

Sydney Adventist Hospital and the Celebration of Sabbath

Guiding Principles

The purpose of this paper is to provide Guiding Principles and a framework for management decision making relating to the Sabbath and for enhancing and encouraging Sabbath celebration at the Sydney Adventist Hospital. This would become a foundational document on which the Executive would produce brochures suitable for Visiting Medical Officers, Staff, Patients and the Community.

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Introduction

Sydney Adventist Hospital (SAH) popularly known as “The San” has operated as an institution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since its establishment in 1903. It has achieved distinction and wide recognition in its community through its commitment to its community to provide excellence in health care. That health care has a distinctive emphasis embracing the body, mind, and spirit of its patients and staff. It understands its mission as *Christianity in Action*.

SAH has consistently and intentionally expressed its identity as a Seventh-day Adventist Institution. It has done this by combining its emphasis on quality, compassionate patient care, with a steadfastness of purpose to be a cutting-edge leader in clinical practice. Adventist values shape its organizational culture and work and service provision patterns and the Adventist lifestyle is embraced for its health advantages. The practice of celebrating Sabbath in the pattern of its operations has been and is an important part of the expression of its identity as a Seventh-day Adventist Institution.

Theological Foundations for a Seventh-day Adventist Health Care Institution

As an Adventist Christian health care institution, Sydney Adventist Hospital understands its mission as grounded in a number of core moral and theological principles found in the Christian scriptures and embodied and exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus. The following points express these principles:

1. The biblical teaching of creation underscores the foundational principle that human life is a gift of a loving, creator God. God is the ultimate source of human life. Only God gives life,¹ (Gen 1-2).
2. Human life as a gift of God is held in trust and each individual is duty bound to care for one’s life and health, (Rom 12.1). Individuals do not possess absolute title to their life or body and they are entrusted with preserving, dignifying and hallowing this life. Adventists understand scripture to teach that the human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 6.16).
3. Human life is of infinite value. Scripture enjoins its protection and preservation, (Ex 20). The life and sacrifice of Jesus underscores the moral imperative that the worth of human life is beyond measure. Individual Christians and Christian health care professionals in particular are therefore required to do everything in their power to preserve life and prolong it (noting that preserving does not equate to artificially prolonging the act of dying). This overarching imperative to save life may at times, and if necessary, take precedence over and suggest the suspension of lesser cultural or religious duties. (Matt 12.3; Mk 2.27)
4. Love and care for one’s neighbor, as one would care for oneself, is both a duty and an expression of the love of God. (Lev 19.18; Matt 7.12) Care and concern for one’s neighbor is an opportunity for expression of gratitude for the gift of life and for the experience of God’s love, (1 Jn 3.16ff).

¹ Raoul Dederen points out that the idea that God is creator is “one of the basic affirmations about God that the Biblical writers and Christians after them have regarded as the indispensable foundation upon which their other beliefs rest.” “Reflections on a Theology of the Sabbath” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, Kenneth A. Strand, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1982) 296.

5. The compassionate care and sacrificial concern for others exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus in turn invites a commitment to a distinctive compassionate care and concern for others in society by Christians. Christian health care professionals find in this understanding the motivation to do all they possibly can to alleviate suffering and provide comfort and care for the sick, (Matt 4.23 & 9.35).
6. Hopefulness in the renewing, restoring, and healing presence of God is grounded in the biblical assurances of the coming of the Kingdom of God and the restoration of all things in the future which even now breaks into the present, (Jn 5.24). Such an attitude of hopefulness, trust and acceptance of the assurances of a loving, faithful, promise-keeping God is an important aspect of healing and wellbeing, (Jn10.10 & Rev 21.1-5a).
7. Each human being is created an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. This wholistic integrated understanding of human nature means that physical, mental and spiritual health are integrally intertwined. Adventist health care therefore has a multi-dimensional integrated approach to healing and patient care.

