



God's Closet **HANDBOOK**

A Seventh-day Adventist outreach
to communities that helps local families in
need by providing free clothing for children



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ISBN# 978-1-62909-870-8

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Introduction

Get ready to make a genuine, lasting impact on your community!

God's Closet is a practical and inspiring ministry that empowers your congregation to reach out to neighborhood families, meet a felt need, and build relationships!

This handbook will take you through the fundamental steps of establishing a God's Closet ministry at your home church. You'll also learn about best practices, recommendations, and options for adapting this ministry to your own unique church and community.

Many Seventh-day Adventist churches of varying sizes, whether in bustling cities or quiet suburbs, have made each of their God's Closet chapters flourish into a recognized and respected presence in the community. God has worked wonders with these churches through their desire to help those in need—and He can do the same with yours!

Disclaimer

It's important to consider that God's Closet started at the grassroots level, responding to a specific need for children's clothes in low-income families. It became a flourishing community ministry through prayer, commitment, and determination. As this ministry continues to grow and spread across the North American Division, however, the framework for its operation has had to grow and adapt as well. Chances are it will continue to do so.

The fundamentals in this handbook are meant as a guide—not a manual—to the setup and operation of your own church's God's Closet chapter. Keep in mind that there's no one way to run a successful God's Closet ministry. What works at one church may not work as well at another. It's best to think about what fits the needs, abilities, and collective personality of both your congregation and your church's surrounding community.

Additionally, before registering as a new local God's Closet chapter, a church should prayerfully take into account the degree of commitment required to sustain this ministry.

While the Free Shop Day events only happen a few times a year, it takes continual effort to collect, store, and process clothing donations so they're ready for each recurring event. Maintaining a constant supply of donations, with enough items in each size to make a community shop day event truly worth it, demands consistent and proactive effort. What's more, the church will need to determine if it has space to store large amounts of clothing donations in between events.

Remember, this is a community-facing ministry. It's best to be certain everything is in order before hosting a Free Shop Day. A hastily-planned or underprepared effort may do more harm than good when considering what may be a first impression of your church to many community families.

But if you feel called to bring this ministry to your local church, you don't have to be discouraged. Move forward in careful prayer and see what doors might open!

I. What Is God's Closet?

Ministry Profile

God's Closet is a ministry that collects and distributes gently-used children's clothing to local families in need through recurring Free Shop Day events.

Clothing items size newborn through 12 are collected throughout the year, utilizing a donation network that includes church members, community members, and local businesses.

Each local chapter of God's Closet hosts Free Shop Day events typically once a quarter,

though it may vary depending on church and community size. Clothing donations are sorted by size and gender and displayed throughout the shop area, where community guests can browse and select the items they need until the designated number of shopping bags are full.

The way Free Shop Day events are typically run, shoppers pay a small entrance fee, such as \$1, to come in and shop. Once inside, all the clothes they fit into their shopping bags are free of charge.

While the primary purpose of God's Closet is to provide children's clothing for families in difficult circumstances, it has many secondary benefits as well. It can create new opportunities for the local church to build relationships with community families, local businesses, and local media. It can also be a great opportunity to advertise church events, children's programming, and more.

Each God's Closet chapter is registered through *AdventSource*, where they may also purchase resources if needed. However, each chapter is locally managed and is under the direction of its host church(es).

Mission, Vision, and Goals

"I was without clothes, and you gave Me something to wear. ...Anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me" (Matthew 25:36, 40, NCV).

Mission: To provide children's clothing for families in need while building relationships with the community.

Vision: To be a ministry that empowers local churches to provide community families with a helping hand during a time of need, making connections that can help grow God's kingdom on earth, starting with the local church.

Goals:

- To collect enough clothing donations for multiple successful Free Shop Day events
- To establish and host a friendly, organized, and helpful Free Shop Day event
- To get to know your community better
 - Families in need
 - Community members that wish to serve alongside your church
- To gather contact information
- To promote local church programs, ministries, and activities



The God's Closet Story

The God's Closet idea was brought to the Adventist Church in 2009 by Merryl Tschoepe Moore, who at the time attended the Spokane Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington. While helping a single mother locate winter clothing for her daughter, she attended an event where foster families could "shop" for articles of children's clothing that were donated from the community. The event was provided by the state to foster families, but God inspired Merryl to envision an outreach for anyone looking for kids' clothes.

Merryl shared her idea, and soon a team came together to host the first God's Closet Free Shop Day in 2009 at the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church in Spokane. The first event was a success with 35 families in attendance. Volunteers provided free childcare while parents and guardians "shopped" for free kids' clothes. The local TV station showed up and asked for an interview, and went on to feature God's Closet on the evening news.

