

DIRECTIONS

NEWSLETTER FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS

Sunday School:

A Core Competency of your Church

Dr. Paul Risser, President ICFG

I grew up in Sunday school; my father was a pastor. My earliest recollection of life at church was in my preschool Sunday School class. My teacher's name was Maltie Norris. She is still living, and is about 90 years old. As I remember, when I walked into the Sunday school class, she reached out to pick me up and with a big smile said, "Paul I just love you." I have no clue what she taught that Sunday, but I still remember her. She exuded the love of Christ. To me, Sunday school is a very inspiring thing.

Sunday school has always been one of the greatest entry points in the church, and was vital to the growth of the church because it was very evangelistic. At that time, churches had Sunday school contests and people were not ashamed about that because everyone got involved, worked hard and brought their friends. As a result, people came to Christ and grew up in the life of the church.

During the "Dark Ages," churches only had one service. The schedule was predictable: Sunday school would start at 9:30 a.m., and church would start at 10:45 a.m. Almost every church had a greater Sunday school attendance than they had in the morning service. When I came to the Florence Avenue church in 1972, thirty percent more people attended Sunday school than attended the Sunday morning service. All the Sunday school classes met in separate areas except the class with the largest attendance which met in the sanctuary.

Today, as churches grow, they may have multiple services. If they build or remodel to accommodate the growing congregation, they focus on building a bigger sanctuary but create "make-shift" educational space.

Many churches have difficulty getting workers. It is so easy to have a pastor prepare a sermon and preach to everybody for an hour and fifteen minutes and then they go home. The work is done by one person. Many leaders know how tough it is to get workers for the Sunday school. Yet, Sunday school offers the greatest opportunity for people to use their gifts. In the whole church, there is no ministry that offers more opportunities than Christian Education.

I want the Foursquare church to get away from being a "pastor-centered church." There are people who want to serve Christ just as much as the pastor. A lay person who teaches is just as important as the pastor who preaches. Many lay people have the gifts to administrate, lead, and organize, as well as the pastor.

It is fulfilling for a Christian Education teacher to have people say, "You know, you've helped change my life." People love Christ, and want their lives to count for the Lord. I see such a strong burden in people's hearts to use their gifts and their abilities for the cause of Christ. Christian education provides the biggest field within the church to do that.

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There are Five Components of Sunday School that make it a Core Competency

Cell groups - A cell group can be a place for brand new Christians to have a positive network. Cell groups and Sunday school provide evangelism, commitment, Bible teaching, prayer, and doctrinal instruction.

Bible Study - Teach God's Word to meet the needs of people. This forum gives them information on the church and the church doctrine. They learn the Scriptures.

Koinonia - Make time to build relationships. Many times you get people into small groups before you ever get them into church.

Prayer - The church should show them how to pray, bear one another's burdens, and listen to others. Not a bad curriculum, is it?

The influence of teachers - Find the most effective Christlike people who are able to lead--and put them in a Sunday School class or small group. This is called discipleship. This is critical to Christian education. Usually brand new Christians have a whole network of people who are not saved. Teach people how to share their faith as a part of the Christian education ministry.

It is important to adjust to today's world.

1. We need creativity in the way we teach. It should be tailored to your church. You can do it. Get on your knees and God will give you great ideas.
2. Come to the conclusion that we can't exist without small groups. We need to encourage people to attend and keep coming. To bring people into the church and lose them is contemptible.
3. Specify your objectives. Be intentional. Explain your objectives for Christian education. Always begin with evangelism. Follow up by helping people see how they fit together.

We need to realize that Christian education is not just a passing trend, but a current reality. The things that we do in a cell group, a Sunday school class, or a small group, should be things that stay. If Christian teaching makes a difference in the lives of others, then I'm willing to do anything. A true shepherd gives himself up for the sheep. The sheep never die for the shepherd. Christian education is something that we need to give ourselves to so that we will build the hearts of people. Make Christian education a magnet. Make it something that draws people.

Condensed from a presentation made by Dr. Risser at the Christian Education Intensive at LIFE Bible College January, 2000

Pray For Your Families

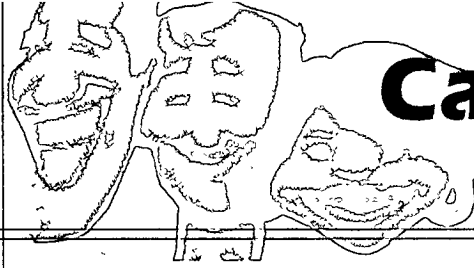
More than ever before, today the church is a "family" to millions of men, women, and children. Church leaders must be familiar with the needs, struggles, joys, and hopes of families they serve. Our Christian education ministries must strengthen these families. We offer the following qualities for you to consider as you pray for the families in your church.

