

2007

# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month  
by Bo Prosser



## I'm ready to cancel Sunday school . . .

Dear Bozo: I'm hearing from my Sunday school teachers that "Sunday school is one of the basic ministries of the church." In our culture today I think they are out of touch with the times and trying to hold on to an outdated view. I feel more inclined to a focus on Christian discipleship, spiritual formation, and creative approaches to teaching and learning. We surely don't keep up with our attendance figures anymore! Sunday school has long ceased to be a relevant event in our church. Nobody is learning anything in Sunday school anymore. Am I wrong? What are your insights on the focus and objectives of the Sunday school today?

—Quarterly Frustrated in Alabama

Dear Quarterly:

Mark Twain once said to some of his critics, "The reports of my demise are greatly exaggerated!" The same could be said for the Sunday school. Critics have been shouting loudly for years about the death of Sunday school and have tried their best to either reform it or kill it outright. My hunch is that we'll still be having Sunday school long after we quit serving donuts and coffee and do away with high attendance days!

—Bozo

Perhaps as you enter into this new year, you are feeling a bit like my friend "Frustrated in Alabama." If so, here are some points to consider as you do a tune-up on your Sunday school.

*People go where they know they've been prepared for and are cared for!* This is what the Sunday school class does best — teaches and cares. The focus is always on people. We teach biblical truths that hopefully relate to meaningful living and Christian growth.

Many people are searching for a place to belong. They want to know that they matter, that they can have a "safe" place to learn and to connect. A delicate balance of inreach and outreach must exist. When a class turns inward too much, the needs of the community around them — especially those who are looking for a place to connect — get ignored. When a class is too outwardly focused, the spiritual growth of one another gets ignored.

People who are deeply connected to church life more often are connected by their

Sunday school class.

I still think Sunday school is a vital ministry for the church. It can be the place where discipleship and spiritual formation are best taught. The keys are intentionality and balance. Consider these thoughts:

*Sunday School was never meant to be in-depth Bible study.* Sunday school has historically been about a balance of two principles: quality Bible teaching and sincere personal interaction. The Sunday school class is one of the main connecting points to the broader work of the church. Most classes have less than 30 minutes of actual class time, whereas in-depth Bible study of any value requires more than 90 minutes of teaching and has a high accountability on outside study and attendance.

*Enlist teachers with a passionate calling for teaching.* Teachers are crucial for meaningful Sunday school ministry. Granted, some teachers have lost their effectiveness in the class experience, but many take their call to teach seriously and prepare dutifully each week. We who lead can help teachers understand better their teaching tasks.

*Use a variety of presentation methods.* The teaching event must engage learners through hearing, seeing and doing. Learners should discuss issues and present their opinions. Teachers are responsible for teaching; learners are responsible for their own learning! Typically, I challenge teachers to use three to five different teaching approaches for each lesson. This keeps the energy and interaction at a high level.

*Sunday School should be fun, engaging and related to today's world.* Teaching and learning are vital elements of the Christian life. We can help prevent boredom in Sunday school by helping teachers embrace their own creativity. Through periodic training we can present them with resources outside of the "quarterly" for initiating meaningful and sincere interactions on questions about faith and life. As participants perceive that teaching is relevant, they are more apt to participate with enthusiasm.

So, "Quarterly," don't be "Frustrated in Alabama." Consider the many creative models and options for doing Sunday school.

For example, many church leaders are enlisting a cadre of "content experts." These folks share Christian-related seminars consisting of two to four Sundays of presentations. These seminars are formed around lifestyle issues that speak to the ministry needs of the church and the community. These are larger "assemblies" of people who share from a biblical base to help participants form deeper spiritually. There are no "roll books" and plenty of opportunities for sharing.

With some intentional interaction, your Sunday school can be a vital piece of the spiritual formation ministry of your church. The demise of the Sunday school is greatly exaggerated. *If we are sharing quality Bible teaching and quality relational experiences, people will connect.*

Perhaps I am only a voice crying in the wilderness, but I'm not ready to give up yet! **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 for Congregational Life at CBF. Resource Page Archives now available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/CL/FF/CMResources/BTResourcePages.icm>