Three months later, more than 200 families attended the next God's Closet event. Donations began to pour in and more families continued to attend each event. God kept blessing as the local TV station conducted a follow-up interview and the newspaper and local radio stations also ran promotions. Soon, various local conference Adventist Community Services (ACS) and women's ministries departments became involved as well. As word spread, more Seventh-day Adventist Churches started asking how they could also start a God's Closet chapter.

Today, the central resources and guidelines for God's Closet are compiled and made available for local churches throughout the North American Division via *AdventSource*. Any church in any type of location can start a chapter of the God's Closet ministry using this framework and connect with the community in a lasting, meaningful way.

II. Starting and Operating a God’s Closet Chapter at Your Church

Pastoral and Board Approval (Generating Interest and Support)

As mentioned at the beginning, running a God’s Closet chapter is a significant, continual commitment that requires support and participation from the congregation and its leadership. That is why a God’s Closet chapter cannot be registered without documented approval of the pastor and church board.

If your church is not yet familiar with God’s Closet, there are plenty of materials available in the Resources section (pg. 21) that can enhance your presentation to the church board.

Since God’s Closet is a major ministry, many churches create a board position for the director or designated representative to keep everyone apprised of the progress and needs of the ministry.

Registering Your Chapter

Once you have the approval of your pastor and your church board, apply for a chapter; complete the form on GodsCloset.com. Once the registration form is filled out and submitted, an automatic email response is sent to your pastor for documented approval. Once your pastor responds, your chapter will be considered active and you will receive a password.

Assembling Your Team


A sustainable God’s Closet ministry works best with a solid team behind it! If you’re starting with just one or two people, you may want to speak with your church board, nominating committee, or personal ministries team to determine others that might fit well on the God’s Closet ministry team.

Depending on the size of your church and the size of your team, the makeup of your ministry team will vary. These positions are recommendations based on several active God’s Closet chapters in different parts of the North American Division:

Director

Often the person who brings the idea to the church leadership becomes the director. However, there are cases in which the person who spearheaded the ministry’s beginning at the church may recommend the position to someone they feel is both gifted and committed to staying on top of this demanding yet rewarding ministry.

A chapter director may sit on the church board and is the liaison between the ministry and the church leadership. A great director is passionate about the God’s Closet ministry, fully understands how it works, and is skilled in team leadership and delegating tasks.



The image shows a "NEW CHAPTER APPLICATION" form for God's Closet. The form is titled "God's Closet NEW CHAPTER APPLICATION" and includes the following sections:

- Applicant Information:** Fields for Last Name, First, M.I., Date, Street Address, Apartment/Unit #, City, State, Zip, Home Phone, Email Address, and Mobile Phone.
- Your Pastor's Name:** Fields for Your Pastor's Name, Pastor's Phone Number, Your Church's Name, and Church's Phone Number.
- Where will God's Closet be located?:** Fields for Street Address, City, State, and Zip.
- Signature:** Fields for Signature and Date.
- Print Name:** Fields for Print Name and Date.

At the bottom of the form, it says: "Thank you for your interest and desire to work for the Lord through the ministry of God's Closet."

Secretary/Treasurer/Assistant Director

It's important to have all the God's Closet information in one place, under the care of a responsible and detail-oriented chapter secretary. The person in this position typically takes meeting minutes, records event and donation information, manages the calendar, and performs other administrative tasks.

In over half of the God's Closet chapters surveyed, the chapter secretaries also handled the treasurer role. They collect and manage event entrance fees and monetary donations from church members, and work closely with the church board treasurer. Depending on the needs of their chapter, they may also draw up a budget based on necessary supplies.



Note:

In some cases, the secretary position also acts as an assistant director, able to stand in with the director is not available. This is likely because the secretary has the information on hand that involves the management of the ministry.

Donation Coordinators (2–3 People Recommended)

Donation coordinators are the go-getters for God's Closet! This is a proactive position that requires great people skills and the willingness to travel around the community regularly, picking up donations and hauling them back to the church for storage.

Not every church will be able to have a 3-person donation coordinator team, but keep in mind that this could be an overwhelming job for just one person, depending on the size of the community.

Aside from collecting and storing donations given to the church, this position is in charge of establishing connections with local businesses, consignment shops, and more (see Establishing a Kids Clothing Donation Network section on page 11). This is crucial, as those are the places best able to provide a consistent supply of clothing across all sizes.

PR Manager

This position is the face of God's Closet to the community! Getting the word out about the Free Shop Day is key. Fortunately, today there are more methods of advertising than ever, each able to reach a different demographic of the community.

It's best to select a trustworthy person who is well-versed in social media best practices, but also one who is comfortable approaching local media, building relationships with other community nonprofits, and regularly traveling around the area to distribute postcards or flyers.



Note:

Some smaller churches combine the duties of a PR director with the responsibilities of a director, as both positions require someone to be familiar with both the big picture and the inner-workings of the ministry.