Theological Foundations for the Seventh-day Sabbath

The Sabbath is described as an integral part of the creation story (Gen 2). It is further identified in the Decalogue as a continuing religious obligation to cease one's labor in celebration of God's gift of creation (Ex 20). In the story of the exodus it is a celebration of the gift of freedom and a distinctive mark of loyalty and covenant relationship with God (Deut 5). The Sabbath is thus understood by Adventists as a scriptural festival which symbolically and theologically rehearses in the weekly cycle of time, the affirmation of the believer's joyous relationship with the creator God. It is a festival that also celebrates freedom and release from the routine and burden of labor for one's livelihood and symbolizes the liberty of generous grace that the Christian values and enjoys. It provides time for personal spiritual growth, for communal, corporate worship and for family. It is thus a central theological symbol and motif that expresses core Adventist values and beliefs.

The core theological purpose of the Sabbath festival is expressed not just through the meaning of the term "Sabbath" but also through the numerous biblical injunctions concerning how the festival day was to be observed. Sabbath in scripture is designated as the seventh day in a cycle of seven and marked off from other days by the natural phenomenon of sunset which defines its beginning and end. The essential idea is that of "rest" as in cessation of labour, but the concept is given much broader and deeper theological development in scripture. Theologically, for Adventists, the purpose of the Sabbath festival as a day of rest is important at several levels:

1. A 'rest' for the human spirit. The Sabbath, grounded as it is in the creation account, is a symbolic reminder that human existence is not the product of mere chance but of a personal creation and redemption by a loving God. The Sabbath day reassures that life has meaning.
2. The day brings 'rest' by enabling the individual to give time to spiritual development. It provides opportunity for experiencing the presence of God and for cultivating a spiritual relationship with the divine.

3. The Sabbath enables physical as well as mental rest and thus contributes to a sense of well-being and wholeness, not through mere inactivity, but through a release from the routine of labour and the earning of livelihood and the opportunity for change of activity. It places a limit on work and enables time for recovering spent or lost energies. Celebrating the Sabbath festival brings 'rest' to life by the release it provides from the pressure to produce, compete and achieve. In restricting temporarily the focus on productivity and the need to compete, the Sabbath provides opportunity to be grateful, and it enables us to appreciate more fully the human value of people and the beauty of things.
4. The restlessness of alienation and estrangement so marked in human experience is addressed in the Sabbath's reassurance of belonging to God. Both the Pentateuch and the prophetic writers emphasize that the Sabbath in a strongly symbolic way communicates the sense of belonging to God, and being sanctified, "set apart" as his.²
5. Sabbath celebration speaks to the experience of rest through breaking down social racial and cultural barriers. It is a powerful symbol of social justice.³ The Sabbath universalizes the family of God as a fraternity of equality. All need to rest. On Sabbath in the presence of the divine there are neither bankers nor clerks, physicians nor wardsmen, CEOs nor janitors. It is a fellowship of family. In the celebration of Sabbath all participate in the blessings of God's covenant and on that day, the place of worship is a "house of prayer for all peoples,"⁴ (Isa 56:1-7).
6. The Sabbath provides prime time and opportunities for service. It facilitates a relocating of a focus from self, to others and a celebration of the community in which we live.
7. The Sabbath is a glimpse into the new earth where God is present with humanity (Rev 21.1-5a), nations are healed (Rev 22.2), human life flourishes (Rev 21.22-27) and evil is no more (Rev 18-19).

In summary, Ellen G White notes the scriptural emphasis on the Sabbath as a universal principle. Its observance was intended to be "an act of grateful acknowledgement, on the part of all who should dwell upon the earth, that God was their Creator and their rightful Sovereign; that they were the work of His hands and the subjects of His authority."⁵

Jesus' Sabbath Healings

² Karl Barth notes that the biblical assertion of God "resting" on Sabbath in the creation narrative means that God has committed Himself to belong to humanity and this world. For Barth the Sabbath is "of radical importance" as a preeminent theological symbol and that the Sabbath commandment has an enormous "range". Cited in Hans La Rondelle, "Contemporary Theologies of the Sabbath" in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, Kenneth A. Strand, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1982), 281.

³ The Sabbath motif is strongly linked with the call for social justice in Isaiah, Joel and Amos. See Kendra Haloviak, "Sabbath Justice" (2005).

⁴ Abraham Joshua Herschel, one of the most influential and profound of modern Jewish writers on the Sabbath, sees it as a universal, relevant to the general experience of all of humanity. It was a day "of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature – is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man's progress than the Sabbath?" His writings have led to a renewal of traditional observance of Sabbath even on the part of Reform Judaism. See also Roy Branson, "The Sabbath in Modern Jewish Theology," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, Kenneth A. Strand, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1982), 273–275.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1913), 48.

