising me to go for counsel to Elder Stockman, who then preached the advent doctrine in Portland.

During the few minutes in which I received instruction from Elder Stockman, I had obtained more knowledge on the subject of God's love and pitying tenderness than from all the sermons and exhortations to which I had ever listened. I returned home and again went before the Lord, promising to do and suffer anything He might require of me, if only the smiles of Jesus might cheer my heart. The same duty was presented to me that had troubled my mind before—to take up my cross among the assembled people of God. An opportunity was not long wanting; there was a prayer meeting that evening, which I attended. { 1T 30.3}

I bowed trembling during the prayers that were offered. After a few had prayed, I lifted up my voice in prayer before I was aware of it. The promises of God appeared to me like so many precious pearls that were to be received only for the asking. As I prayed, the burden and agony of soul that I had so long endured left me, and the blessing of the Lord descended upon me like the gentle dew. I praised God from the depths of my heart. Everything seemed shut out from me but Jesus and His glory, and I lost consciousness of what was passing around me. { 1T 31.1 }

The Spirit of God rested upon me with such power that I was unable to go home that night. When I did return, on the following day, a great change had taken place in my mind. It seemed to me that I could hardly be the same person that left my father's house the previous evening. This passage was continually in my thoughts: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." My heart was full of happiness as I softly repeated these words. { 1T 31.2}

The night after receiving so great a blessing, I attended the advent meeting. When the time came for the followers of Christ to speak in His favor, I could not remain silent, but rose and related my experience. Not a thought had entered my mind of what I should say; but the simple story of Jesus' love to me fell from my lips with perfect freedom, and my heart was so happy to be liberated from its bondage of dark despair that I lost sight of the people about me and seemed to be alone with God. I found no difficulty in expressing my peace and happiness, except for the tears of gratitude that choked my utterance as I told of the wondrous love that Jesus had shown for me.

Elder Stockman was present. He had recently seen me in deep despair, and the remarkable change in my appearance and feelings touched his heart; he wept aloud, rejoicing with me and praising God for this proof of His tender mercy and loving-kindness. {1T 32}

Not long after receiving this great blessing, I attended a conference meeting at the Christian church, where Elder Brown was pastor. I was invited to relate my experience, and I felt not only great freedom of expression, but happiness, in telling my simple story of the love of Jesus and the joy of being accepted of God. As I spoke, with subdued heart and tearful eyes, my soul seemed drawn toward heaven in thanksgiving. The melting power of the Lord came upon the assembled people. Many were weeping and others praising God. { 1T 33.1 }



## ACTS 2 CHURCH

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe (or fear) came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

COUNSEL

## COUNSEL

The minister should not feel that it is his duty to do all the talking and all the laboring and all the praying; he should educate helpers in every church. **Let different ones take turns in leading the meetings**, and in giving Bible readings; in so doing they will be calling into use the talents which God has given them, and at the same time be receiving a training as workers.

The best help that ministers can give the members of our churches is not sermonizing, but planning work for them. Give each one something to do for others. Help all to see that as receivers of the grace of Christ they are under obligation to work for Him. And let all be taught how to work. Especially should those who are newly come to the faith be educated to become laborers together with God.

Christian Service, p. 68-69

## COUNSEL

“Do not depend on the ministers to do all the work in your church and neighborhood. The pastors must seek the lost sheep, and you must help them; and while the ministers are called to labor in other parts of the vineyard, the people of God must have light in themselves, speaking to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts and making melody unto the Lord. While you should respect the ministers highly for their work’s sake, you must not trust them as your saviours, but build yourselves up in the most holy faith. **When you assemble in the house of God, tell your experiences, and you will grow stronger. While you speak in meeting, you are gaining an education that will enable you to labor for others.** What a precious privilege it is to bring souls to Christ. It is the greatest work that mortals can do, for in so doing they are co-laborers with God. But of ourselves we can do nothing. If we try to work in our own strength, we shall fail completely. Jesus came to our world to bring divine power to combine with human effort. When God unites his power with man’s effort, the work is brought to perfection. God wants to do great things for his people; and if we only have faith in him, he will work for us mightily.” { RH May 7, 1889, par. 8 }

## COUNSEL

Often Make Sabbath Meeting a Bible Class—It has often been presented to me that there should be less sermonizing by ministers acting merely as local pastors of churches, and that greater personal efforts should be put forth. **Our people should not be made to think that they need to listen to a sermon every Sabbath.** Many who listen frequently to sermons, even though the truth be presented in clear lines, learn but little. Often it would be more profitable if the Sabbath meetings were of the nature of a Bible class study. Bible truth should be presented in such a simple, interesting manner that all can easily understand and grasp the principles of salvation.— EGW Letter 192, 1906.