Event Staff/Volunteer Team

These volunteers work in teams with the director to accomplish:

- Donation sorting
- Venue preparation and cleanup
- Event registration/checkout
- "Customer service," or being available and approachable for shoppers that have questions

There is room for much variation in this area. While some churches have a dedicated event team, other churches sign up different volunteers for each event and have a team member that handles volunteer coordination.



Note:

If there is a church school connected with your church, you can arrange for a group of students to volunteer for event prep or cleanup so they can earn community service hours/credits.

Supplies and Budget

Compared to other large ministries, God’s Closet rarely involves a hefty budget. Yes, there are financial needs, especially at the start, but several of the costs can be covered by the Free Shop Day entrance fees. If funds are still tight after that, many of the necessary supplies can be donated.

Many God’s Closet chapters require the following supplies:

- Storage containers/bags/bins for donated clothes
- Dedicated cleaning supplies, including wet wipes and disinfectant spray
- Multiple tables for displaying clothing by size/gender
- Advertising fees (if applicable)
- Printing/signage/labels
- First aid kit
- Trash bags
- Miscellaneous supplies, such as pens, paper, tape, safety pins, etc.
- Shopping bags for shoppers (You’ll need hundreds! Many chapters just use plastic grocery bags.)



Signs, posters and flyers available at GodsCloset.com



Optional extras:

- Branded T-shirts for team members and volunteers
- Higher-quality banners, posters, etc.
- Business cards
- Branded tote bags for shoppers
- Refreshments for Free Shop Day
- Small toys/activities to hand out to families waiting in line

Online/Social Setup

Active and engaging online representation is integral to the growth and success of a God’s Closet chapter. Once yours is active, you can set up a Facebook Page for it. There will be a link that leads to it from the official website, GodsCloset.com, where you can also view other chapters’ Pages and find other resources with your password.

After filling in the information about your local chapter, you can write your own content for the About section, or use the current description used on many other chapters’ Pages:

God’s Closet was founded to support families of young children by providing gently-used children’s clothing free of charge.

Articles of clothing, sized __ to __, are donated to God’s Closet by local businesses, church members, and community families.

Shopping at a God's Closet is much like shopping at a regular store, but all the clothes are free! Shoppers only need to pay a \$1 entrance fee (per family, not per person), which helps cover some of the event's expenses. The family is then provided with a designated number of bags they can fill up with clothing items of their choice. When their bags are filled, they can check out at the exit.

God's Closet is for everyone! We do not ask for documentation of any type. Everyone is welcome to shop. If you are a parent and you need clothes for your children, God's Closet is for you!



Note:

God's Closet's Free Shop Day includes children's clothing [and sometimes shoes], but we do not carry other children's items, such as car seats, toys, baby bottles, etc.

You can donate clothes to God's Closet all year long! This helps keep this wonderful ministry going. All donations must be clean and free of tears, rips, or defects. A good rule of thumb: Do not donate anything you would not want your own children to wear.

At each event we determine how many bags each family can use to shop, as donation levels may vary from event to event. Shoppers are to only take the number of bags assigned by the God's Closet registration staff. Each family receives the same number of bags, regardless of family size.

God's Closet is not a store. We do not maintain regular business hours. The Free Shop Day events happen once per quarter [insert custom timeline here, if needed], and dates are posted on this Facebook Page in advance, so you can plan accordingly.

If you'd like to keep up with Free Shop Day events or other news, please like this Page to receive notifications.



Note:

Event times are subject to change. Please check back at this Page for the most current information.

Visit GodsCloset.com

Call [if there is a church phone number you wouldn't mind listing]

Message us here.

Find us at [church name and address—or, venue name and address if different than church. But also include church address.

When your Page is all filled out, decide who you want to have administrative access, which allows a user to make updates or changes in the Page's content.

It's recommended that the director have access in addition to the PR manager. However, it might also be good to give access to a third person as a backup, such as the secretary, in case there is a change in leadership or if someone is unavailable to make quick updates if needed.

Additionally, access to your official God's Closet social media is best entrusted to people you can count on to use it wisely and stay civil in online conversations. Social media management is a skill all its own, and it can require more than just adding content to a Page and posting event announcements.

There will likely be reviews posted about your event, conversations posted on your Facebook Timeline, or messages coming in from Facebook Messenger. It's important to follow these conversations and to respond to or acknowledge them—but not to get defensive if someone posts something negative about your God's Closet chapter. It should always be a place where you witness to those who are hurting and in need.

It may also be helpful to create a private **Facebook Group** for your chapter's leadership and volunteers. It can also be helpful if your chapter partners with other churches in the area. This way everyone can keep in touch no matter where they are, post ideas, share pictures, and more.

III. Clothing Donations— How to Proactively Maintain a Constant Supply

This is the bread and butter of God's Closet, and it's always a good idea to devote it to God in prayer. A Free Shop Day event requires an ample supply of clothing across all the sizes.

