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The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
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An old new way for improving teaching in your church

One advantage of having a 40-year ministerial career that includes serving as pastor, minister of education, writer, editor, curriculum planner, publishing manager, Bible and Christian education professor (adjunct), seminar leader, publishing consultant, and curriculum publisher is that over time I have become familiar with many practices that work — and don't work.

In church life sometimes the “old” can have new uses and new appeal in a new generation. Let me tell you about an old new way (or is it a new old way?) that will help to revitalize your church's Sunday school, Bible study or small group program. This simple practice has been around for decades, but not nearly enough churches use it today.

This old new way will help teachers by providing a time of preparation for teaching each week. In the churches in which I've helped to make this happen, teachers have become so devoted to it that they have insisted we keep doing it.

This teaching preparation time is not just teaching the lesson on Wednesday evening. It's leading teachers in exploring the Scripture to be studied in the next session and trying new teaching/learning methods. It works for any age group, but I will focus on adults in this article.

The benefits of this regular teaching prepara-

tion time are many. Here are a few, some of them straight from the lips of participating teachers who are sold on the idea:

- “It strengthens my teaching by helping me think about the Scripture and the class session through the week.”
- “It helps me anticipate questions and themes my class will be interested in exploring.”
- “It encourages me to try new teaching/learning methods I might otherwise be reluctant to use.”
- “It saves me preparation time.” (Many teachers say the 30-40 minutes they spend in teaching preparation time saves them at least twice that amount of personal preparation time.)
- It encourages the development of new teachers.
- It aids with the enlistment of substitute teachers.

Here are several other reasons for championing teacher preparation time, especially if you're a pastor or a church staff member. These reasons can be capsuled in three words: knowledge, relationships and focus.

Knowledge. Leading this time will give you an opportunity to provide your teachers with the resources and insights your theological education has given you. You can help teachers grow in their biblical understanding.

Relationships. Teaching preparation time will give you an avenue for connecting with teachers in a unique way. They will be your allies and supporters because they know that you support them.

Focus. Connecting with teachers first and then with small groups will give you an opportunity to help influence and sharpen your church's focus.

So how can you initiate this educational tool in your church? First, get as many adult classes as you can on the same curriculum plan.

One disadvantage of the smorgasbord of Sunday school studies many churches have drifted into using is that such churches can start to resemble the Israelites in the chaotic days of the judges when everyone did what was right in their own eyes! Giving classes freedom to choose their own studies can be helpful, even enabling some classes to get out of an unproductive rut. There are big payoffs, though, for coordination, both for the church and for individual teachers.

Getting a fair number of your church's Sunday School/Bible study classes and/or small groups on the same curriculum page probably won't be easy. (Maybe your first step is to lead your classes to evaluate possible curriculum choices.) You might just begin teaching preparation time where you can — with teachers of a few classes that are using the same curriculum plan.

If you have the courage and the cooperation to get at least a few classes using the same study, here are some steps to take to make teaching preparation time work in your church:

- Determine the best 30-40 minute time slot available.
- Establish the session as a weekly priority for at least one year.
- Enlist a leader who has strong biblical interpretation skills and credibility as a good teacher and is willing to use a variety of teaching methods.
- Have the leader follow the general pattern of the teaching plans in your curriculum materials, adapting them as needed to meet the needs of the teachers.

Every “old” idea won't work today, but teaching preparation time is one that will. If you will invest in it, you — and others in your church — will be glad you did. **BT**



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