## COUNSEL

We should arouse every energy that God has given us, and should pray without ceasing. We should press our petitions to the throne of grace. We should plead with God to give us the spirit of supplication, that we may seek for those things which he has pledged himself to bestow upon us. If you pray in faith, you will gain a rich experience, because you will be living as in the sight of God; and **when you come together on the Sabbath in the capacity of a social or prayer meeting, the angels of God will accompany you, to be round about you in the house of worship. You will not be without a testimony to bear to the glory of God.**

{ RH October 22, 1889, par. 8 }

## COUNSEL

All heaven is keeping the Sabbath, but not in a listless, do-nothing way. On this day every energy of the soul should be awake, for are we not to meet with God and with Christ our Saviour? We may behold Him by faith. He is longing to refresh and bless every soul. { 6T 362.1}

Everyone should feel that he has a part to act in making the Sabbath meetings interesting. **You are not to come together simply as a matter of form, but for the interchange of thought, for the relation of your daily experiences, for the expression of thanksgiving, for the utterance of your sincere desire for divine enlightenment, that you may know God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent.** Communing together in regard to Christ will strengthen the soul for life's trials and conflicts. Never think that you can be Christians and yet withdraw yourselves within yourselves. Each one is a part of the great web of humanity, and the experience of each will be largely determined by the experience of his associates. { 6T 362.2}

**We do not obtain a hundredth part of the blessing we should obtain from assembling together** to worship God. Our perceptive faculties need sharpening. Fellowship with one another should make us glad. With such a hope as we have, why are not our hearts all aglow with the love of God? { 6T 362.3}

## COUNSEL

Says the prophet, “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. And the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.” You can see from this text that the burden of the social meeting does not rest upon one individual, but upon all. We are to speak one to another. There is nothing that will so completely kill out the true spirit of devotion in social worship as for one to occupy the time to the exclusion of others. When one person takes up twenty or thirty minutes in a long-drawn testimony, it is not for the glory of God, but that self may be exhibited; it is not for the prosperity of him who does it, or for the prosperity of the church.

(cont)



## COUNSEL

It is death to the meeting. Those who are willing to let some one else do their talking for them, are willing to rob themselves of the blessing that God has for them, and they are failing to obtain the experience which it is necessary for them to have in order that they may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. It is essential that every member of the church should keep himself in working order, so that he can have freedom in speaking his thoughts intelligently to the members of the church.

{ RH October 22, 1889, par. 9 }

## COUNSEL

When one person takes up an undue proportion of the time, he is depriving some one else of his privilege to speak in meeting, and is giving an entirely wrong mold to the service. It would be entirely proper for the one who is appointed to lead the meeting; to call upon others frequently to take his place; and let every one who names the name of Christ have a testimony to bear in social meeting. Let it be right to the point, relating personal experience as to what God has done for your soul. No one has a right to take up time that belongs to another, and so deprive a brother of his privilege to bear testimony. This long sermonizing does not benefit any of the hearers. But while one person should not occupy all the time, there should be no waiting one upon another. Those who have an abundance to say out of meeting, should not be found silent in meeting. (cont)

## COUNSEL

We have certainly subject matter enough about which to talk. We have the great principles of salvation revealed in the word of God, which concern our eternal welfare, and our very souls should be all aglow with the love of God. We should be ready to speak forth his praises. Christ should abide in our hearts by faith, that we may learn of him, and be laborers together with him. We should unitedly go forth, determined, through the help of God, to bear testimony to his glory in every act of our life. { RH October 22, 1889, par. 10 }

## COUNSEL

Sabbath Services—The one appointed to conduct Sabbath services should study how to interest his hearers in the truths of the Word. He should not always give so long a discourse that there will be no opportunity for those present to confess Christ. **The sermon should frequently be short, so that the people may express their thanksgiving to God. Gratitude-offerings glorify the name of the Lord. In every assembly of the saints holy angels listen to the praise offered to Jehovah in testimony, song, and prayer. { GW 171.1 }**

## Counsel

I am questioning on my way home what I should do about Parramatta meeting. . . When we entered the church, Brother Smith was in the stand. Although it was early, before time, I stepped up in the desk, and after bustling about a little he stepped down, but he gave out the hymn and stepped up in the desk to read the hymn. As soon as the hymn was closed, I knelt and prayed. At the social service he took it, apparently, completely on himself. Seated himself facing the congregation and almost preached a discourse before giving the others a chance to speak. His movements were painful to me and entirely out of place. How glad I was that the people assembled were not afflicted with any more of his service than they did have. I think it is time something was done in this case.