In fact, several God's Closet leaders recommend that you *to make sure you have enough donations before even announcing your Free Shop Day to the community*. If shoppers have stood in line for over an hour and then find a scarce supply of clothing in the sizes they need, you can imagine the disappointment they will feel. Since your first Free Shop Day event is like a first impression to your community, you want to start off strong. Word travels fast.

But with much prayer and a great team alongside you, it's amazing what God can do. The process of establishing a donation network can even be a blessing in itself, as it connects your church to your community in new ways.

Establishing a Kids Clothing Donation Network

Depending on the congregation and community, some chapters decide to offer sizes ranging from newborn to size 12. Others start with toddler sizes. A few chapters extend into teen sizes. After getting to know the potential resources in your area, you can decide what your chapter is most comfortable offering.

Keep in mind that you cannot rely solely on church members' donations. To have enough variety of sizes and styles, you will also need to utilize local businesses in the community.

Kids consignment shops have been the most promising source for nearly all God's Closet chapters (Once Upon a Child, Kid to Kid, locally-owned stores, etc.) They'll often set aside unsold clearance items and clothes that didn't pass all the criteria to be sold in their store. Then they typically give them to a thrift store or a charitable organization they have a relationship with. That's where you come in!

After introducing yourself and explaining how God's Closet works, request that they add God's Closet to their list of organizations that receive their donations.

You may be surprised how many consignment shops are in your area. You'll want to contact each one, preferably meeting them in person, at a time when they're not swamped with shoppers. Make sure to bring flyers, postcards, or business cards with you so they know you're representing a legitimate cause.

This is one of the first levels of relationship-building you will take part in as your God's Closet chapter grows. Get to know the workers and the management. Emphasize how much this ministry means to you and how much the community means to you, and to your church. And all the better if you shop at their store yourself!

To cover all your bases, especially if you live in a larger city, assign different areas of town to your donations team to minimize driving time. In smaller cities, some God's Closet chapters regularly drive to consignment shops in neighboring towns to make sure they have plenty of donations in each size. (Note: Many of the items you pick up from consignment shops may be out of season, meaning you will need to store them until a later Free Shop Day.)

The donations received from consignment stores may be enough to provide all the clothing a chapter needs, and for many of the chapters in larger cities, they are. Some volunteers may have to make weekly visits to these stores; otherwise, the loads of clothing may be too big to fit in their cars at once!

The clothing supply can also be supplemented by donations from church members, school families, or even community members. Some churches create a donation drop-off bin just outside the building. As the Free Shop Days happen more often, you may find that community members will want to return the favor.



Note:

One source found to be *not* worth the effort is larger department stores, like Target or Walmart. Some already have a contract with an organization like Goodwill, and if not, will have several hoops for you to jump withthrough. The result will usually be a small gift card—which won't go too far for the amount of clothing you need.

If you still find that you are short on donations, particularly a certain size, post it on your chapter's Facebook Page and announce it to your church. Some chapters have had community members come donate, or church members make last-minute runs to area thrift stores.

If donors ask for receipts, check with your church treasurer for more details.

Storing Donations Until Free Shop Days

Operating a God's Closet chapter requires significant storage space year-round. Most chapters use the church basement or a large utility closet. If storage space might become an issue, keep in mind that some smaller chapters have used storage units.

Clothing donations do not need to be sorted before storing. They will be sorted in preparation for Free Shop Day. Until then, most chapters use plastic tubs, shipping containers, or even large trash bags.

These stored clothes will need to be accessible well before Free Shop Day, as it will take time to sort them.

IV. Free Shop Day Event—What God’s Closet Is All About!

Most chapters decide to do a Free Shop Day event **four times a year, once each quarter**. That way it’s easier to schedule and you can cover all seasons of clothing. It also allows enough time in between to debrief, adjust plans, and prepare for the next one—all while having it often enough for the community to become familiar with it.

However, depending on the church or the community, a few chapters hold them twice a year, and a couple ambitious chapters have them more often.

These events are usually on Sundays, spanning 3–5 hours, depending on size of community, amount of clothes, or other factors. Some prefer to have it in the morning, starting around 9 or 10 a.m. Others, especially in communities with a lot of churches, choose early afternoon hours in order to get more attendance after Sunday churches are out. In busier communities, some chapters have been able to hold shop days on weekday mornings, from around 9 a.m. through 1 or 2 p.m.

Whichever day or time you decide to hold your Free Shop Day events, note that it can take a few days to set up for this one-day event. Allow extra time in your schedule for things like sorting clothes, setting up tables, cleanup, etc., until you have a clear idea of how much time you’ll need for each task and how far in advance to plan it each time.

Choosing a Venue

If possible, hosting the Free Shop Day on the church grounds is best because it helps the community become familiar with your location. It helps with relationship-building.