Jesus ministry involved preaching, teaching and healing (Matt 4.23, 9.35). He was known as a miracle-worker and his compassion for the sick and the disadvantaged is a central focus of the gospels. This ministry has served both as a model and motivation for his followers in providing compassionate care for others. Scripture also clearly teaches that Jesus celebrated the Sabbath and reinforced its meaning and purpose for his followers. He affirmed, in opposition to pharisaic misunderstandings, that the festival had been designed as a blessing for humanity and was not an end in itself. "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2.28). . The gospel accounts of healing miracles on the Sabbath need to be understood in the context of the specific theological argument that Jesus was engaged in with the Judaism of his time over his claims to messiahship. Through the Sabbath miracles Jesus illustrates how the Sabbath symbolized the deliverance and liberation realized by the Gospel. As many New Testament exegetes point out, such miracles were conducted and are reported for their theological purpose. The patients involved, their selection and the nature of their medical problems were almost incidental to the overarching theological meaning of the story. The miracles demonstrated that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament messianic promises and they served to authenticate the validity of his claim to be the promised messiah rather than being a basis for a professional healing ministry.

It is important, therefore, to note that the healing ministry of Jesus is not a direct parallel or pattern for the delivery and practice of modern medical care. These exceptional and notable Sabbath miracles therefore are not useful as precedent in a simplistic or direct way when considering patterns for institutional health care delivery in a modern context and issues related to Sabbath celebration. For example, the miracles did not involve any kind of work from support staff, or income for any individual or institution. They involved no process of triage in diagnosis or health assessment or evaluation of which cases might be more urgent than others. Their purpose was other than simply "healing".⁶

Sabbath Observance and Modern Industrial Civilization

The Decalogue in scripture enunciates eternal moral principles, at the same time scripture sets out the understanding that religious and moral duties may at times be transcended by competing humanitarian duties that have a higher priority. Engaging in labour to rescue a son or an ox that had fallen into a well on Sabbath is a classical illustration of this principle in which one obligation is temporarily suspended in order that a higher obligation might be carried out (Lk 14.5). Jesus citing of a case in the Old Testament when David's military colleagues ate food that had been designated as temple bread and only to be consumed by the priests is another classic illustration of the principle (Mk 2.25). Scripture not only expects and allows but anticipates that works of mercy and necessity are permissible and therefore are not only not in conflict with the spirit of Sabbath observance but exemplify the benevolent restorative core meaning of Sabbath observance.⁷

At a number of other levels, the biblical concept of Sabbath celebration stands in tension with modern industrialized, technological advanced civilization. Do the standards of biblical Sabbath practice fit with such a society? Are they universal? How would such standards be implemented in the context of a total population completely practicing Sabbath observance? Seventh-day Adventists and other sabbatarians acknowledge that certain economic activities and industries cannot be completely shut down on Sabbath. Brian Schwertley cites examples such as the steel industry where a smelter in a foundry takes several days to reach its proper temperature and requires at least a minimal crew to maintain the plant operating through the holy day. Certain types of transport are problematic. Shipping arrangements for some vital resources may require journeys of longer than a week. Power and water industries and telephone companies are other commercial examples. Because they function at a basic level of providing essential services for the conduct of ordinary life and are

⁶ If a simplistic precedent relationship is sought, it would probably suggest that any surgery proposed for Sabbath is done for free.

⁷ Brian Schwertley, "The Sabbath and Modern Industrial Civilization" is the basis for much of the material for this section.

necessary for the safety and security of society as well as being necessary to maintain and/or preserve life and provide support for the sick, such economic activities are deemed to take precedence over the ideal of no Sabbath labour. Rural Adventists are more familiar with industries involving animals and the need to care for them to ensure their ongoing productivity, for example, dairy farming and the regular milking schedule. As Schwertley points out however, the number of industries that have a genuine need for labor on Sabbath are actually few in number and the number of people involved in such Sabbath work would be small compared to those who work during the regular work-day week. He suggests that the vast majority of economic activities conducted on Sabbath are, in fact, unnecessary and are conducted for consumer convenience or in the simple pursuit of profit. The principle of Sabbath observance is compatible with modern industrial economies and culture and Christians are not required to return to a stone-age style of living each Sabbath. **Sabbath**

Application to Health Care

Work involved in providing emergency medical care and the alleviating of suffering and the preserving of life, which is the mission of an Adventist health institution is deemed to be an activity which takes precedence over the Sabbath obligation to rest. Deciding what is emergency medical care and the alleviating of suffering and the preserving of life that is critical to the well-being of the patient, is the responsibility of the medical and clinical practitioner.

