



Personal Evangelism

Part Four: Preparing a Person for Baptism

iFOLLOW

Walking with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

Curriculum Development: The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry**. **General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntuhuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout:** Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

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Personal Evangelism, Part Three: Getting Decisions

This is the fourth in a series of four units designed to provide basic training in personal evangelism.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the dynamics of helping a person prepare for his or her baptism
2. Understand the church dynamics and spiritual principles involved in baptism
3. Learn specific methods of preparing a person who has completed Bible studies and made a decision to be baptized
4. Learn methods of helping a person deal with the need for continued spiritual growth as a new member
5. Learn methods of helping a person become woven into the fabric of fellowship in a congregation
6. Learn methods of helping a person become integrated into the Adventist movement

Content Outline

1. The importance of adequately preparing a person for baptism
2. Steps in preparation for baptism
3. The standard approach
4. Assimilating new church members

Background Material for the Presenter

Public evangelism is often the only way we think of evangelism. There is also the evangelism that occurs in the privacy of one-to-one relationships and small circles in the home. Ellen White writes, “of equal importance with special public efforts is house-to-house work in the homes of the people.” In fact, she asserts that “there are certain classes that cannot be reached by public meetings.” She points out that “the work of Christ was largely made up of personal interviews. He had a faithful regard for the one-soul audience.”

In the end, all evangelism must be personal. Individuals

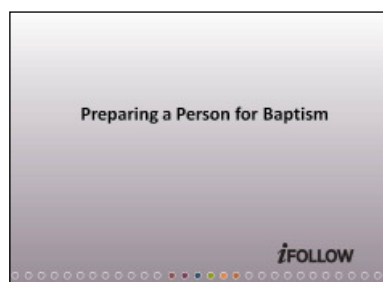


who attend seminars or come forward to make a decision for baptism at a public meeting require personal work in order to prepare them to join the church. A large evangelistic crusade always includes a team of personal evangelism workers.

Preparing a Person for Baptism

Church members usually feel that only the clergy can actually prepare a person for baptism. Often pastors reinforce this idea because they want to meet and talk with a person before they are willing to baptize the individual. In fact, any church member with a living experience in Christ and a knowledge of a few basic principles can prepare a candidate for baptism and church membership.

1. Make sure that the prospective member has in fact accepted Christ as his personal Savior, and that he knows that Christ is in his life and that his sins are forgiven.
2. Review the teachings of the church, using the baptismal certificate or the booklet prepared by the General Conference Ministerial Association as a guide in preparing candidates for baptism entitled *In His Steps*.
3. Make sure the person has the victory over alcohol, tobacco or other addictions. Ask gently and kindly, “When did you have your last smoke? Do you use tobacco in any other form?”
4. Say something like this: “There really isn’t anything now that stands in your way of being baptized and becoming a full member of the church, is there? We have a baptism planned for the fifteenth and one on the twenty-ninth. Which would be better for you?”
5. Explain how the baptism will be conducted. Usually it will come early in the worship service and the pastor will do the baptism. The prospective member will meet a deacon or deaconess (depending on gender) in the dressing area. They should bring something appropriate to wear under the baptismal robe that can get wet, as well as a towel, a plastic bag for wet items and whatever they may need to dry their hair. The deacon or deaconess will help them down into the baptismal pool, and assist them in getting up the steps out of the pool. After they have dried themselves and dressed, they will come out and sit near the front in preparation for their acceptance into official church membership and the presentation of their baptismal certificate by the pastor.
6. Have the prospective member sign the baptismal vows on the back of the certificate. Explain that the pastor may read these vows and ask him to affirm them in front of the congregation, and that the rest of the certificate will have been completed in the next few days and will be handed to the new member fully signed right as part of the ceremony.



7. Explain that the pastor will want to meet with them prior to the baptism to get better acquainted, answer any questions they have and make sure they are comfortable with the baptismal ceremony. Indicate that you will call in a day or two to let them know of a time to meet with the pastor.