Many churches use their **fellowship hall, or the nearby church school’s gymnasium**. If neither of these accommodations are available, however, some chapters have reserve a room in a town community center, or even rent a tent to have it on the church lawn.

Make sure the entrance and exits are clearly marked for people who are unfamiliar with the building. You’ll also want to make sure there is enough room for shoppers to form a line while waiting to get in.

Advertising and Promotion

Start advertising anywhere from two weeks to a month before Free Shop Day, depending on the size and/or pace of your community. Aside from the time and place of the event, include a general description of the ministry, why it exists and who it serves, and any additional details that help people find the location and know how to prepare. For example:

- Let interested families know that they do not need to bring their own bags
- Explain that the clothes are free, and the \$1 is only an entrance fee
- Include parking information or details on how to find the location, if necessary
- Emphasize that this is for families in need, but entrance into the event is on a no-questions-asked basis.
- If you have more of one size/type of clothing and less of another, make a note of that in the ad copy.
- Always include the link to your chapter’s Facebook Page, since that is where all your public information is located.

A great place to start is by using your own chapter’s Facebook Page to create an event. This will notify anyone who has liked your Page, and they can then share it on their Facebook Timelines or even tag friends and family to notify them. Word of mouth is still the most powerful method—the conversations have just moved online!

Here are some **advertising methods** commonly used by God's Closet chapters:

- Church bulletin announcements (include instructions for sharing the event from the God's Closet Facebook Page)
- Local newspaper events/classified section (fees may be involved)
- Community calendars (online)
- Facebook community groups (share your event, if the group allows it. Check the Facebook group guidelines).
- Banners, signs and flyers (available at GodsCloset.com)
- Post flyers around town in:
 - Daycares
 - Preschools
 - Head start program
 - Community centers
 - Pediatricians' offices
 - Medical clinics
 - WIC centers
 - Homeless shelters
 - Bulletin boards at coffee shops, grocery stores, etc.
 - Local moms' groups



Note:

While many God's Closet chapters have reached out to **local school districts** in the past, they have commonly been given the runaround on who to talk to, where they can leave flyers, etc. What's more, many schools won't actively promote something with "God" in the title. **However, one chapter found success by contacting a school district's family resource coordinator directly.** It's this department's job to connect families in need to local resources, so they may be more willing to hand out your postcards or business cards, or at least pass along the information. Try contacting **school counselors** directly as well. If nothing else, request that they like your Facebook Page so they can tell families about the event!

While it's common to post ads in Craigslist for events like Free Shop Day, many chapters have found that these ads can attract the wrong kind of audience. It's common for people to look for events like this on Craigslist so they can gather free items to sell later for a profit. However, depending on your community, it's up to your chapter to decide if you feel this is a worthwhile place to post an ad. It may be worth an experiment.

After your first Free Shop Day, you can build an email list and/or a text message list for those who provide their contact information when they register to shop. This will help notify return shoppers who may also come back with friends!

There are several free options for sending out group emails, such as MailChimp, iContact, SendinBlue, etc. There are plenty of free versions of group SMS texting as well, such as Remind!, BulkSMS, and several more.



Note:

Return shoppers can be great candidates for donation-sorting volunteers. Many end up donating clothes themselves!

Creating postcards, business cards, and flyers doesn't have to be complicated. Access to official God's Closet graphics/templates are included with your chapter's registration, and not every flyer or postcard has to be full-color on fancy cardstock. Many chapters print black ink on light blue or

yellow paper for flyers that stand out. Several chapters still have great success by printing postcards on regular paper and cutting them into quarters and handing out stacks to some of the locations in the above list.

Some chapters have approached local media, such as TV and radio. One chapter in Redding, CA, was featured on the local news! (You can watch the video on their Facebook Page at www.facebook.com/pg/GodsClosetRedding/videos/.)



Note:

In some areas, it may take several successful Free Shop Day events before God’s Closet is recognized by the city as a legitimate nonprofit endeavor. Since many community outreach events like this come and go, especially in larger communities, it’s important to demonstrate that you are here to stay! However, once the nonprofit community recognizes God’s Closet as an established ministry/service, you may learn about new resources to obtain donations and more ways to get the word out to the families that need Free Shop Day the most!

Sorting Clothing Donations for Free Shop Day

The following method of donation sorting has worked well for several chapters and can easily be adjusted to your chapter’s preference. Often done the Sunday before the event, it involves 10–30 volunteers coming in to help sort clothes in 2–4-hour shifts.

One chapter chose to hold this sort day from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., with people choosing any shift within that timeframe to volunteer.

Because so many people are needed to get through all the donations, several chapters turn this sizeable task into an opportunity for community members to volunteer for a few hours in return for a free lunch and a bag or two of clothes. It’s a great way to connect with community families in a casual, conversational environment while also meeting a need!

