

2007

The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Bo Prosser



The transformative Sunday school

A couple of my friends have a debate going on. “Sunday school is dead,” one of them taunts. “If not for the Sunday school, your church would be dead,” the other responds. “Sunday school is for old-timers,” one responds haughtily. “Sunday school is the most innovative hour in the church,” the other hollers. I think they are both right.

The Bible teaching ministry in general and the Sunday school in particular are still vital parts of who we are in the church. Innovation is needed, but the Sunday school is still important to the missional ministries of the local congregation.

The local church is still relevant. The tasks facing the local congregation are certainly more challenging than ever, but the results may also be extraordinary. Numbers matter only in the way numbers represent people. And, the numbers are staggering!

Most people in our nation affirm that they believe in God. Yet, less than one-third of the population participates in local congregations. Most church watchers predict that somewhere between 50,000 and 60,000 congregations will close in the next 20 years. So, how can we embrace the stability of the Sunday school tradition while injecting innovative methods in the mix?

Here are a few building blocks for embracing the Sunday school and bringing innovation to this ministry. (For others, see *Building Blocks for Sunday School Growth*, Smyth & Helwys, 2002.)

Vision — Determine what you want to happen in the Sunday school hour and clearly communicate this to your workers. As folks embrace the vision of the ministry, they will participate consistently and with energy. Sunday school was never meant to be

“in-depth” Bible study. The vision has always been about fellowship, outreach and quality Bible teaching.

Balance — The Bible study hour is about information and transformation. For too long we’ve been heavy on one or the other. As we clarify a vision for the Sunday school, we are better able to balance what happens in the class experience. Balance leads to vitality, freedom and transformation.

Leadership — For too long we have relied on a handful of hearty souls to teach each week. These leaders studied diligently, participated weekly and presented enthusiastically. Today, some classes have multiple teachers, literature pieces and presentation styles. A leadership team is vital for addressing the needs of a class. Teachers, care givers, note writers and phone callers/e-mailers help keep the class connected to one another and to the church. An effective team will bring about contagious fellowship and transformation.

Relevant teaching — Teaching today must bring a vital word from the Bible about living in today’s world. Teaching biblical truth that is relevant to now is one of the most challenging aspects of the Sunday school. Relevant teaching requires a variety of teaching methods and presentation media, and must focus on people. It is about helping people believe, belong and become. Relevant and relational teaching lead to transformation.

Outreach and evangelism — Sunday school is no longer the “front door” of the church. The initial connection to a congregation comes through worship. However, Sunday school becomes the “sticking” place. The Sunday school class is the point of relationship

building and growing. As the class becomes more relevant and transformational, members will become more aware of friends and family who should be part of the class. As more people participate, the opportunity to share the message of salvation becomes crucial. The Sunday school interprets faith experiences into life-changing decisions that lead to transformation.

Receptivity and inclusion — People go, where they know they’ve been prepared for and are cared for. The Sunday school has always been about people. We teach people the Bible. We share fellowship with other people. When people come to us for informing and transforming Bible study, we must make room for them physically and emotionally. People know if they are not wanted. We must address the question, “Are we serious about reaching and including the unchurched in our congregation?” The answer we give will either lead to stagnation or transformation.

Missional mindset — The Sunday school cannot become just another “program” of the church. We have too many Sunday schools like that already. The missional Sunday school seeks to empower class members to minister out of their calling, not the needs of the nominating committee! The missional mindset will bring energy and innovation to the Bible teaching ministry. The missional mindset will not return us to the greatness of “a million more in ’54,” but will equip us for bringing a relevant truth to a people who wait desperately for us to figure out how to do so!

The tools are already at your disposal. Become more of who you already are. As you do, your Sunday school will move from stagnation to transformation. **BT**

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month’s page was written by Bo Prosser, Coordinator of Congregational Life for CBF.

Resource Page Archives are now available at http://www.thefellowship.info/resources/for_your_church/baptists_today.icm.