8. Each of you will want to join in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Baptism is a serious topic. It should not be entered into lightly, on a whim or simply to go along with a group that has been studying together. “The preparation for baptism is a matter that needs to be carefully considered. The new converts to the truth should be faithfully instructed,” Ellen White reminds us.

If the prospective member has been through a complete series of Bible studies over a period of many weeks, and has begun to attend church regularly, you are likely to have a clear understanding of their readiness from the steps outlined above. When a decision for baptism has been made, it is important for you to talk to your pastor immediately and review with the pastor the steps you have been through and the responses of the prospective member. The pastor will want to meet with the person also and finalize arrangements for the baptism.

A Recommended Approach

Roy Allan Anderson, the long-time director of the General Conference Ministerial Association, recommends the following specific approach:

After covering rather fully each feature of the message in the preparatory classes, at least two weeks before the baptismal service I place a baptismal certificate in the hands of every candidate, asking him to review the fundamentals of our faith as outlined in it. A day or two before the baptismal service, I make a point of visiting all of the candidates either separately or in families. Opportunity is given them to ask questions, with a view of discovering that their confidence is firmly established in the fundamentals of the faith and in the movement with which they are now to be identified. The last interview is not a review of doctrines. Far from it! I am eager to help them understand the deeply spiritual implications of the ordinance itself. This to my mind is most important, for baptism is more than ordinance. It can be, and should be, a beautiful experience. This final, brief visit means much to the candidate. Of course, it gives opportunity to clarify any point of doctrine, but its main objective is to help the candidate to know how to claim the power of the Holy Spirit as he rises from the watery grave. He must sense that he is henceforth to walk in newness of life. In fact, the last few studies should be definitely on the place and power of the Holy Spirit in the surrendered life. “Our conversation with these souls should be of a spiritual, encouraging character.” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for*



the Church, Volume 6, page 93) They must be taught how to claim the Spirit of God for personal victory. They should be led to see that the Holy Spirit will share no heart throne with self and sin.

If they have been thoroughly prepared through the Bible studies, the baptismal certificate will be but a summary of the message they have learned to love. I have been both surprised and gratified to discover how seriously some souls have accepted the baptismal certificate. Some who come from other Christian bodies will look upon it as a kind of catechism, and more than once I have discovered that they have memorized the whole summary of beliefs or baptismal vows, together with the all the Scripture references, and even the exact wording of the texts. Of course, this is not required or even encouraged, but those who come into the church through such an experience usually come to stay. There will always be a Demas or a Judas somewhere, but these will be few and far between if we are more careful and prayerful in our preparation of those to whom the right hand of fellowship is extended. (Adapted from *The Shepherd-Evangelist*, 1950, Review and Herald Publishing Association, pages 260-261)

Assimilating New Members

The work of personal evangelism is not done when a person is baptized. It will take continued effort to make sure that the new member becomes knitted into the fabric of fellowship that makes up the local church. In fact, over the years, inattention to this important phase of evangelism has cost the Adventist Church a significant portion of its converts.

A person attends some community-oriented event at an Adventist Church or in some other way becomes acquainted with an Adventist member. At some point this person expresses an interest in Bible study. A Lay Bible Minister begins to visit the person weekly, spending an hour or more in each session carefully answering the person's questions. When significant issues develop in the life of the person, the Lay Bible Minister and others are available to pray for them, listen to them and offer practical assistance. The first time this person attends church, someone sits with them and invites them home for Sabbath dinner. As they get to know several of the church members, they make new friends and have repeated opportunities for fellowship activities.

All of this is typical of the pattern of personal evangelism as it is carried out in most Adventist churches.

The person makes a decision to join the church. In part they are thinking, "Look at all the attention I am getting at this church. This is a great place to belong." In the weeks between their decision and the Sabbath of the baptism, they likely have an increase in visits,

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contacts, prayers and other expressions of friendship. The week following the baptism there is significantly less contact. The Bible studies no longer happen. With a couple of weeks no one comes to visit or calls them. At church they are not likely to be given special attention because now they are a “regular” member.