Clothing is sorted:

- Usable vs. unusable (stains, heavy soil, worn out, offensive graphics or wording)
- Boys/girls
- Season
- Size



Signs available at GodsCloset.com



Note:

Some congregations set aside clothing that just needs a light washing, if church members are willing to volunteer in this area.

After the sorting is complete, you might notice that there is more or less of a particular size than others. If there’s not enough of a certain size, try letting your church family know. Sometimes several last-minute donations can be a big help.

You could also try listing your clothing situation in your advertising. For example, you could update your Facebook Page with something like, “We have more size 6 girls clothes than usual, so if you need that size, come on down!” or “We have plenty of clothes in all other sizes, but this time we are low on boys size 9–10. First come first served.”

Venue Setup

Some chapters are able to do sorting and setup on the same day, while others prefer to have the sorting done well ahead of time. For example, setup can be done on a Friday afternoon or Saturday night if your Free Shop Day is on Sunday.

Allow for extra time or a larger group of volunteers if some of the clothes need heavy cleaning, or if there are many large items that need to be moved to make room for the shoppers. The goal is to create an open layout with plenty of room to walk between tables with bags of clothes in hand and kids in tow.



Note:

Is your church near an academy or church school? Students can make great recruits for setup day or clean-up day, especially since many schools require them to complete community service hours during the year.

Once the clothing tables are set up, place the clothing on the tables organized by gender and size, and label it prominently. Labels don't have to be fancy, just clearly visible to the shoppers.

Place the registration table near the entrance, making sure there are enough registration cards, pens, chairs for volunteers, etc.


You'll also collect the \$1 entrance fees and distribute the shopping bags at this table. By this time you'll know how many clothes you have, so you can set the number of bags you'll allow each family to fill (average is 3–5 bags).

Signage is important, both outside and inside. In addition to any banners or posters you set up to advertise the event, clearly mark the entrance and exit (there should only be one of each), and where shoppers should line up.

Some chapters post a list of shoppers' guidelines for people to review while standing in line. These guidelines might include:

- The number of bags that families are allowed to fill with clothes
- Line etiquette
- Registration/shopping procedure
- "Checkout" instructions

Make sure to assign and schedule volunteers appropriately, and that they have confirmed their participation. One recommendation to help you make sure volunteers are spread out evenly is to assign them into one of two shifts. This way you'll be clear on who will be there at what time, and minimize risk of being short-staffed at random times. Provide lunch/dinner/a snack for your volunteers, and have the shifts begin and end around that time.

	REGISTRATION CARD Please fill out the following information to register for God's Closet's Free Shop Day!
Name _____	
(*Optional) *Phone/Text # _____ *Email _____	
1. Would you like to be notified of upcoming God's Closet Free Shop Days? Yes No	
2. Would you be interested in volunteering for God's Closet? (<i>Volunteers receive first choice in Free Shop Day clothing</i>) Yes No	
3. Would you like to receive information about children's programming at _____ Church? Yes No	
4. Are you interested in studying the Bible with a pastor or Bible worker? Yes No	
5. Sometimes photos are taken during Free Shop Day events for promotional purposes. Check this box if you do NOT wish for your family's faces to appear in any pictures. [<input type="checkbox"/>]	
7. How did you hear about God's Closet Free Shop Day? _____	
Stay up to date with God's Closet events! To stay informed and plan ahead follow our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/	

Here Come the Shoppers!

Volunteers may wish to arrive 30–60 minutes before the Free Shop Day starting time to double check that everything is in order. It also leaves time for everyone to gather together for prayer and dedicate this event to God’s will, that it can reach the families that need it most.

Shoppers may already be lined up by the time the doors are opened. Make sure they are aware there is a registration process, and not to rush on in the minute the doors are opened.



Note:

It’s recommended that shoppers fill out a registration card each time they attend a Free Shop Day, even if they are return visitors. This helps keep things simple.

You may wish to hand out registration cards and pens to the next few shoppers in line, to help speed up the process.

As each family enters, collect the \$1 entrance fee and then hand them the registration card, one per family. When they return the registration card, you can hand them their shopping bags.



Note:

If possible, no one should be turned away from Free Shop Day for not being able to pay the \$1 entrance fee. You may wish to have a stash of extra dollars to donate in these situations.

Keep letting in people until the shopping area fills up, but be careful not to overfill it. Shoppers should always have elbow room while sorting through clothes.

Once a shopper has filled their bags with clothes, they can “check out” at the exit. The volunteer(s) at the exit will verify that shoppers only filled as many bags as allowed for the event before offering them a friendly goodbye.



Note:

It’s helpful for checkout volunteers to be in communication with front door volunteers so they can know how many more shoppers to let in.

Throughout the event, you may want to designate 1–2 volunteers as “runners,” whose job it will be to walk the floor to answer any questions, to make sure clothes stay sorted, and to be a liaison between the checkout and registration teams, helping those at the front know how many more they can let inside.