EGW. Lt 152, 1894 to WCW

## Counsel

In the social meeting there is special need of clear, distinct utterance, that all may hear the testimonies borne and be benefited by them. Difficulties are removed and help is given as in social meeting God's people relate their experiences. But too often the testimonies are borne with faulty, indistinct utterance, and it is impossible to gain a correct idea of what is said. Thus the blessing is often lost. (cont)

## Counsel

Let those who pray and those who speak pronounce their words properly, and speak in clear, distinct, even tones. Prayer, if properly offered, is a power for good. It is one of the means used by the Lord to communicate to the people the precious treasures of truth. But prayer is not what it should be, because of the defective voices of those who utter it. Satan rejoices when the prayers offered to God are almost inaudible.

Let God's people learn how to speak and pray in a way that will properly represent the great truths they possess. Let the testimonies borne and the prayers offered be clear and distinct. Thus God will be glorified. Let all make the most of the talent of speech. GW 88

## Counsel

God has given us the gift of speech that we may recite to others His dealing with us, that His love and compassion may touch other hearts, and that praise may arise from other souls also to Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. The Lord has said, "Ye are My witnesses." Isaiah 43:10. But all who are called to be witnesses for Christ must learn of Him, that they may be efficient witnesses. As children of the heavenly King, they should educate themselves to bear testimony in a clear, distinct voice and in such a manner that no one may receive the impression that they are reluctant to tell of the mercies of the Lord. {CT 243}

I do not write these things to silence you, for there has already been too much silence in our meetings; but I write that you may consecrate your voice to Him who gave you this gift, and may realize the necessity of cultivating it so that you may edify the church by what you say. If you have acquired the habit of speaking in a low, indistinct way, you should regard it as a defect, and put forth earnest efforts to overcome, that you may honor God and edify His children. { CT 245}



## Counsel

God says by the psalmist, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.” The worship of God consists chiefly of praise and prayer. Every follower of Christ should engage in this worship. No one can sing by proxy, bear testimony by proxy, or pray by proxy. As a rule, too many dark testimonies are borne in social service [prayer meeting], savoring more of murmuring than of gratitude and praise.

When the word of God was spoken to the Hebrews anciently, the Lord said to Moses, “And let all the people say, Amen.” This response, in the fervor of their souls, was required as evidence that they understood the word spoken and were interested in it.

All who are connected with the light will let their light shine to the world, and will, in their testimonies, praise God, to whom their hearts will flow forth in gratitude. RH Jan 1 1880

## Counsel

The readings have been made short, in order that there may be opportunity at each meeting for remarks from the minister, if one is present, or a prayer and social service. Do not for anything let the meeting drag. Brief, earnest prayers, testimonies short and right to the point, spirited singing from the heart, — this is pleasing to God.

O.A.Olsen GC Pr. 1896 Week of Prayer Suggestions

# EXAMPLES

## 1897 General Conference Schedule

### SABBATH, FEB. 27

10:45 A. M. Sermon.

3:30 P. M. Social Service.

### SABBATH, MARCH 6

10:45 A. M. Sermon.

3:30 P. M. Social Service.

I spoke to our people upon Sabbath with much freedom. A social meeting followed where many bore testimony for the truth and expressed gratitude for that which they had heard, and said they meant from that time to be more earnest and interested in the work and cause of God than they had been heretofore. At the close of the social meeting, the Lord's Supper was administered. Brother Wood officiated. It was a solemn, impressive symbol to us, and brought fresh and impressively to mind the words of Christ, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world." John 6:51. (Lt 21, 1880)

Sabbath, February 19, I spoke to the people at 9 A. M. The Lord gave me of his Holy Spirit as I presented before them the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. In the afternoon, at 3 o'clock, we assembled for social meeting. I was much blessed as I spoke to them again, upon the necessity of our coming up to greater sympathy and more decided contemplation of the great sufferings of Christ. We think of these altogether too little. I requested those who desired prayers to come forward. The seats were quickly filled, and my heart was stirred as I saw the whole congregation on their feet. I said, Sit down just where you are, and we will all seek the Lord together. (cont)

Before the season of prayer, **many testimonies were given in quick succession and with deep feeling**, showing that hearts were touched by the Spirit of the Lord. Confessions were made with tears. We were glad to see this work going forward; for we knew it was just such a work as was needed to bring the people into that position of humbling their hearts and confessing their sins before God, that he would accept their repentance and their efforts to seek him. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

(cont)

Elder Haskell preached with great plainness. I went out to the stand with trembling, my head throbbing with pain. I spoke from the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah. The Lord spoke through me. The words came in demonstration of the Spirit and power, almost faster than I could articulate them. The congregation were nearly all in tears. I called them forward and about fifty came forward and they bore testimony. All were weeping like children. All felt the power and presence of God. There was indeed the revealing of His power. Hearts were subdued and broken before God. { 7MR 29.4 }