It should be no surprise that within a few weeks some newly baptized members begin to have a change of attitude. Some have reported that they began to think that all of the visits and attention were simply calculated efforts to recruit a new member and not genuine expressions of friendship. There are other church members who they hear complain that Adventists are “cold” or “legalistic” or “numbers oriented.” At the same time, the new member may experience negative feedback from some of their old friends outside the Adventist Church and he may be struggling with habits which he has told the pastor he has overcome. In this situation, it is easy for a person to become discouraged and feel that perhaps they do not really “fit” in the Adventist congregation.

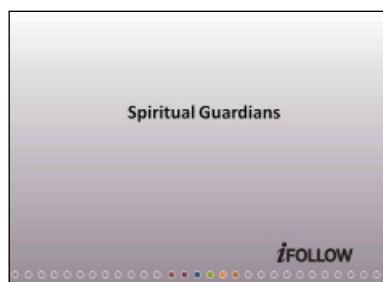
This problem can be overcome only if the same care and effort is given to assimilating the newly baptized member as was devoted to winning him or her to the Adventist message. There are methods, programs and resources that can help any local church have an effective assimilation ministry.

Perhaps the most important aspect of helping a new member feel at home in your congregation is to make sure that he or she finds personal friends among the members. In fact, research demonstrates that if a new member finds six or more personal friends during her first year in the congregation, she is likely to remain as an active member over the long term. If he finds fewer than six personal friends during that first year, he is likely to drop out or establish a pattern of only occasional attendance.

“Personal friend” in this research is defined as someone who makes contact with the new member during the week, outside of church-related meetings. These contacts include visits in the home, telephone calls, invitations to go shopping together or join in other one-on-one or family activities. It is not really perceived as friendship unless it happens at an informal level outside of the visibly organized activities of the church. In other words, the new member is asking himself, “Am I accepted here as a person?”

Spiritual Guardians

One way to make sure that new members find friends in the congregation is to assign a “spiritual guardian” or “special friend” to each person when they are baptized. The spiritual guardian accepts the responsibility of making regular contact with the new member, introducing them to others in the congregation, inviting the new member to social opportunities, answering their questions, praying for them and alerting the pastor or an elder when there



is a need for pastoral care. The spiritual guardian can be introduced to the newly baptized member and a special “charge” may be read to the spiritual guardian in front of the congregation immediately after the new member is voted in. A printed certificate for the spiritual guardian is available to help impress them with the importance of their role.

The most important task for the spiritual guardian is to get acquainted with the new member and then select individuals from among the members who might best “fit” the new member; who are most likely to become long-term friends and get on well with each other. The new member and the selected other members are invited to Sabbath dinner at the home of the spiritual guardian so that introductions can be made and there is “quality time” to get to know one another.

In addition, the spiritual guardian should make a list of activities to do that will help to introduce the new member to the Adventist culture. The spiritual guardian can take the new member to shop in the Adventist Book Center for the first time, visit the nearest Adventist Community Services center with her, go out with him during the Ingathering campaign, and take her to her first camp meeting. If the newly baptized member has school-age children, the spiritual guardian should take the family to visit the church school and introduce them to the principal. They should also be introduced to the Pathfinder Club director and perhaps taken to the annual conference-wide Pathfinder Fair.

Small Group Ministries

Of course, another way for the same thing to be accomplished is through small group ministries. In fact, one of the reasons why small group outreach has become so widely used is that it tends to care for the assimilation of new members in a natural way that does not require specific planning and arrangements. A prospective member that studies in a small-group Bible study becomes acquainted with others in the group from the beginning. Informal contacts develop even before a decision is made to be baptized. Friendships grow outside the group meetings so that by the time the person is baptized, he or she already has a circle of personal friends in the congregation.



A third method is to conduct a New Member Class. This works best when there has been an evangelistic crusade or a number of people have all been baptized at the same time. The New Member Class might meet during Sabbath school time for one quarter, or it might meet for seven weeks as a special series during the mid-week meeting time. A curriculum has been developed for a New Member Class which is entitled *Welcome to the Family*. It includes a textbook with seven lessons, an instructor’s guide, and a documentary video with an introduction to the history and world-wide work of the Adventist Church. There is also a video seminar version with seven 30-minute presentations.