When it gets close to the end of the event, or if it’s clear that the clothing supply is dwindling, make an announcement to the shoppers and to those still in line.

The most important thing for any Free Shop Day volunteer to remember is that by interacting with community families, they are acting as the hands and feet of Jesus, and that this event is meant to meet their needs. Interactions should be friendly and genuine. We don’t want any shoppers to feel less than or looked down upon. God’s Closet is here to help people feel like they are receiving a hand up, not a handout.

Optional Extras for Free Shop Day

For chapters that want to add to the Free Shop Day experience, here are some ideas from several chapters across North American:

- Set out refreshments for the shoppers on a table or hand them out to those waiting in line (cold drinks in the summer, hot chocolate in the winter, etc.)

- Have inspirational music playing in the background for the shoppers
- Have a pastor or Bible worker present in case any shoppers have questions or want someone to pray with them

Post-event Cleanup and Debriefing

Once the last shoppers have left the building and the doors are closed, it is a good idea to gather together everyone who was involved that day and have another group prayer, this time offering God thanksgiving and asking that He bless your chapter's continued efforts.

To help your event cleanup go quickly, here is a checklist used by several God's Closet chapters:

- Collect all remaining donations (and keep them sorted if possible!)
- Return the furniture or the state of your venue to its previous arrangement
 - Fold any tables or chairs you unfolded
 - Set up any tables or chairs you took down and set aside
 - Sort the items that stay at the venue and the items that belong to volunteers, another part of the church, etc.
 - Sweep/vacuum
 - Disinfect surfaces
- Count the money received and seal it in an envelope to give to the church treasurer
- Enter the registration card information into a spreadsheet, noting those who asked for email announcements, text announcements, etc.

If your first Free Shop Day event had lower attendance than expected, do not be discouraged! Some communities rely heavily on word of mouth from people they trust. The more people God's Closet helps, the more people they will tell, and the attendance at your next event might surprise you. In some cases, however, it took a year before a few chapters saw a big response. But they are a thriving ministry today!

Free Shop Day Troubleshooting Questions

While many Free Shop Days across the country go off without a hitch, it's a good idea to be prepared for complications. Be ready with an answer to any of the following questions should they become a problem during your event.

- Our Free Shop Day volunteers are bored and are just sitting around and talking. What can we have them do?
- Some shoppers are trying to sneak out clothing or extra bags. How should we handle this?
- A shopper is getting upset and making a scene. What should we do?
- Some shoppers are taking piles of clothes over to the side and sorting through them. Should there be a rule that clothes must stay on the tables?
- Some sort day volunteers are not being cooperative and are clearly only here for the free clothes. How should we handle this?
- We don't have enough clothes for our Free Shop Day! What should we do?
- What if we run out of donations before the event is supposed to be over?

V. God's Closet Success Stories

Spokane's Sort Day Ministry

"We've had a few Bible studies come out of our sort day volunteers from the community. We've become well acquainted with several of the moms that helps us before each event, and we invite them to church events.

Sometimes it's hard for people who are unfamiliar with church to just start attending by themselves. It can be overwhelming and intimidating. But getting together to sort donations to help community families isn't.

On another note, our chapter really depends on our community volunteers to help us sort. Without them, we'd have another 120 hours of labor to complete in 48 hours! This sort day alone serves both the community and our own church, and we're thankful for this blessing."

—Sara Maniscalco of the God's Closet chapter in Spokane, WA

"You Are an Answer to My Prayer"

It was an early Sunday morning and my prayer time had turned into something of a tussle with the Lord. I was a retired pastor working part-time as an associate pastor at Central Church in Spokane, WA, and our Sabbath had been a busy one. I was tired and had anticipated getting some things done at home, but then I saw the notice in the bulletin that said they were needing volunteers at the God's Closet event.

"Oh no, Lord," I complained, "I really do not want to lose a big chunk of my Sunday! I mean, I've helped before, and nothing really has happened to make me think I made any difference. Besides, kids' clothes are not my thing!"

I became increasingly grumpy. Do you ever get grumpy with God in your prayer life? I don't like to admit it, but I did that morning. With no response forthcoming from God I finally just ran out of my complaints. But the announcement still said the same thing: "We need volunteers for God's Closet!"

After a few minutes of quiet I gave in and told the Lord I would go. "But God," I prayed, "please make this experience worthwhile for your kingdom. I'm asking for something to happen that will make it clear to me that you were present and blessed my volunteer work. I just don't want to waste another morning sorting clothes. I need to experience a divine appointment. I'll just trust you, Lord, to deliver my request any way you like."