A Dunkard preacher bore an excellent testimony. One white-headed man bore testimony that he thought he was not able to come to the meeting, but when he read in the paper that Elder Van Horn and Sister White were to be present he thought he must come. He came one hundred and forty miles on horseback and on foot. He had not heard an Advent sermon for six years. The meeting he had had that day was precious indeed. The discourse he had listened to from Sister White would be food for him a long time. He was well paid for his journey if he received no more. Said he could not stay but a few days but must return home. In going and coming, this man in feeble health, would travel two hundred and eighty miles to hear two or three discourses. { 7MR 30.1 }



1909 General Conference – June 7  
*'The Closing Social Service' - A Testimony Meeting*

A. G. Daniells: We have now come to our closing service. We have been together after a four-years' separation in all parts of the world. Many of us who are gathered here will not be together four years from now. From that standpoint we feel a sense of sadness and regret to see the meeting close. Yet there is another side, as expressed by the prophet, in Zechariah 2:10, 11: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee." (cont)

From this view-point we may all rejoice here; for God has literally and truly sent us to all nations, and the very message we bear to the world, as indicated in the wording of the message itself, is to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” Those who first took up the proclamation of this message believed that it was to be carried to the uttermost parts of the earth, and they set out with that purpose in view. They have continued their work until this has, in a measure, been accomplished. At this meeting we have men and women who have come here to tell us about the progress of the work in the uttermost parts of the world.

(cont)

Following Elder Daniells's remarks, a testimony meeting was held in which many took part. The following extracts are taken from a few of the testimonies borne:—

Wm. Covert, Illinois: I think I have been present at every General Conference except one during the last thirty-five years, and I have been hoping that it would be my privilege to attend every one until the Lord comes. I feel much encouraged at the prospect before us.

Mrs. H. J. Edmed, South Africa: I desire to thank the Lord for the precious privilege of attending this Conference. I have believed the third angel's message for twenty-one years. I thank God that we can go back to our field of labor with increased courage, and a more earnest determination to labor until the work is finished.

H. H. Dexter, France: I praise the Lord for what this message has done for me. I love this message, and desire to go back to my field filled with the Spirit of God, and with a burden for the salvation of lost souls. (cont)

A brother from Holland: Though I can not speak good English, I want to thank the Lord with all my heart that I have been here at this meeting.

F. W. Spies, Brazil: A day or two ago several of us were marking on the map the churches we have in South America. When we got through, we had the continent belted from the equator on the Atlantic side to the equator on the Pacific. It begins to look as if the work would soon be done, and we could go home.

H. H. Dexter, France: I praise the Lord for what this message has done for me. I love this message, and desire to go back to my field filled with the Spirit of God, and with a burden for the salvation of lost souls.

E. W. Farnsworth: My father began to keep the Sabbath four years before I was born, and he was the first man who began to keep the Sabbath as an Adventist. Father is dead; and while it may be a pleasant thought to think that I am connected with one who had the fear of God before his eyes sufficiently to obey the truth under those circumstances, we must have a living faith for this time, and walk by faith, and not by sight. (cont)

Sister McCoy, Pitcairn Island: I feel as if I could not let the meeting pass without thanking the Lord for allowing the truth to come to our little island. I love the truth, and the more I hear of it, the more I love it; and when it triumphs, I expect to triumph with it.

C. N. Miller, editor of the paper for the blind: I am thankful for the enjoyment of this meeting. My heart is filled with gratitude for what I comprehend in knowing that this message is going to the uttermost parts of the earth.

R. J. Bryant: Just thirteen years ago this truth was brought to me by a canvasser one evening after the Sabbath. It got such a grip upon me that Monday morning I was out selling books, and the Lord helped me to sell \$150 in the homes of the people before I ever had the privilege to keep a Sabbath. I praise God for this truth and the part he gives me in it.

Many others also spoke, and it was with difficulty that the meeting was brought to a close at 5:30. It was an occasion of rich blessing.

(GCB June 7 1909)

## 1889 Meetings at South Lancaster, Mass - RH March 5 1889

On Sabbath afternoon, many hearts were touched, and many souls were fed on the bread that cometh down from heaven. After the discourse we enjoyed a precious social meeting. The Lord came very near, and convicted souls of their great need of his grace and love. We felt the necessity of presenting Christ as a Saviour who was not afar off, but nigh at hand. When the Spirit of God begins to work upon the hearts of men, the fruit is seen in confession of sin, and restitution for wrongs. All through the meetings, as the people sought to draw nearer to God, they brought forth works meet for repentance by confessing one to another where they had wronged each other by word or act. Wild, clamorous cries and exercises are no evidence that the Spirit of God is at work. The Lord manifested himself to Elijah in the still small voice. Says Christ, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." It is the sinner himself who has barred the door. Will he take down the barriers? Will he unbolt the door? The locks are all on his side of the door, not on the Saviour's side. (cont)

