

Sabbath is Our Liturgy | BY VIKKI LEON-SALAS

The following is adapted from a response given at the 2013 Adventist Forum Conference, held at the Sheraton Read House Hotel in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on September 7, 2013.

“Happy Sabbath!” To many of us, the response to this greeting is as easy and as natural as breathing. But for those like me, who are newer to the Adventist tradition, it might have taken some getting used to. However, I’m now getting pretty good at beginning my Saturday morning with a “Happy Sabbath” or even “¡Feliz Sábado!”

In the Adventist Church, we often emphasize the importance of doctrine. There’s 28 Fundamental Beliefs floating around that I remember studying to prepare for baptism. But I have to admit, no doctrines or fundamental beliefs influence my day-to-day worship practice—the everyday liturgy of my faith—as much as Sabbath does.



For us, as Adventists, Sabbath is a defining part of our identity and of our liturgy. So how does this part of our liturgy, the Sabbath, influence the way in which we as a community practice our faith?

How can we use Sabbath to strengthen our own identity as Adventist Christians, without excluding or distancing ourselves from other faiths, and even from other Christians? For me, coming from the Episcopal tradition, which emphasizes liturgy as a means to share a

common worship experience, the shift from attending church on Sunday to attending

church on Saturday has been a powerful reminder of where our Christian heritage originates: in the Jewish faith tradition. To keep Sabbath, just as our spiritual ancestors did, links us to our faith cousins in the Jewish community and reminds us that we share many common beliefs and practices. But while Sabbath can help connect us to other faiths, it can also exclude and separate us from other people—especially from other Christian denominations. Many of us have sat in Sabbath School and heard comments about “those Evangelicals,” or “those Catholics,” or even (a little puzzlingly) “those Methodists.” If we’re honest with ourselves, a large part of the importance of Sabbath to us as Adventists is that it defines how we are different—especially from other Christians.



To have something that distinguishes us, something that sets us apart from everyone else, is not such a terrible thing. Much of who we are as human beings is caught up in how we are different from others—short or tall, male or female, American or New Zealander (like me). These differences are a part of who we are, but they don’t have to be barriers separating us from other people. As Adventists, the challenge for us is to find a way to define the Sab-

While Sabbath can help connect us to other faiths, it can also exclude and separate us from other people.

bath that maintains this important aspect of our Adventist identity, without letting it become something that excludes and separates us from our brothers and sisters who have their



own unique and special ways of honoring God.

So, how do we do this? I'd like us to begin by defining Sabbath in a different way. Not in

terms of how others are wrong—keeping Sabbath on the “wrong” day, or keeping Sabbath in the “wrong” way, or dear me—not even keeping Sabbath at all! And not in terms of a seemingly endless list of rules and regulations that can make very little sense to an outsider, or even to a brand-new Adventist—walk, but don't run; cook at home, but don't go out to eat; spend time with friends, but don't play soccer; watch a documentary (preferably about nature), but never a film. Instead, let's share this worship practice, this exercise of our faith, with our brothers and sisters in Christ and with our spiritual cousins in God by showing them the joy that comes from keeping Sabbath. Let's define Sabbath by what it really means to us as Adventists, and show others how this part of our worship experience transforms our everyday lives.

I believe that Sabbath is liturgy in its purist sense, putting worship into practice as a community, without the need for church or music or props. To set a time aside for God, to say that this day is special, is a reminder that there is a purpose to our lives. Every day in the week is one day closer to Sabbath. We work so that on the seventh day God might look on us and see that it is good, and give us rest.

For us to show the blessing of Sabbath to others, it must first be a blessing to us. So I say that our liturgical challenge as Adventists is to find the joy and blessing in our Sabbath, such that people around us will ask what this day is

that transforms the rest of our life. Look at the list of “don'ts” that we've created, and let the Holy Spirit work through you to transform them into a list of Sabbath “do's.”

Do worship—see the wonder and joy in the world and in the people around you.

Do fellowship—with your fellow Adventists and with people from other faiths.

Do invite the other—into your home, into your worship experience, into your life

Do love.

Let's use Sabbath as an opportunity to express the “Advent” part of Adventism. To help ourselves and others, as author, speaker, and activist Brian McLaren says, “to see Christ as still coming to us from the future in perpetual advent,” by welcoming his Holy Spirit into our lives here and now, as we rest with him on the day that the Lord has given us. ■



Let's use
Sabbath as an
opportunity to
express the
“Advent” part
of Adventism.

Vikki Leon-Salas is an assistant professor of biochemistry



at Purdue University. She began attending the Episcopal Church after her 2005 move from New Zealand, and was introduced to Adventism by her husband, Daniel Leon-Salas. She believes that the Adventist community, like the

Episcopal Church, is united not just by common beliefs, but also by common worship.

Reference

1. Brian McLaren, *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha and Mohammed Cross the Road?* (New York, NY: Jericho Books, 2012).