If your church is unable to find enough spiritual guardians to care for each newly baptized member and it does not make extensive use of small group outreach, then it becomes very important to conduct a New Member Class once a year or at least following any major evangelistic effort. Two or three leaders can make individual contacts before and after class sessions and by telephone, and organize a number of informal social events to make up for the lack of personal attention that would be provided by the spiritual guardian or the small group.

A fourth approach is to start a new Sabbath school class. Growing churches need to start a new adult Sabbath school class at least every year or two. If a number of new members are brought into a new class along with two or three established members, it can become a powerful tool for assimilating the new members. The class leaders should also organize informal social activities at least once a month; invite the class to a picnic in the park or a potluck dinner at the home of one of the members or for a Sunday shopping trip to the Adventist Book Center. (More ideas are included in the training video entitled *The Sabbath School Class as a Caring Unit* which you can obtain from AdventSource at 800-328-0525.)

Some church members may object to all or most of the new members being clustered in a new Sabbath school class. There is a tradition that new members ought to join the established classes. But, the facts are that an adult Sabbath school class which has been meeting together for several years does not easily assimilate new people. In fact, one of the reasons why new members sometimes quit attending Sabbath school is that they do not feel accepted in the classes they attend. If a new class begins there is no history of “bonding,” and new participants can more easily feel at home.

Two Important Aspects

There are two aspects of assimilating a new church member that are often neglected. Both are of great importance.

Number one, the Bible promises the Holy Spirit to those who repent are baptized. “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38, NASB) The new member should be encouraged to understand and claim this promise at the time of his or her baptism.

Careful instruction on this point will help to safeguard the new member against false teachings. It will also help to get the new member involved immediately in the ministries of the congregation. It is vital that newly baptized members understand that the manifestation of the Holy Spirit taught by the New Testament to be normative of every believer is the bestowal of spiritual gifts for ministry.



It is equally important that every new member get involved in one of the ministries sponsored by your congregation and avoid falling into a pattern of self-centered church participation.

Number two, the new believer should be instructed in his witness for Christ even before he is baptized. He should be clear that baptism includes being dedicated to the work of ministry, that in the Adventist Church every member is a minister of Jesus Christ.

“Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary,” states Ellen White. “Everyone who is added to the ranks by conversion is to be assigned his post of duty.” The new convert should become a soul winner so that the process of spiritual reproduction may continue.

At the point that a decision for baptism is made, prior to the day of the event, each new believer has what may be his or her optimal opportunity to reach their non-member friends and relatives. The new believer should be helped right at that point to learn how to share their testimony and encouraged to invite each of their acquaintances to consider committing their lives to Christ.

Some years ago a young woman who had no religious background and was employed as a waitress in a night club accepted Christ and the teachings of the Adventist Church, and made a decision for baptism. She asked the pastor if it would be permissible for her to send out invitations to her baptism. He agreed, and she did so. In fact, she went to a print shop and had formal invitations printed and sent to scores of friends, relatives and work acquaintances.

That Sabbath morning a whole section of front pews was filled with people who clearly did not regularly attend worship services. At the end of the morning, the young woman told the pastor that she had invited all of her friends for lunch at her apartment and that he and his wife were invited too. He spent the afternoon with dozens of interested individuals asking him question after question about what it means to be a Christian, where the Bible came from, and what the Adventist Church was all about.

A number of the young woman’s friends accepted an invitation to a Bible study group at her home. Within a year, that pastor had baptized several of these people. It would be a real blessing if this story were to be repeated again and again in all of our churches!