## Meetings at South Lancaster, Mass

Both students and teachers have shared largely in the blessing of God. The deep movings of the Spirit of God have been felt upon almost every heart. The general testimony was borne by those who attended the meeting that they had obtained an experience beyond anything they had known before. They testified their joy that Christ had forgiven their sins. Their hearts were filled with thanksgiving and praise to God. Sweet peace was in their souls. They loved every one, and felt that they could rest in the love of God. (cont)

## Meetings at South Lancaster, Mass

I have never seen a revival work go forward with such thoroughness, and yet remain so free from all undue excitement. There was no urging or inviting. The people were not called forward, but there was a solemn realization that Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. The honest in heart were ready to confess their sins, and to bring forth fruit to God by repentance and restoration, as far as it lay in their power. We seemed to breathe in the very atmosphere of heaven. Angels were indeed hovering around. Friday evening the social service began at five, and it was not closed until nine. No time was lost; for every one had a living testimony to bear. The meeting would have continued hours longer, if it had been allowed to run this full course; but it was thought best to close it at that time. I was not able to sleep that night until nearly day. The Lord had visited his people. And there was joy in heaven among the angels over the repentant sinners that had come back to the Father. What a beautiful sight it was to the universe to see that as fallen men and women beheld Christ, they were changed, taking the impression of his image upon their souls. (cont)



## Meetings at South Lancaster, Mass

There were many who testified that as the searching truths had been presented, they had been convicted in the light of the law as transgressors. They had been trusting in their own righteousness. Now they saw it as filthy rags, in comparison with the righteousness of Christ, which is alone acceptable to God. While they had not been open transgressors, they saw themselves depraved and degraded in heart. They had substituted other gods in the place of their Heavenly Father. They had struggled to refrain from sin, but had trusted in their own strength. We should go to Jesus just as we are, confess our sins, and cast our helpless souls upon our compassionate Redeemer. This subdues the pride of the heart, and is a crucifixion of self. In the parable, the father saw the returning prodigal son. He saw his repentance and contrition of soul, and he had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. The son spoke his penitence, saying, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." The prodigal made a full confession of his sin. He made no excuse for his wrong-doing, and he was forgiven, and re-established in his father's house. RH March 5 1889

YOUTH'S INSTRUCTOR

8-1-1860

Decatur City Sabbath School. We have a Sabbath-school connected with our social meetings on every Sabbath. We commenced at the first of Genesis, taking from three to four chapters for a lesson. We have now got to the last of the book. School commences at ten o'clock by singing and prayer. The lesson is read, then the scholars recite their verses committed to memory; and if there are any questions to ask pertaining to the lesson, either by scholars or teachers, they have the privilege. Our school consists of about twelve scholars, and one teacher presides over them. After school is out our social meeting commences. As I am a learner, I would ask if there is any better way to carry on a Sabbath-school. W. H. FORTUNE, Sup't.

7-1-1862

“Suffer Them to Come unto Me.” So says the kind and gentle Saviour to all those to all those children who will listen to the voice of the good Shepherd. Jesus says to little children, “Come unto me,” for he knows they can be safe no where else. To come to Jesus, means to do his will and go with his people.

How pleased I was a few days since when I saw a timid, sweet little girl eight years of age, rise up in the prayer meeting and tell the people she was going to be a Christian. That is just the way to come to the Saviour. Get up in the social meeting as this child did, and you will then have courage to do other duties which will bring greater blessings. God wants all the children to do right, to be baptized, and be saved. Children, will you come to the Saviour ? Will you come now?

6-25-1884

NORA B. WILSON writes from Jeff. Co., Iowa. She says: "We kept the Sabbath alone until last fall Elds. McCoy and Hankins came here with their tent, and gave a course of lectures, and now we have a nice little company, who meet together every Sabbath for Sabbath-school and social-meeting. We have prayer-meeting every Wednesday night at private houses. I am twelve years old. I have a brother nineteen years old, and one nine years old. I want to live so I can meet the INSTRUCTOR family in the kingdom of God.

7-24-1902

From Seattle, Washington - It is now nearly six months since the young people here in Seattle organized a Young People's Society. There were eight of us when we organized; some who joined then have moved away, but others have been added to our numbers, and altogether we have fourteen members at present, with the hope that others will join soon. We generally have a fairly good attendance, some of the older members of the church coming, and outsiders, too. We are following the lessons given in the YOUTH'S INSTRUCTOR, with an occasional reading from the Testimonies or some magazine, and we always have a social meeting. These meetings have been a great help to me, and I have heard several others say the same. I am glad these Young People's Societies have started, and want to see them prosper; for we realize that it is the younger people who are to spread the third angel's message. It is time we were at work; for it will not be long before it will be too late, and I know we all want a part in the closing work, and to help hasten the coming of the Lord. I do not think I ever enjoyed any meeting we have had more than the one held last Friday night. There seemed such interest; everybody took part, and we all felt encouraged; for the Lord was with us. All through the social meeting there seemed to be but the one desire of each one, and that was to work more earnestly for the Lord, to devote more time to his service, to be his light-bearers, shedding bright light wherever the ways of life may lead. Remember us and our work here in your prayers. ANNA MYRBERG

