



A Note for Your Newsletter

A pastor of one of our United Methodist churches in Oklahoma shared this story. Her grandson Alec, age seven, and his family recently moved from Tulsa to Houston. He was born in Tulsa and this was his first move. She was talking to Alec on the phone about three weeks after they had moved and asked him if he had made any friends yet. He replied, "Oh, yes. Hundreds!" She said, "Wow, that is a lot of friends. How did you do that so quickly?" His answer? "I went to Sunday School."

What a wonderful story! What children in our neighborhood could make "hundreds" of new friends if someone invited them to Sunday school? Could you help?

How Do We Find New Teachers?

One director of Christian Education seeks nominations for teachers. She wants to know whom classes would like to have as a teacher and whether or not they are teaching at the moment. She invites the second graders to tell her whom they would like to learn from, and she invites the men's class and the Sojourners class, etc. Of course, not every class has someone to suggest, and not all of their suggestions are folks who are not teaching elsewhere. However, she reports that her ability to recruit people to teach who have some hesitancy about their ability or even about their schedule is much improved by this approach. Imagine how it would feel if the Christian education director or Sunday School Superintendent were to come to you and say: "I see gifts for teaching in you, and so do others. You've been nominated to teach the XYZ class. Are you willing (even on a short term basis)? Can I help you feel prepared?"

Who are the folks gifted to teach in your congregation? Who can help you find, enlist, and equip them?

Risks of Teaching

Anyone who has ever taught any sort of class, including a Sunday school class, knows that the teacher learns much more than he or she is able to share. Here's a true story.

A young mother moved with her spouse who was in military service to a new location. Once there, they decided to have their baby baptized. Though neither parent was particularly religious, both had attended a church as a child so this seemed like the thing to do. The pastor of that church stayed in touch with the couple who did not become active in the church until one of their parents became ill. Being far away from family, they had a new openness to the church family.

A short time later, the pastor invited this young mother to teach the toddlers and twos class. While any other age-level might have seemed too challenging, she reports that she felt like she could "keep up" with these little ones, even with her limited background. Of course, as she prepared the lessons and loved these children and became more and more a part of the church family, the Word of God began to work in her heart, until she came to count herself a person of faith. She became hungry to learn and grow. She took DISCIPLE Bible Study and finally ended up going to seminary and being ordained as an elder.

Are we inviting people into the joy and challenge of teaching? Are we helping them to grow in their own faith as they study the Bible and lead a caring community?

Standing in the Need of Prayer

We've been talking about what a difference it would make if we were praying for our Sunday School teachers and if they knew that someone was praying for them. I've learned that there are different approaches to this too.

One pastor talked about recruiting adult members of Sunday School classes to go to the children's classrooms

before class and pray for each teacher and each child. The teacher may be there getting ready for the class, or not; but either way, the congregation is being enlisted in the spiritual work of teaching. Not only is this incredibly important to the teachers, but think about the impact on the adults—isn't this a marvelous way to "do all in our power to increase their faith, strengthen them in hope and perfect them in love" as we agree to do in our baptismal service?

In another church, the Christian education director goes to the chapel to pray for the teachers at a date and time that's announced each week. The congregation is invited to join in praying at that time, either in person or wherever they happen to be.

What pattern of prayer could become a part of your congregation's repertoire?

How Much Is Enough?

"Mark" is an energetic young person, who participates regularly in Sunday school and other activities in his congregation. Not long ago, his teacher decided that there were a few things that she wanted her students to "learn by heart" so, when the Twenty-third Psalm came up in the lesson plan, she thought: *Here's my opportunity. Many of the children already know parts of this psalm; we'll start here.* As it turns out, "Mark" doesn't memorize well. He worked and worked on the psalm, and as the children were each saying the psalm week by week he began to get worried. However, in the week when his turn came, he stood up and began confidently enough: "The LORD is my Shepherd..." followed by a long pause. He concluded: "and that's enough for me."

Whether or not you think memorization is an aid to learning, that teacher and her class had a chance to talk about something really important that day. Maybe the work of our whole life is to be able to say confidently: "The Lord is my Shepard, and that's enough for me." Sunday school is certainly a place to learn important things...maybe even to change our lives!

Just Saying Thank You

A pastor of a large-membership church in the UMC shared with me recently that he's been thinking about the Sunday school. We've been talking about how to let congregations and teachers know how important their work is, and the fact that many pastors are committed elsewhere on Sunday morning. He decided that instead of trying to find a way to get to the Sunday school area between services, he would just write a note to each and every teacher during the week. So he did. He got the list of teachers, wrote the notes and went on to the next matter on his "to do list" in a busy downtown church.

He was amazed at the outpouring that followed. Teachers

were so grateful for his personal investment, for his recognition of them as partners in ministry, and for his attention to part of the life of the church that they hold dear. It made him realize how important it was that he respond to this offering of their gifts and talents.

How can you express appreciation for the teachers in your congregation? Maybe some of the barriers to doing that one way could lead to developing a whole new pattern.

What's Going On in Sunday School?

Here are synopses of some of Cokesbury's most popular curricula. Can you find a way to connect to what some of the classes are studying in your congregation?

This fall in **Exploring Faith**, the children will be studying about how God called Abraham and Sarah and all their descendants into a special relationship and promised to be with them. In September, the children will address the following stories: God calls Abraham, God promises Abraham many children, Abraham and Lot divide the land, and the birth of Isaac fulfills God's promise. Abraham's family continues to increase in size and God continues to be present with them. In October, the children will hear these stories: Rebekah is chosen as a wife for Isaac, Esau sells his birthright, Jacob cheats his brother out of his blessing, Jacob's dream at Bethel, and Jacob and Esau reunite.

In September, **Bible Studies for Youth** will focus on the early church and the spreading of the gospel. Students will delve into the Book of Acts and discover the beginnings of the church in Jerusalem. In October, youth will learn about the spreading of the gospel through Paul's conversion and to Lydia, Priscilla, and Aquila. They'll be challenged to answer Jesus' call to take the gospel "to the ends of the earth."

Adult Bible Studies will also focus on the Book of Acts, around the theme of community, entitled "You Will Be My Witnesses." In September, classes will be looking at being witnesses "in Jerusalem":

Encountering the Spirit, Acts 2:1-42
Sharing Community, Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-35
The Gift of Healing, Acts 3:1-26
Power to Be Bold, Acts 4:1-31

In October these classes will move to looking at being witnesses "in all Judea and Samaria":

Faithful Servant, Acts 6:8-7:60
Christians Without Borders, Acts 8:4-25
Interpreting the Word, Acts 8:26-40
Breaking the Gospel Barriers, Acts 10:1-48
Never Alone, Acts 12:1-17

Other places to go for help.

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