After eating breakfast I arrived at our fellowship hall. Tables were piled high with clothes and the hall was full of about a hundred people, mostly mothers with a few dads helping out, and quite a few small children. Another couple hundred people stood in line filling the front steps and down the sidewalk all the way to the church. For an hour and fifteen minutes I just mingled among the people, straightening clothes, smiling, greeting, and encouraging the dads whenever I could.

Then I found myself making full eye contact with a young mother. She had a small baby slung across her front, was holding two full bags in one hand, had a diaper bag on her other shoulder, and was struggling to fill a third bag with her free hand. Her face, however, beamed with a big smile and her dark eyes showed no stress—just expectation.

"Do you go to this church?" she asked.

"Yes, I do."

Could you help me by watching these two bags for a few minutes?”

“Of course.”

She gave me another one of her amazing smiles and wandered off among the other tables.

About fifteen minutes later she returned with her third bag full.

“So, have you attended the Central Church before?” I asked. “You look familiar to me...”

“Yes,” she said, “I first attended here in 2008. I had just arrived with my family from Thailand. You see, I’m a Seventh-day Adventist!”

“You are?”

“Yes,” she said, “My name is Taw Wah* and I’m Burmese, but my family had to flee Burma, and we lived in a refugee camp in Thailand for many years. I grew up there as a girl. But there was a Seventh-day Adventist school there, and that is where I learned about God. My parents are Buddhists, but they gave me permission to go to the Adventist school. After I became a Christian I came down with tuberculosis. My family thought I was going to die. I prayed that if God would heal me, I would always tell others about Him. And God healed me. I have preached God’s message in Burmese, and I have seen people changed.”

Now I was hooked! “So, how did you happen to come to Spokane?” I asked.

“Well, my family and I were cleared to come to America as refugees. And we were sent to Spokane. There are about forty Burmese people who live here. I met a young Burmese man after I arrived here. He is from a different part of Burma, but we became friends and eventually got married. He is a Christian, but a different kind, a Baptist. We attended Central Adventist Church a few times, but gradually we went more and more to the Baptist church. I have tried to tell him about the religion that I learned at the refugee school, but he does not understand. Sometimes he gets upset with me when I try to share it with him. We now have three small children, and everything is more difficult.”

Then she shyly looked up at me with her 100-kilowatt smile, black eyes intently searching my face.

“Would you ever give Bible studies to people like us?”

I swallowed hard and endeavored to keep my smile in place. *Wow, Lord! I gulped internally. I’m REALLY GLAD I came today as a volunteer! Sorry for being such a grump. This is amazing. How can I best serve?*

“Taw Wah, I would be honored to have Bible studies with you and your husband,” I said.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, doing a little dance on the other side of the table. “You are an answer to my prayer!”

It would be an understatement to say that I walked on air the remainder of that day. To think that God had me right where he needed me at that particular moment to answer Taw Wah’s prayer! It certainly deepened my desire to volunteer more often!

—Gerald Haegar, former pastor of Central Seventh-day Adventist Church in Spokane, WA

*Name changed

Do you have a God’s Closet story to tell? Share it with us at support@godscloset.com.

VI. Resources

While each God's Closet chapter is run independently, everyone is part of the same mission. You can always visit **GodsCloset.com** to see what's new, check out other chapters, or access resources.

God's Closet's beginnings **3ABN interview**

www.youtube.com/watch?v=vO0zqvMATOE

God's Closet featured **on North American Division offering spotlight for Adventist Community Services**

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ex9LGcw6U1k

God's Closet **YouTube channel**

www.youtube.com/channel/UCLjZFHrv26Yk4ioMpRjcm_g

Questions? Need more materials or direction? Contact *AdventSource* at 402.486.8800 or service@adventsource.org.

If you'd like to provide feedback or contribute content for the God's Closet Ministry Handbook, let us know! We will only learn more as this ministry grows and spreads, and certain methods or best practices may need to evolve over time. Contact us with your suggestions at support@godscloset.com.

**“I was without clothes, and you gave Me something to wear. ...Anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me”
(Matthew 25:36, 40, NCV).**

God’s Closet is a practical and inspiring ministry that empowers your congregation to reach out to neighborhood families, meet a felt need, and build relationships!

Many Seventh-day Adventist churches of varying sizes, whether in bustling cities or quiet suburbs, have made each of their God’s Closet chapters flourish into a recognized and respected presence in the community. God has worked wonders with these churches through their desire to help those in need—and He can do the same with yours!

This handbook will take you through the fundamental steps of establishing a God’s Closet ministry at your home church. You’ll also learn about best practices, recommendations, and options for adapting this ministry to your own unique church and community. Included are segments on:

- What is God’s Closet?
- Starting & Operating A God’s Closet Chapter at Your Church
- Clothing Donations—How to Proactively Maintain A Constant Supply
- How to Set Up A Free Shop Day Event

Are you ready to make a difference in your community? God’s closet is a ministry that will engage your church members in serving the community surrounding your church.