1. **Salvation** "Lord, let salvation spring up within our families, that we may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (Isaiah 45:8, 2 Timothy 2:10).
2. **Love** "Grant, Lord, that our families may learn to live a life of love, through the Spirit who dwells in them" (Galatians 5:25, Ephesians 5:2).
3. **Purity** "Create in them a pure heart, O God, and let that purity of heart be shown in their actions" (Psalm 51:10)
4. **Honest and integrity** "May integrity and honesty be our virtue and our protection" (Psalm 25:21).

1 Thessalonians 5:7

5. **Joy** "May our families be filled with the joy given by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians. 1:6)
6. **Love for God's Word** "May our families grow to find Your Word more precious than much pure gold and sweeter than honey from the comb" (Psalm 19:10).
7. **Passion for God** "Lord, please instill in our families souls that 'followeth hard after thee' (Psalm 63:8, KJV), that cling passionately to you."
8. **Peace-loving** "Father, let our families make every effort to do what leads to peace" (Romans 14:19).
9. **Hope** "May the God of hope grant that our families may overflow with hope" (Romans 15:13).

Excerpted from "31 Biblical Virtues to Pray for Your Kids" by Bob Hostetler. The article appeared in [PRAY Newsletter](#)



Care Groups That Care

Real Life Stories

Any church that takes seriously the call to make disciples is always on the lookout for ways to do it better. Times are changing. What will the church of the future look like? How will the church develop ways to reach and teach people? It is important for the church to understand today's diverse society in order to successfully disciple. Listed are some trends and changes that can actually create opportunity for cell/care groups:

Mobility - People not only move from city to city more easily, but they also move from church to church. Many middle aged or young adults claim two or three churches, rather than one home church.

Diversity - By the end of this decade, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants in most big cities will be the minority rather than the majority. People are getting older, and there's a larger group of seniors than ever before. Ministries to seniors will be affected in every size church.

Short Commitments - We blame this trend on baby boomers, but it's happening everywhere. People might say they'll try something out for a short time, but they want to know how long they are obligated.

Cocooning - This term describes ordering a pizza with your car phone on the way home from work and then picking up a video so you can stay home on Friday evening with your wife or family.

Consumerism - People are leaving the church because they aren't getting anything out of it, and that's their main reason for church attendance. Most younger adults assert that they want to have certain needs met:

1. To be loved
2. To make a difference
3. To have security

Family - Many children have one or no parents. The dysfunctional family seems to be the norm. More mothers are working. Parents protect the free time with their families. This means men and women have less time to volunteer for church activities.

Realizing this diversity, it is important to define the purpose of a Bible study group. Your cell/care group should center around common needs and interests.

Determine your target audience for each small group and develop a strategy to achieve your purpose and reach that target. Communicate your strategy to your group leaders. Do not limit your meetings to traditional times or spaces.

Evaluate the effectiveness. Is each leader clear about his or her responsibilities? Do leaders keep themselves accountable? Are people in the group building relationship and sharing their faith with unchurched people?

Cell/care groups can minister to individual needs that are sometimes overlooked in a traditional setting. Small groups are gaining in popularity. There are unlimited opportunities for well-planned, flexible groups that truly share the love of Christ with others.

Excerpted from two articles: Thomas, Larry "Care Groups That Care (and work)." *Focus* Fall 1999
Shepherd, Mike "Discipleship at Bat." *Current Thoughts and Trends*. December 1999

Our small church has a space problem, so my class meets in the basement. One Sunday our lesson was on Abram's journey from Ur, so the nine students took a basement journey. We were sitting on a wheelchair ramp, the first stop in our journey, when a visitor with a crying baby joined us. In our limited church space, it was the only place she could go to comfort her little fellow. She listened as I told the story of Abram building an altar. The baby stopped crying, but the woman didn't leave. We journeyed to other parts of the basement as our journey continued, and she came along.

We ended our Bible study in Egypt, a table where all the children climbed up and sat listening to how Abram lied to the Pharaoh. The woman and sleeping baby were still with us, standing beside the table. Class ended and she asked me, "Was that story really in the Bible?" I assured her that it was. "Does this church tell Bible stories every Sunday?" I nodded and explained that we not only tell the stories, but we also help children and adults discover for themselves what that story has to teach them. "Well," said the woman, "do you mind if I come back again?"