Caution should be taken to ensure that the motivation for clinical activity on the Sabbath is motivated by best practice and the alleviating of pain and suffering and not by other drivers such as convenience and economic pressures.

General Traditional Patterns of Sabbath Celebration Followed at SAH⁸

In its current general practice, Sydney Adventist Hospital endeavours to intentionally embrace and give practical expression to the celebration of Sabbath in an effort to be true to its core theological roots. It values the symbolic meaning and purpose of the Sabbath festival and seeks ways to enhance its meaning in the experience of both its staff and patients. It achieves these objectives through adopting a range of strategies including the following:

1. The cheerful and highly competent provision of emergency care with the usual expected levels of excellence is offered willingly. Routine office or clinical services or consultations, however, are not available as they might be on regular weekdays.
2. Administrative and business offices are completely closed to routine weekday business and admissions are minimized. Sufficient service is provided, however, so that the unavoidable admissions and discharges are processed efficiently and so that the families whom the hospital serves through the admission and discharge process are not unnecessarily inconvenienced or disadvantaged.
3. The scheduled closing and suspension of all routine activities usually involving those departments not immediately related to patient care. An adequate number of qualified people are retained in each department to ensure provision of the expected appropriate, high standard of clinical care.

⁸ These strategies tend to mirror those adopted by other Adventist hospitals. The list is drawn from the General Conference Guidelines for Sabbath Observance. http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/other_documents/other_doc6.html

4. Routine physical maintenance projects and development work is suspended except that which is involved in the necessary provision of essential services to patient care and the support of emergency care.
5. Routine and elective diagnostic and therapeutic services are postponed unless necessary for the welfare and comfort of the patient or are of an emergency nature. Such decisions are made by medical staff who follow carefully framed medical bylaws.⁹
6. An atmosphere of tranquility and Sabbath restfulness in the wards is enhanced by the cessation of the bustle and routine of major maintenance and project-type work.. Specialist medical consultations are continued as required to provide the patient with the best opportunity to recover at the earliest opportunity.
7. The careful and considerate rostering of staff enables individual staff members to participate in corporate Sabbath (or Sunday) worship on a shared or rotating basis with other staff. Careful attention is also given to rostering staff of other faith traditions to facilitate participation in corporate worship. While the hospital does not wish to act as conscience for its employees, it seeks to accommodate the individual religious convictions of its staff.¹⁰

Development Challenges at SAH as identified by the management team and implications for Sabbath Observance

How can Sydney Adventist Hospital respond to increasing demand on its services in a way that enables it to maintain the expression of its Seventh-day Adventist identity and its distinctive contribution and emphasis in health care?

1. The current demand for services at SAH exceeds the hospital's ability to provide for community needs. All general theatre session times are taken and bed capacity further limits the number of surgical cases that can be undertaken, particularly from Tuesday to Friday. Surgeons are requesting operating theatre session time, which cannot be accommodated. General practitioners and physicians are regularly unable to send their patients to the hospital.
2. The demand on health care services, primarily driven by the ageing population, is stressing all area health services and hospitals. Most private hospitals and groups are planning significant expansion to enable them to cater for their communities' current and future needs. (See Concourse Building Business Case pages 18 – 39). The demand for San services cannot be adequately met by alternative providers as all hospitals are experiencing a similar dilemma.
3. Over the past four years the San has actively promoted a patient flow discipline, with the express purpose of improving patient access, in a hospital with significant bed and operating theatre constraint. Strategies employed over the past four years have included establishing an active patient flow committee, employing a patient flow director, improved bed allocation systems and practice, increasing operating theatres by two, rationalizing theatre sessions, adding additional

⁹ General Conference guidelines suggest and it is the practice at Adventist Hospitals in the USA that medical staff are asked to indicate their understanding in an acceptance of the conditions and terms of their appointment indicate that they understand the values and importance of Sabbath observance at SAH.