Handout in this Package

1. Resources for Living the Christian Life



Additional Resources

Anderson, Roy Allan (1950). *The Shepherd-Evangelist*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Kleuser, Louise (1949). *The Bible Instructor in Personal and Public Evangelism*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

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Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to carefully prepare a person for their baptism after they have already made a decision to be baptized?
2. What do you think of the standard method recommended by the GC Ministerial Director in 1950? Is that the method still being used in most cases?
3. Can you share an experience, from your own personal involvement in preparing a person for baptism or observing a minister do so, or from your own baptism?
4. Why is there a widespread impression that most newly baptized church members soon quit coming to church? (In spite of the fact that all the research shows that after two years, 75 percent to 85 percent of adult converts are still active in the Adventist Church.)
5. What are the most important factors in helping a new member feel welcome and become comfortable in the fellowship of your congregation?

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Group Activity

Purpose: Think about the practical steps that make a baptism event not only a highly spiritual occasion, but one that helps to build a strong relationship with the new member.

Preparation: This exercise can be done with a flip chart or chalk board/white board. If your learning group is large and you are going to use the option for breakout groups, you will need a supply of markers and flip chart sheets.

Assignment: Design a good baptism event that will provide a highly spiritual experience for the new Christian and all the other participants and make the new member feel welcome and comfortable.

Agenda: If your group is about a dozen people or fewer, you can do this exercise as a whole group. If you have six or more people in your group, you can break out into smaller groups as described below.

1. Take a few minutes to introduce the assignment and explain that this is a brain-storming exercise. This means we will not take time to make negative comments about anything that others put up on the list until we get to the evaluation time.
2. Break into small groups of three or four people each. Give them 20 minutes to brain-storm and put their ideas on a sheet or two of flip chart paper.
3. Come back together and have each of the small groups give a three-minute report to the entire group, focusing on the most important ideas they came up with. Tell each group, as they make their report, not to repeat ideas that have already been mentioned.
4. Be sure to reserve 15 to 30 minutes for discussion of the ideas put up on the lists. Encourage people to think in terms of what is meaningful for them instead of making judgmental statements about the appropriateness of other peoples' ideas.

Time: The overall exercise will take one hour to 90 minutes to complete, if you use the breakout groups. Otherwise it can be accomplished in 30 to 45 minutes.

Handout 1

Resources for Living the Christian Life

These materials can be used in meeting the needs of new members as they grow in their spiritual life. They could be used in Bible studies that prepare a new member for baptism or used in Bible studies continued after the baptism. You can also share specific texts and ideas as needed.

The need of a Christian experience

1. Christ a reality in the life (1 John 1:1-3)
2. Saving and keeping power in the gospel (Romans 1:16)
3. The life of Christ is an example for the follower (1 Peter 2:21-22)
4. We must be like Jesus (1 John 3:1-3, 1 John 5:4)

Conversion continues after baptism

1. Converted through the power of the Spirit (John 16:8-13, 14:26)
2. Walking in newness of life (Romans 7:18-25)
3. Putting on a new man, putting off the old man (Colossians 3, Romans 13:12)
4. Crucified with Christ daily (Galatians 2:20, 1 Corinthians 15:31)
5. Living a transformed life in the same body (Romans 12:1-2)

Daily prayer life

1. Beginning each day with God (Psalm 130:6)
2. The power of personal prayer life (Psalm 42:1)
3. Prayer is comfort for the oppressed (Psalm 42:5-6, Isaiah 40:1-2, 66:13, Psalm 56:8)
4. Prayer is the key to spiritual riches (1 John 5:14, James 1:5)
5. Prayer is the Christian's power (Mark 11:22-23)

Daily Bible study

1. We are kept through His word (Psalm 119:9-11)
2. God's plan is revealed in the Bible (Isaiah 46:9-10)
3. Learning a life of surrender from the Bible (Romans 12:9-21)
4. God's Word must convert us daily (Psalm 119:30-32)
5. It provides comfort (2 Peter 1:4, 1 Peter 4:12)
6. Search the Bible diligently (Isaiah 34:16)

Service for Christ

1. The example of Jesus (Luke 19:10)
2. The mission of Christ is our mission (Luke 4:18-19, Matthew 28:19-20)
3. The urgency of the gospel (Revelation 14:6-12, 22:17)

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