2-12-1907

During my recent visit to the Solusi Mission, plans were laid for Jim to go to Barotseland and labor for his people. The last Sabbath service, before his departure, was most solemn. I spoke for a short time, and then Jim delivered to them his farewell address. He 'spoke from Joshua 24: 14, rs. He referred to the words of Paul in Acts 20: 17-27, and called their attention to the life he had lived among them, and his faithfulness in presenting to them the Word of God, and urged all to choose and obey the Lord. Said he, " If the stones and sticks your fathers worshiped are the true gods, then worship them; but if not, then serve the Lord of heaven and earth." A social meeting followed, and many touching testimonies were given. One after another told how Jim had helped them to overcome various evil things, and how he had encouraged and counseled them in times of need. There were very few dry eyes in the congregation that Sabbath morning, for Jim was beloved by all. He had been like an elder brother to all at the mission, and now they would miss his words of good cheer.

3-28-1911

Take some part in every social meeting, and in every general discussion. Tell how you pray. Tell of one way in which your habits of prayer have affected your Christian life. Describe some one hindrance to prayer which you have had to cope with. Tell what special hindrances have at times weakened or interfered with faith in God as a force in your life. Tell some experience that has shown you how God makes himself known to the one who prays. Give your experience in hearing and being influenced by what seemed to you a direct divine message. Explain how you are able to detect God's voice when he speaks to you. It will do you good to praise your Maker. Praise is a sign of growth of the soul. The more we praise God, the better we will understand him. Praise God more and see if that will not mean more power for service. Thank him for the blessings given, for the desires denied. Yes, and make every experience in life an opportunity for praising God.



1912

We shall give a brief explanation of the plan, and shall have the lessons ready for distribution in leaflet form as soon as possible.

### General Exercises

The general plan proposes a meeting of about one hour in length, divided into four fifteen-minute periods. This gives fifteen minutes for opening and closing exercises, including the usual song, prayer, reading of minutes, and whatever other exercises are desired, as report of work, special music, review of Morning Watch texts for the week, contribution, etc.

### Bible Study

We are coming to recognize more and more clearly that it is not elaborate programs and entertainments that really advance our work, and give it permanence and stability. A short Bible study is certainly one of the essentials in a successful society meeting, and may be made most fascinating both to our own young people and to those who may be visiting our meetings. The manner of preparation and presentation of the study may be varied to suit all conditions. We merely suggest topics and methods for those who feel the need of assistance. One study a month has been prepared from "Great Controversy." (cont)

## Mission Study

Next to the Bible the study of missions is certainly the most important to us. This furnishes a field of inexhaustible resources and unfailing interest to the young. In addition to our general mission study, we have the special feature of one study a month on the details of one of our mission stations. This matter will be supplied by a missionary who is right in the field.

## Social Meeting

Years of experience and observation have taught us that the very life of our societies centers around the social service. Leaving out the prayer and testimony meeting, we extinguish the vital spark most conducive to permanence and growth. We can not too earnestly urge that a little time be given at every regular meeting for this purpose.

## Special Days

We shall vary the outlines as required for special programs appropriate for Temperance, Educational, Thanksgiving, Religious Liberty, Morning Watch, Reading Course, Missionary Volunteer, and other special days. Also clays for the study of local needs. For the sake of our young people's work as a whole, will you not do your best to make this plan a success?

MEADE MACGUIRE

THE END?

1931 RH

Is the so-called social meeting, going out of practice in some of our churches? We fear it is. It is still held as a part of the prayer meeting, but we have wished many times that it could be made a part of the regular Sabbath service.

As we hark back to the Sabbath services Of our boyhood days, we vividly recall that no Sabbath service was considered complete unless opportunity was given for the members of the congregation to speak of their Christian experience, and to offer praise and thanksgiving to God for His many mercies. And this was a general practice, whether the Sabbath services were conducted by the local church elder, or whether some minister was present and gave a sermon for the occasion. The rank and file of the church had an opportunity to express, in an after meeting, their thanks and hopes and purposes in connection with the service of Christ. And we can recall how we were thrilled by some of the humble testimonies borne. They did us more good than some of the sermons to which we listened. We wish there could be a revival of this in some, of our churches. (cont)

We wish that once more opportunity could be afforded at the Sabbath service for praise and thanksgiving on the part of the congregation. It might require a shortening of the long announcements, which would be indeed refreshing; it might require that the minister should shorten his discourse, which sometimes would make it more forcible and appealing. We recognize, of course, that in some of our large churches this might not be practicable. But in the great majority of our congregations, services could be conducted in this way. It might not be best to follow this plan every Sabbath, but we believe that occasionally this could be done with great profit.

