

How to be relevant in the community as Seventh-day Adventists?

Many grown-up Christians have a hard time witnessing about Christ, and touching someone's life with the Gospel. Gallup Institute: "Believers in Christian faith have some bridge-building to do in the new century; too often the message of religious people has seemed only judgmental and less than inviting or redemptive... Believers need greater sensitivity than ever before."¹

Telling the Truth is much easier sometimes than representing and doing the Truth. And the doing part adds the relevant ingredient to the witnessing art a Christian, a Seventh-day Adventist can do. George G. Hunter III . said: "on average, it takes between twelve and twenty significant "gospel touches" for people to make a decision for Christ." ²

How to get involved?

1. Start by talking to God, and telling Him: "Lord, I am available to You today. Please use me for Your glory, and make me as a representative of Your Kingdom. Let me meet those people who need exactly the type of representation I am for You." God responds to all who make themselves available to Him, and provides representation opportunities.
2. Know your goal: to genuinely love friends, family members, and even strangers into a more intimate and life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ-without being pushy, manipulative, or obnoxious.
3. Be genuine – naturally the person God created you to be. We just need to be "normal", everyday people rather than "strange religious nuts". As the candle give light by nature, the salt gives salty taste to food by nature, and the yeast makes the dough grow by nature, so the Christians should impact their community by their natural participation in the life of the community they live in.
4. Know the Master's approach: "The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me!'"³
5. Observe: as many times we have sent out young people during the Relay Youth Training sessions in the centre of a city to watch where most people are, what activities are they involved in, and what needs they have we could meet.
6. Discuss: after the observation exercise young people form groups and discuss the most relevant real needs, and by using their own spiritual gifts and abilities brainstorm about possible ministries which can meet some of the needs detected.

As we prepare for the witnessing activities we need to follow the 4 Aha-s as follow:

- 1. Aha: make it simple enough for simple people
 - 2. Aha: make it an on-going process
 - 3. Aha: make it really friendly, non-offensive approach
 - 4. Aha: make it immediate
7. Prepare: as soon as the group came up with a practical ministry idea, they need to prepare the tools and supplies which are necessary to serve according to people's needs. One very important ingredient to this is that the approach should be attractive to people, so they

¹ George Gallup Jr. and Timothy Jones, *The Next American Spirituality: Finding God in the 21st Century* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications, 2000), p.160.

² Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping, Doug Pollock, *Irresistible Evangelism: natural ways to open others to Jesus*, (Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data), 2004, p. 53.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143.

would come to us and asking questions rather than us going and trying to “sell” them something.

8. Do it: go out and serve. Be a blessing and be the sermon to people around. Be ready to answer the questions: “Who are you?”, “Why are you doing this?”, and “How can I join you?”
9. Evaluate and re-think: as soon as you have served, and experienced the response of people, assessed the attractiveness of the approach used, basically answer these two questions: “What went well?” and “How would we do it differently next time?”
10. Do it again, evaluate, rethink, and do it again, and again – without routine. It is important to keep our activities on-going and relevant. Serving, blessing people, and answering on their questions, letting them getting involved.

This approach takes away the fear from hearts, and helps all Christians naturally represents the values of God’s Kingdom in the community they live in.

Generally speaking this is the Relay-pattern we follow in witnessing serving and talking, and moving gradually from one level to the other:

Kindness Process	Stranger level	Acquaintance level	Friendship level	Eternal level
Actions	Small acts of service and openness to listening	More serving and active listening	Regular serving, listening and wondering	Regular serving, listening and wondering and sharing
Words	„This is a practical way to show God’s love”	„I want to get to know you better”	„I really care about you”	„Would you like to experience relationship with Jesus?”
Gifts	Inexpensive and impersonal	Simple and related to our conversation	Special personal favourites	Personal and thought-provoking
Time	Brief touch	Brief but more frequent touches	Regular access to your life	Significant connecting time

A few examples to illustrate this approach:

1. Witnessing made exciting and attractive – in Split, Croatia Relay participants engaged themselves in creative practical witnessing on the streets attracting people to themselves, and making them asking questions about Christ and Christianity. This culminated in pancake-evenings when more than 100 people came to the church and enjoyed a wonderful pancake served professionally, and the spiritual talk about the Lord, which became the cream on top of Relay.
2. Car wash: in Hungary a group of young people saw dirty cars in front of the railway station. Since cars are private property, they have prepared cards and placed them on the windscreen of the cars: “We would gladly wash your car tomorrow. As per your permission please place this card on the dashboard and park your car here.” The following day the

group had washed more than 10 cars. Then they placed another card on the windscreen. (In the old days the card would read: "Our pastor is preaching tonight in our church, please come and attend. If not, we would make your car even dirtier than it used to be...") No! No! No! No strings attached. No catch. No tricks! So, they placed another card saying: "It was a joy and pleasure washing your car. In case you have any complaints, please call this number..." They gave a telephone number. And guess what! All of them called. They did not complain, but they said: thank you, then asked questions, and a conversation started.

3. Multi-group approach - Gothenburg, Sweden. A group of young people went out with umbrellas and offered people a "Free umbrella escort" during the rain. You are stuck under the umbrella for minutes, and you talk. When buying more umbrellas in the shopping centre, the shop assistant after learning the reason for buying the umbrellas, said: "Sir, I congratulate those young people. This is the best service I have ever heard about. Knowing this, I commit myself to do at least one good deed every day. You make our city a better place to live."

Another group went into the park of the city where many people went out exercising. They offered them a fruit salad. People were blessed, and they wanted to know more about who Adventists are.

We had a group which went out with the Sabbath Sofa, promoting health and rest. People responded positively to the possibility of sitting down and having some snacks and fruits while doing an interview-type conversation on the sofa.

A group went out into the walking street of the city and started chalk painting on the pavement of the street about the changes which are necessary in our society. Many stood by and got involved in painting and talking, encouraging young people to continue this ministry.

Two groups joint together and went into the shopping centre, where literally thousands of people walk through every afternoon. Challenging people to care for their health by jumping the skipping rope and competing, and stopping by and talking about the change they need to introduce in their life. Those who wanted to talk, were directed to the "Wall of Changes" put together by the other group, so people could write on the wall changes they see necessary in their lives, and in the city. Opportunities to listen, mingle, do something and talk led some people to attend the evangelistic presentations of the evenings.

These are only a couple of examples of relevant witnessing. Ellen White said: "We have an army of youth today who can do much if they are properly directed and encouraged... Let all be so trained that they may rightly represent the truth, giving them reason of the hope that is within them, and honoring God in any branch of the work where they are qualified to labor."⁴

It is one of the most humbling and honouring experience to present the principles of Biblical and practical witnessing to young people, and see them putting these in practice right away. Hopefully will happen more and more often in every country of Europe.

⁴ Ellen G. White, GC Bulletin January 29-30, 1893