That's what I want every one of my classes to be like—so exciting and involving that even a visitor with a crying baby will be captured and drawn in.

By Marlene LeFever, David C. Cook Ministries Used with Permission.

Investments That Build Your Ministry Capital

Darrell Fraley

Warren Bennis mentions this instance in his book *Managing People is Like Herding Cats*—"Louis B. Mayer, the head of MGM Studios during Hollywood's golden era, was known for his tyrannical habits, yet he made MGM into a pivotal cultural force, shaping the movies that shaped America. He knew what today's corporate titans either never knew or can't accept—that the only capital that really counts is human capital.

Mayer once said, 'The inventory goes home at night,' conceding that without his corps of talented directors, writers, and actors, MGM would be nothing."

People are the greatest resource of any ministry. God's will is to see people transformed by His power in a deep and lasting way. So what is your plan for investing in the human resources that God has given you? Whether you have 10, 100, 1,000 or 10,000 people in the ministry you lead, you must have a plan for enhancing people's spiritual growth, development and service, thereby causing them to sense that they really are the treasured capital, leveraging the children's ministry of your church into a future of hope and transformation.

Here are a few recommendations for enriching your children's ministry volunteers, the bread and butter of your churches committed core--

Help each volunteer feel like a member of the team. Ask them, "What do you think about this idea...?" or "If you were me, what

would you do about...?" Then stand back and listen. This process is like mining; you get mostly ore but eventually, after sorting through enough of it, you will find a diamond. Besides, to most volunteers it doesn't matter if you don't implement their suggestions. As long as you care enough to listen, they will feel as though their contribution has been valued.

Stand firm on your principles and beliefs. Volunteers respect leaders who make sacrifices and draw a clear line on principles. Conviction is the element that volunteers look for in a leader. Core values and principles instill respect for people in a ministry.

Reward volunteers. Every week your children's ministry volunteers do something nice for families. Be sure to return the blessing through appreciation. At the very least, remember to say, "thank you."

Build long-term relationships with your volunteers. Ask questions like, "How are your wife and kids doing? How is your job going?" If they take a break, stay in touch, if they leave your ministry to go to another church, stay in touch. They may come back someday.

Provide relevant training. Active, hands-on training that educates volunteers through participation, maximizes the value of the experience, also it builds camaraderie and team spirit.

Align long term vision with short-term execution. Don't just plan



and prepare for tomorrow by a series of knee jerk reflexes. Your ministry will look more like a grand-mal seizure than a focused, intentional set of priorities. Help volunteers know that there is a direction and, "we're all on the same page." This will prevent hurt feelings among volunteers and add years to the life of the leader. Besides, volunteers appreciate honest feedback when their vision takes them toward unbalance and burnout. I believe it's the job of the children's ministry leader to shepherd them at times by preventing them from "overextension" rather than pushing a volunteer toward unrealistic commitment that may damage them, simply to achieve success in the short run. Remember, ministry is life long. Protect the longevity of your volunteers by helping them manage the load of new commitments.

Pay attention to details. You've probably heard the adage, "God is in the details." When you leave loose ends on communication or planning, volunteers become uneasy. This discomfort will deplete your supply of volunteers faster than a Quick Draw McGraw. Cover the bases thoroughly. One of the greatest compliments a volunteer can give you is - "You're so organized." It's the details.

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YOUR SUNDAY SCHOOL



Evaluation is a powerful tool. One of the first tasks that Nehemiah completed before rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was to assess the needs. There is a tendency for church leaders to assess their needs when crises happen rather than in the initial planning stages of church programs.

Nearly twenty years ago, I was invited to attend an adult Sunday school class. This class had been a central connecting point for the church. The donuts and coffee were good. Then came the time of teaching and my concern began to grow.

The leader had been teaching this class for 29 years. She opened in prayer and then announced that they were now in the fifth chapter of Proverbs, a study they had begun seven years ago. The leader read the first two verses and asked for comments. People wanted to discuss everything from angels to the apocalypse!

After the class, the pastor approached me in the hall (he hadn't been in the session) and said, "Well, I don't understand why this class continues to decline. The Book of Proverbs is a good subject."

The subject matter was fine, but the class wasn't. The people were not learning how to apply God's Word to their everyday lives. Perhaps if the leader or pastor had taken a look at the class and explored the way things were, imagined the way they could be, and set goals to initiate change, the class would have been destined for success.

