

T.E.A.C.H.

God Has a Future for the Sunday School

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Christian
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Dr. J.K. Warrick was the keynote speaker at our recent Ministerial Conference. In one of his addresses he quoted a paragraph from the book *Practicing Greatness* by Reggie McNeal.

The quote states, "Great leaders bless people. They inspire and encourage. They help people become more than what they have been, maybe even more than they thought they could be. Great leaders help people be a part of something bigger than themselves. In short, great leaders leave people better off than they were before the leader entered their lives."

Accepting that definition of a great leader it is easy to see that Jesus was an extraordinary leader. As I reflected on that reality I began to wonder about how Jesus, if He were here in the flesh today, might lead the Sunday school at my church and yours into the next century.

I began to wonder what the future of Sunday school in our churches would look like if we could see it through the eyes of Jesus. I wonder how He would set out to bless people? I wonder how He would go about accomplishing that? I wonder whose life He might begin investing in to help them begin realizing the potential that He had entrusted to them. I wonder how He might go about communicating His vision of the future of Sunday school in such a compelling way that numbers of men and women would drop everything to join Him on His journey? There is no doubt in my mind that Jesus would leave everyone and everything that He touched better off.

These are important questions that are worth wrestling with. Is our present vision of Sunday school strong enough and big enough to capture the attention of those we are leading? It is important that it be biblically based and scripturally supported because people will not inconvenience themselves much less lay down their lives for my ideas or yours. Jesus spoke a lot about the will of the Father and we need to do the same thing.

Jesus clearly understood that the growth of the kingdom of God will rise or fall on our ability to attract and grow people. He was especially interested in attracting those with the ability to influence others. What are we doing to attract people? What are the needs in their lives that we need to be responding to? When we are able to attract people what are we doing to help them grow? Is there obvious significant life change taking place with the passing of time?

If we set aside the time and invest the necessary energy to really process these questions I believe we can discern what the Lord wants to do next through our Sunday school. There is no doubt that He has a preferred future planned that is different than our present reality. Are you willing to quiet your heart and spend some time listening for His leadership? Are you willing to open your eyes and ears to those in your web of relationships to begin really paying attention to their needs? He is ready to lead us in responding to those needs if we are ready to follow.

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The Christian Education Convention Transition

After much study by our department and numerous discussions with the district C.E. Committees it was mutually agreed that the convention could be readily available to more people if both the S.C.D. and W.C.D. C.E. Committees would each host a district convention versus the one convention presently hosted by the General C.E. Department.

We reached this conclusion after looking at trends covering quite a number of years. We observed that the location of the host church has had a fairly dramatic impact on the attendance. When the convention was hosted in the South Central District there was a much larger number of churches from within that district that were represented and the same has been true when events were hosted within the West Central District.

We also noticed that the number of participating churches from beyond the hosting district was negatively affected

when the convention was not in their district so the overall attendance numbers have remained pretty much static for several years now. We feel certain that the total number of churches participating as well as the number of individuals able to attend will both be strengthened by going to two separate conventions. Both conventions will be very similar if not identical in format.

The following data will give you clarity on the vital information you will need to be able to plan your calendar.

West Central District Convention	South Central District Convention
Date: September 15, 2007	Date: April 19, 2008
Location: Lighthouse CCCU	Location: Brookside CCCU
Schedule 9:00—4:00	Schedule 9:00—4:00

If you have any questions or need further information feel free to contact our office.

What's So Special About Sunday School? by Pastor Charlie McGraw

Growing up in the *Churches of Christ in Christian Union*, I was always brought to Sunday School on Sunday mornings by the church van. I can still remember till this day being crammed in the basement of that little church on Eastern Avenue in Gallipolis, Ohio. That was where I learned about the love of God and was taught all of those great bible stories with life changing truths. In that environment, I was exposed to the church and caring people who loved me and carried a burden for my soul. It was in Sunday School where I "got hooked" on the word of God and began to consider following Christ. I believe in Sunday School, I believe this ministry is a must for the church today. Statistics show that Sunday School in America is declining; this concerns me. What might be the cause? I think that much of it has to do with the fact that many people believe Sunday School is "old fashioned" or not relevant. I disagree, yes Sunday School may seem to be old fashioned, but it's concept is still relevant to today. There are many ways of developing a Sunday School program in our churches. When churches today think of Sunday school, they immediately think of children, this is a good start. But Sunday school is not only for children, but adults as well. Every person young, old, and in between needs the fellowship and the exposure of the Word. So what are the benefits of Sunday School/Christian Education?