Large numbers of our congregations never attend prayer meeting, unfortunately, and so they are deprived of the privilege of social worship ? Why not afford them the opportunity of telling what God has done for their souls? We believe that the effect would be most wholesome, even upon those not of our faith who might be present.

FMW Advent Review and Sabbath Herald May 7, 1931

## WHAT HAPPENED?

Late 1890's - The Latter Rain Aborted - Wandering in the Wilderness

1900's – Ellen White turns more attention to writing – recording for future

Pastors Start Settling over Congregations

1915 - Ellen G. White Dies

1919 – Church Reorganization – Faith wanes

1920 - A.G. Daniels no longer G.C. President

Backsliding - Forgot how to hold Social Meetings, Testimony Meetings and Prayer Meetings. Rapid Settling of Pastors

1932 - First Church Manual Published – Backslidden methods crystalized

The ministers are hovering over churches, which know the truth, while thousands are perishing out of Christ. If the proper instruction were given, if the proper methods were followed, every church member would do his work as a member of the body. He would do Christian missionary work. But the churches are dying, and they want a minister to preach to them. They should be taught to bring a faithful tithe to God, that he may strengthen and bless them. They should be brought into working order, that the breath of God may come to them. **They should be taught that unless they can stand alone, without a minister, they need to be converted anew, and baptized anew. They need to be born again.**

{ GCB April 12, 1901, par. 21 }

We have not settled our ministers over churches as pastors to any large extent. In some of the very large churches we have elected pastors, but as a rule we have held ourselves ready for field service, evangelistic work and our brethren and sisters have held themselves ready to maintain their church services and carry forward their church work without settled pastors. And I hope this will never cease to be the order of affairs in this denomination; for when we cease our forward movement work and begin to settle over our churches, to stay by them, and do their thinking and their praying and their work that is to be done, then our churches will begin to weaken, and lose their life and spirit, and become paralyzed and fossilized and our work will be on a retreat. GC. President, A.G. Daniells – Ministerial Address L.A. March 1912



# Early Adventist “Social Meetings”

A call for testimony revival

Early Adventist worship had different essential elements that connected people to God and each other. Bible study in Sabbath School and preaching the Word through a Bible-based message were complemented by the “social meeting,” or planned sharing time.

It might occur in connection with Sabbath School, follow the morning sermon, or appear in an afternoon meeting. There was a culture of speaking in church with sincere testimonies of encouragement, experience, providence, answered prayer, and praise, as well as confession and even exhortation.

As a young girl Ellen Harmon was introverted and shy. During 1843 or early 1844 she found the courage to pray out loud for the first time during a meeting at her uncle’s home in Portland, Maine, United States. She had struggled with doubts about her conversion. This prayer transformed her Christian experience.

She said, “As I prayed, the burden and agony of soul that I had so long endured left me, and the blessing of the Lord descended upon me like the gentle dew. I praised God from the depths of my heart. . . . The Spirit of God rested upon me with such power that I was unable to go home that night.”<sup>1</sup> Shortly after this, at a Millerite meeting in Portland, she shared her testimony: “The simple story of Jesus’ love to me fell from my lips with perfect freedom, and my heart was so happy to be liberated from its bondage of dark despair that I lost sight of the people

around me and seemed to be alone with God. I found no difficulty in expressing my peace and happiness, except for the tears of gratitude that choked my utterance as I told of the wondrous love that Jesus had shown for me.”<sup>2</sup>

Levi Stockman, an Adventist minister who had privately talked with young Ellen about her struggles, was present at this meeting. He was so affected that he “wept aloud,” praising God for the blessing given to the girl he had recently seen so overcome with discouragement and fear.

Ellen, later to be called to prophetic ministry as the Lord’s messenger, was soon asked again to share her testimony at a nearby Christian chapel. As she expressed her love for Jesus with subdued heart and tearful eyes, the “melting power of the Lord came upon the assembled people. Many were weeping and others praising God.” A call for sinners to rise for prayer was made with wonderful effect.<sup>3</sup>

## PLANNED TESTIMONY TIMES

These dynamic expressions of living faith and revival as illustrated by Ellen White’s early experience were characteristic of early Adventist worship. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Seventh-day Adventist worship included planned testimony times. People were invited to respond to the message given and share their own experience with God.