The mission of your Sunday school is too great to reduce it to a mere routine of superficial studies of the

Why are you doing what you're doing to your people?

Bible and to teachers who have taken their teaching time for granted. Ask some hard questions:

- What is wrong with our Sunday school?
- What is right with our Sunday school?
- How can our situation be improved?

Wait. Before you conclude that your problems center around not having enough teachers or money, think about the purpose of your Christian education programs:

- What do you want people to learn?
- What methods will you use to teach them?
- What kind of people do you want to teach?
- Do people look forward to serving?

Whether or not you agree, society is changing; while it is still important to bring people to an understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, your methodology may need to change. Jesus used many methods and circumstances to teach His followers.

Define your purpose. Respond to that purpose. Sunday school can be an excellent avenue for teaching Bible truth and developing healthy Christians. I believe, after two hundred years of helping to change lives, quality Sunday schools will see even better success in the future.



Rick Wulfestieg,
National Minister of Christian Education

people
want
in a leader

At least 3 out of 4 people want leaders who...

- Motivate people to get involved (87%)
- Negotiate a compromise when there is conflict (78%)
- Identify the course of action to take (77%)
- Make decisions which are in the best interests of the people, even if those decisions might not be popular (76%)
- Train and develop other leaders to help (75%)

Over half of people want leaders who...

- Describe a vision for the future (63%)
- Create the plans necessary to implement the vision (61%)
- Supervise the work of staff people (61%)
- Manage the day-to-day details and operations of the group they lead (56%)

More than 1 out of 4 people want leaders who...

- Give up personal convictions to satisfy the desires of the majority (29%)
- Fight for things to stay the way they are (26%)

Goals for Sunday School RECRUITMENT

Goal 1: Inform everyone on the Sunday School staff of the recruitment needs so that everyone can pray.

If recruiting is the responsibility of only one or two people, those people often become overworked and discouraged—and recruitment prospects are limited to the friends and acquaintances of these few people.

The total Sunday school staff needs to accept part of the concern for recruitment. The pastor, Christian education committee or council members, Sunday School coordinators, teachers and helpers must support, encourage and, above all, pray that potential teachers will accept an invitation to ministry.

This involvement does not mean everyone is trying to sign up new teachers. That would only invite chaos! Rather, everyone on staff must be informed of recruiting needs, pray regularly that the need will be met, and be willing to help where appropriate in the recruiting process. In addition, particularly in a larger church, it is often helpful to have a committee that is responsible for the various steps to effective recruiting. Form a new committee at least once a year. Invite people to be on the committee at least once a year.

Goal 2: Create a church wide campaign that will let people know the good things happening in your Sunday School.

Crucial to a successful recruitment program is church wide awareness of ways God is using your Sunday School to make a difference in people's lives. People don't want to make a deep commitment to an organization or program they know little about. And they can't get excited about becoming part of a group that is constantly making desperate pleas for somebody—anybody—to please help!

Present your Sunday School or other program in a positive light:

- What is God accomplishing through this ministry?
- How are people's lives being helped?
- What are some of the benefits, challenges and rewards to those who become involved in this exciting and fruitful ministry?
- What opportunities are open to those who want to have a part in the work of the Sunday School?



Goal 3: Find the right person for the right job, and supply a written job description.

In order to recruit a person to do a job, you need to be able to clearly describe the job and what is required of the person who accepts that responsibility. No one is going to get excited about taking a position that is vaguely defined. People want to know what they're getting into and how much time, effort and ability the job will require. Providing job descriptions will give you a head start on your recruiting.

Much of what we desire of a person in ministry has to do with relationships. Almost everything else in ministry—how to lead a small group, how to tell a Bible story, how to guide students in an art activity—can be taught. But relationships deal with more tangible things. So, first, we want our leaders and teachers to be people whose relationships with God are foremost in their lives. That relationship is the foundation upon which all other parts of ministry is built. But we also are looking for people who are able to build relationships with the students they teach or lead. Especially in youth ministry, there is a high expectation for significant relationship building—and a realization that building relationships takes time. Be certain that your job descriptions for teachers and leaders highlight this key part of ministry.

An important part of an effective recruitment program is a consistent and continuing effort to identify people who might enjoy a place of ministry on the Sunday School staff. Consider the benefits of a well-planned, year-round program of identifying and evaluating prospects.

Excerpts from "How To Have A Great Sunday School" by Wes & Sheryl Haystead. Gospel Light Publications ©1999

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