In a Sunday school setting one can and should experience love. One of our Sunday schools core values is sharing love. Every person needs to feel loved and to experience the love of the Father, People need to sense Christ's love and presence in their lives. They need to hear the gospel in a loving envi-

ronment on a level of their own understanding. A Sunday school setting is a great place for a non believer to feel loved and to be lead to Christ. For those of us who know Christ, this is a place where we can encourage one another in our faith.

Sunday school is a perfect place to disciple "new babes" in Christ. Every person needs to feel their life being shaped by Christ and the Gospel. Here we can help people discover biblical truths that will help them on their journey of faith in Christ Jesus.

Another core value of Sunday school is *Serving Like Christ*. Every child of God needs to be in service for the King! The Sunday school setting provides a place where people can discover their gifts, talents, and abilities and use them for the Kingdom.

Finally, the goal of Sunday school is to train and send leaders. The gospel must go forth from our home to all of the world.

Growing up Sunday school is where I got the "meat and potatoes" of the Gospel, it is where I began to learn and know about God and His plan for my life. Christian education is for everyone and every Child of God. It is a place of fellowship and a place to encourage one another on our life journey. The beauty of Christian Education is that you can choose your methods, style, approach, location and time. Each church is different. At Cortland Cornerstone, we are in a revitalization period so this is the perfect time to refocus and expect the Harvest!



God's Preferred Future For Sunday School

Pastor Doug Thompson

Why? That may be one of the most important questions we can ask in this life. Why is this true? Why is that being said? Why am I doing such and such? Why?

Can I begin this article by asking you that question about Sunday School? Why does your church engage in a Sunday school program? *Wait. Stop and really answer that last question.* Investigate this with me for a moment and don't move on to the next sentence just yet. Why does your church engage in a Sunday school program? While we're thinking together, why don't we get some of the "pat answers" out of the way. *Why do we have Sunday school?* For discipleship, of course. For Bible study, too, no doubt. What about knowledge in doctrine and theology? Doesn't it allow someone to exercise their spiritual gifts? That's a reason isn't it? What other reasons are there? Go ahead, name a few. Write them on the edge of the paper.

But let's be gut-level honest. If you're a pastor or a lay-leader the Sunday school program was in place long before you came to the church you're serving. You didn't invent it. You didn't institute it. You didn't begin the program. It was there before you and it will probably be there long after you're gone, am I right?



Some Sunday school programs remind me of the old oak tree growing in my grandma's front yard in Elizabeth, Indiana. It was there when my Momma was a little girl and it was there when I was growing up and now it's there when my kids visit too. When they were small I took them there and placed them in the tree just to give them a taste of what it was like. I'm a grown man, but whenever I go home I still want to climb it just for old time's sake. It feels so good, in fact I want to plant my own oak tree in my own front yard back in Ohio! That tree that sits on my grandma's property is much a part of our family as the house itself. It's a part of our family. It's a part of our history.

Tradition. Heritage. Legacy. These are words that connect with Sunday school. Surely there are a myriad of motives behind Sunday school programs. But many of them fit with the "oak tree" system. It was there when we came, it has meaning and value in a nostalgic sort of way, it will never change. So, it's our responsibility to maintain it and make certain it grows as best it can. It's something like a "trust" isn't it? We have Sunday school in our church because our Momma had Sunday school in her church and our grandma and grandpa before that, and our great-grandparents before them. It's an historic tradition, as much a part of our church as the building itself.