¹⁰ James Londs highlights the importance of the idea of "Sabbath" for caregivers. *Faith Based Caregiving in a Secular World: Four Defining Issues*. See also Laung Rasmussen's review of Londs's work in *Spectrum* 38:1, (Winter 2010), 42 – 44.

inpatient beds, continuing to reduce surgical length of stay and establishing a “Hospital in the Home” program. In these four years inpatient and day patient activity has increased 14.6% and annual occupancy from 81.7% to 87.7%.

4. As a not-for-profit institution, the hospital directs any generated surpluses into the funding of expansion to extend its services of healing and caring. It sees the need to address the increasing unmet demand for care from the community of which it is a part and which it is committed to serve. The provision of health care and undertaking of necessary surgeries on Sabbath is not driven by the seeking of an economic advantage. (Penalty rates for weekend labour for example, are a disincentive to extend service across these times.) The pressure to respond to community need poses the dilemma of balancing the pressure against the compelling obligation to provide Sabbath rest to employees and to create a culture of patient care and an environment that embraces Sabbath tranquility, rest, quietness and wholeness all of which enhances the healing that is sought.

Other Sabbatarian Health Care Organisations Sabbath Practices.

Adventist hospital organizations in the United States approach their practice of Sabbath observance in various ways.

- Practice across Adventist Health System Sunbelt Healthcare Corporation (AHS) (a 56-hospital group) facilitates most elective surgery procedures. Those that would be undertaken at the sole convenience of doctor or patient (such as cosmetic surgery) are not scheduled on Sabbath.
- Loma Linda Medical Centre does not routinely schedule elective surgical work on Sabbath as it is a Level 1 Trauma Centre. The time is used to reschedule elective work which is “bumped” during the week to accommodate the emergencies.

Proposed Recommendations:

- A. That the SAH Executive continues to work actively to minimize the need for surgery in Sabbath times by developing and providing appropriate additional infrastructure and capacity of the institution to provide adequate care.

- B. That the principles in this document now form the basis of enhancing and encouraging Sabbath Celebration at the Sydney Adventist Hospital and that it be utilized by the Executive to develop brief principles documents or brochures which are understandable and inspirational for the following groups:
 - Visiting Medical Officers
 - Staff
 - Patients
 - Community

- C. That the Executive gives consideration to ways of enhancing the profile of Sabbath Observance at SAH and the enhancing of patient care and patient experience on Sabbath. (See appendix 1 for suggestions and ideas on how this might be done.)

Appendix 1

Ideas - Suggestions:

What strategies might be adopted, other than those already in place, to appropriately describe to the hospitals constituencies (both internal and external) what is actually being done in the expressing of SDA identity and in implementing Sabbath celebration In the Sydney Adventist Hospital.

1. The preparation of a brochure explaining the rationale and the practices adopted for Sabbath Celebration at Sydney Adventist Hospital for patients and community – as well as for constituency. (Cedars-Sinai Medical Center devotes a lengthy page on its website about services for Sabbath observing patients).
2. Reporting in the RECORD through articles and interviews the many things that SAH actually does to implement Sabbath Celebration. (This could be in a non-polemical context – just explaining to the constituency how important Sabbath is to SAH.)
3. Planning of additional specific strategies that would enhance the Sabbath celebration culture of the institution and give higher profile to the meaning, role and value of Sabbath as an important theological symbol. These could be focused on consideration of the well being of staff and the welfare and comfort of patients.
 - Sabbath Music in public spaces
 - A brief worship-devotional period for staff working on the wards.
 - A “Sabbath Rose or Chocolate” delivered to each patient on Sabbath by a chaplain with an explanatory greeting note attached.
 - A special meal option, or a card on the meal tray for each patient explaining the practical meaning of the Sabbath and noting the religious services or spiritual help that is available for patients on the day.
4. Invest more heavily (paradoxical though it might seem), in the provision of patient care personnel on the wards to enhance the “Sabbath” experience of patients and staff in contrast to providing just a skeleton staff for Sabbath which could result in the diminishing of the patient experience.

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