

Myrtle Felkner

Places and Spaces for Learning

But we don't have the room! We're cramped now as it is, and we just don't have room for another class! We already have a class in the choir loft and two in the sanctuary. Where can we put another class?"

If you're in a small congregation and haven't heard statements similar to these, your church is quite unusual! One of the chronic complaints in many small congregations is lack of space or the need to use limited space for several different functions and purposes. For some, this is a problem. For other, those who have a vision of vital Christian education, this is an opportunity!

The Very Basics

What is absolutely necessary to make a space conducive to effective Christian education?—a space recognizable as "ours."

Notice that nothing is said here about those "spaces" having four walls and doors...or elaborate tables, storage cabinets, dry-erase boards, pianos, and VCRs—nice as all these things are. Nothing is said here about windows, curtains, carpeting, or any of the other accouterments usually found in up-to-date educational wings of large churches.

What is being said is that learners—children, adults, youth—need a sense of familiarity and comfort with the surroundings.

Working with the Spaces You Have

"Personalizing a space is crucial; it's central to giving adults, children, and youth a sense of belonging, of being at home. How can we personalize spaces, especially when space is so scarce?"

How many classes meet in the sanctuary? Can each one have part of a wall allotted to them to hang banners, pictures, or an attendance chart? How about "our" stack of curriculum resources, Bibles, and pencils and papers at the end of "our" pew? How about a small wooden stand with our class name on it that's positioned in front of our section of the sanctuary before we arrive? "See that small back-board there underneath the pew? That belongs to our class, and one of the men fixed it so it would

fasten onto the back of a pew so we could all see it. It sort of marks our space!"

A class in the kitchen? Why not?

What about the vestibule or narthex?

Fellowship hall? Two problems: Fellowship halls are often oddly shaped, and they often carry sound very well—too well! Here's where portable screens or partitions can help.

Now get creative! Look for other spaces in your church. One congregation transformed the unused balcony of its sanctuary into a couple of class spaces, with a minimum expenditure of church funds.

Who gets the best spaces for Christian education? Who gets the nice room with all the facilities? Our first thought might be to provide that for the children. But experience indicates that, often, if the adult Sunday school class is placed in the very best

room with the best facilities, then those adults will want for their children and youth what they themselves have, and they will be motivated to provide additional space—maybe even a new building—for other classes!

Put another way: If you get the adults in your congregation excited about the ministry of

Christian education and all that it can mean, they'll take care of the children and youth. But if you ignore the Christian education of adults, you'll soon have a situation in which the adults drive the children to Sunday school, drop them off, and come back an hour later to pick them up. And that's almost always followed by the adults failing to even drive their children to Sunday school. In other words, get the adults, and you've got the whole family; and you have the improvements in physical facilities you need to make your Christian education ministry truly effective! □

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