The “social meeting” was a significant feature at the organization of the Michigan Conference in 1861 and of the General Conference in 1863. “Our ministers had unusual freedom in preaching the Word, and the social meetings were excellent, especially the general conference meeting on Sunday evening. . . . The time was filled up with short testimonies from many brethren and sisters. A calm, sweet, melting spirit pervaded the meeting making it the best of the kind we ever witnessed.”<sup>4</sup>

Church leaders at those conferences placed social meetings at the heart of evangelism and church organization. They recommended that when an evangelist held meetings in new areas, “a leader be appointed, and let social meetings be continued till such time as the individuals become thoroughly acquainted with each other, and ascertain with whom they can have fellowship, and who are qualified for the important duties of officers of the church.”<sup>5</sup> Then the congregation would be organized.

This approach was affirmed by Ellen White in Australia in 1894. J. O. Corliss introduced the personal sharing time to the small “Seven Hills” congregation following a moving message from Ellen White. “We then had a social meeting. This was a new exercise to those who had newly come to the faith, but Elder Corliss called upon one after another to be witnesses for the Lord Jesus until

**Sharing personal experiences with others helps us understand our need of God’s blessing and builds relationships between people.**

all but one of the believers bore testimony,” Ellen White observed: “We keep before them the fact that the social meeting will be the best meeting in which they may be trained and educated to be witnesses for Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

## SHORT AND MULTIFACETED

She gave practical counsel that these sharing times should not be dominated by one or two people. “There should be a spirit of confession to God, and an acknowledgment of His blessings, with thanksgiving.”<sup>7</sup> “In conclusion I would say, on the Sabbath, when the people assemble for worship, let the discourse be short, and let all be given an opportunity to bear testimony.”<sup>8</sup>

Sharing personal experiences with others helps us understand our need of God’s blessing and builds relationships between people. It provides a living way for the Holy Spirit to impress hearts and connect people to God.

The Bible is filled with stories of struggles and personal faith. The Holy Spirit uses these stories, along with our own, to bring personal and congregational revival. One of the reasons we love the Psalms is that they honestly express heart need, confession, petition, promise, praise, and stories of the mighty acts of God.

In these last days the wonderful promise to us is clear: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Rev. 12:11). What would happen if every church had sharing and testimony meetings? Satan would be overcome through both the redeeming blood of Jesus and the word of our testimony. ☉

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> [James White], “Michigan General Conference,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1861, p. 148; see also [James White], “The Conference,” *Review and Herald*, May 26, 1863, p. 204.

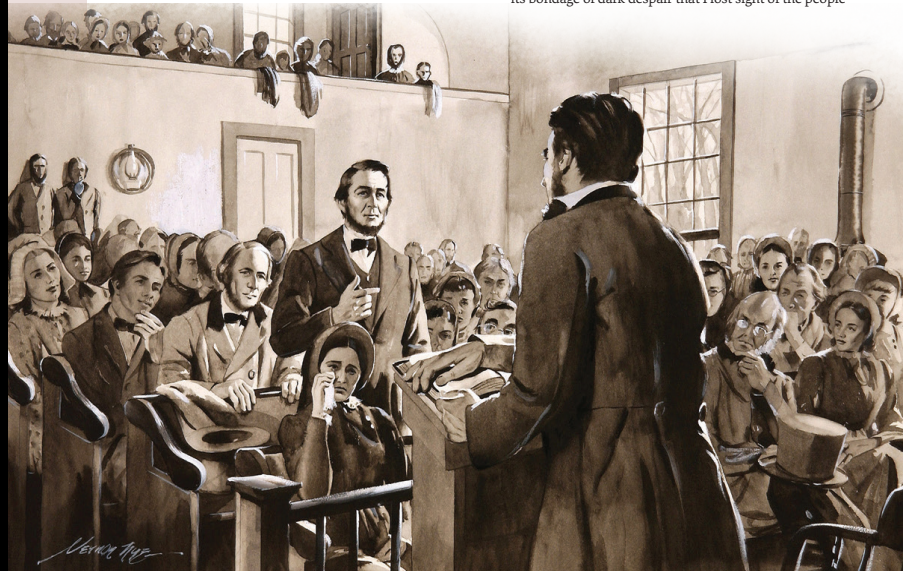
<sup>5</sup> J. N. Loughborough, Moses Hull, M. E. Cornell, “Conference Address,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 15, 1861, p. 156; see also *Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* (1863), pp. 8, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, “Meeting at Seven Hills,” manuscript 32, 1934.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White letter 279, 1905, in Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), vol. 9, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White letter 187, 1904, in *ibid.*

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To be laborers together with God means a great deal more than merely to go to Sabbath school, and attend the services of the church, and take part in the work of teaching, and in bearing testimony in the social service.

To be a laborer together with God means that your heart is drawn out in strong desire for the salvation of the sinful souls for whom Christ has died. It means that you are filled with solicitude for the work, that you are ever planning to make your instruction interesting, to devise ways that you may draw with every entrusted power of your nature along the lines in which Christ is drawing, that souls may be won to His service and be bound to Him by the cords of His infinite love. CSW 120