Other Sunday school programs I've seen remind me of some other trees on my grandma's property. While she has that old oak tree in the front yard, but she also has about a dozen fruit trees in the backyard. When I was a boy growing up, I'd spend the summers with my grandma and grandpa, whereupon she would set out to break every "Child Labor Law" this fine country has ever fashioned and legislated! It was my job to harvest the fruit off those trees in the back

acre. It dawned on me that the purposes behind the oak tree in the front yard and the fruit trees in the back have quite drastic contracts. One is there for appearances along with tradition and legacy, the others exist to feed the family.

Now allow me to ask you again, *Why does your Sunday school program exist?* More to the point, *"Is it an oak tree? Or is it a fruit tree?"* Does it decorate the church reminding us of our past, creating a nice and comfy feeling for our members, but doing little to impact their lives, or does it feed our souls.? It's not just Sunday school, mind you, we could have this discussion about anything going on with the church, from the preaching to the music to the other times we have services. But Sunday school is the issue at hand, so let's think about it together, shall we?

In recent years, much has been said and written about the death of Sunday school in America. Many churches today are moving toward a small group or home based discipleship system in their churches. They're chopping down the "oak trees" in the church and replacing them with "fruit trees." At the same moment in time, many other churches are clinging tenaciously to the traditional discipleship system of Sunday school, it has history, it has meaning, it has value, in a nostalgic sort of way.

May I be so bold as to suggest that God's "preferred future" may not be that we chop down the Sunday school program in the church? Some things aren't ready to die. They need to live. Can I suggest that God's "preferred future" may be that you live and die protecting it like the tree-hugger environmentalists of nature. At times keeping something alive hurts us all. We need to let it go, we need to let it die.

In every church, and in every place the need may be different, and I'm not here to suggest an "either/or" approach to discipleship programs. Many churches might handle both Sunday school programs and Small Groups simultaneously and do well. Here's my point: **If something isn't fruitful, if it isn't feeding the church family, it either needs to die and be replaced or it needs to be revisited and revitalized by the leader's of the family.**

The temptation for all of us is to cling to the past even while the present and future slip through our fingers. By the same token, if we throw out the baby with the bath water we've just tossed our future out the window, haven't we?

Sunday school isn't really the issue in our churches, fruitfulness is. Lost people need Jesus, young believers need to be mentored and discipled, guests need to be welcomed and made to belong, the church needs to feel like a family again. If your Sunday school program is doing these things GREAT! If it isn't, maybe it's time to try something new, or maybe it's time to pump some new life into the program.

When I was a boy, the thing I loved to do most at grandma and grandpa's was to climb the oak tree and hang like a monkey. But they knew how to put all that energy to good use, they knew how to feed the family. God has a family to feed, and we are the labors. Let's do that as efficiently as possible!



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Is the Seed Sown?

Early one morning with a spade in my hand, I was turning soil for planting, thanking the Lord for His presence and praying for His blessings on the sugar snap peas that were just put in the ground. God is at work in the world and He wants us to join Him. As a Sunday School Superintendent, my thoughts went to sowing spiritual seeds to believers and unbelievers in the Sunday School ministry. We all have a mission, this is part of God's plan.



What is going to happen next? The future of Sunday School will be fulfilling God's purposes within the ministry and continue to do what Jesus started with His class. Jesus took twelve men and changed the whole world. This is an essential part of God's glory. Today in the future Sunday School is an exciting way to make a difference in many lives. Ask God to place someone in your class that you can share your faith with by teaching the basic such as: Where do we come from? Where are we going? In addition, why we are living today?

On many occasions, just before the Sunday School hour an

Roy Fee, Sunday Superintendent

ear of field corn is passed around the congregation. They are asked to take one kernel from the ear and spiritually sow it that week. Each ear of field corn has approximately 800 to 1000 kernels per ear depending on its size. Moreover, each year is started with one kernel. Do you begin to get the message? If seed is not sown and prayer is not given, Sunday school will diminish. Any place where God is you BE THERE!

Church Bulletin Bloopers

Thursday night—Potluck supper-prayer and medication to follow.

Don't let worry kill you-let the church help.

Next Thursday, there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

Barbara C. remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Jack's sermons.