



How Do We Say Teaching Is Important?

Effective teaching occurs when we have a system of support for teachers that values them and their teaching and equips them to be even more effective. When a congregation understands that the purpose of Christian Education is to transform people and communities, teacher, learners, and all of us know why teaching is so important. When the value of teaching is proclaimed in the congregation, then, teachers know they are important. And when the whole congregation celebrates the ministry of teaching, they help create a climate where learning can take place.

One Sunday morning a man visited a congregation for the first time. He came in early for worship and, as many of us do, watched people as they entered. Several people carried totebags. He was curious about them, and when someone with one of the bags sat nearby, he read the message on the side: "Proud to Be a Sunday School Teacher." In a very concrete way, this congregation was saying to the teacher, "Stand up and be noticed. You're one of our teachers and we value you." All who saw the totebags knew that this congregation believes teaching is important.

Each congregation shows that it values the ministry of teaching by carefully planning ways to express support for teachers. Our support says clearly to all who teach, "What you are doing is life-changing and vital for us."

(from *Foundations*, p 65-67.)

Continual Improvement in Sunday School

As we plan for successful Sunday schools, having an expectation that God can and will do surprising things in our midst, anytime, anywhere, by any means, must become a central attitude. Sometimes it is a small thing we do with God's help that makes a big difference.

The Japanese people constantly improve their beautiful rock gardens. These improvements are incremental; they move one rock daily and by year's end, 365 changes have been made. Productive Sunday school growth and quality usually

come not from brilliant, amazing improvements as much as they do from smaller, incremental improvements. Imagine a church school making one improvement weekly for a total of 52 improvements annually!

Sunday School Teachers Make a Difference

Dr. Jim Pledger, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Sherman, Texas, was leading a workshop for pastors on how important Sunday school is to church growth. He began the class by asking his colleagues for a show of hands of those pastors who remember a sermon that caused them to change their lives. As he looked over his audience, no hands were raised. His next question was: "How many of you remember a Sunday school teacher who made a difference in your life?" All the hands in the group were raised. Certainly Dr. Pledger believes good preaching is important, even critical, for the life of a congregation. However, the point was also clear that Sunday school teachers make a significant difference in the faith development of many people.

Gerald Chambers, a life-long Christian educator, relates to this experience. He often refers to his Sunday school teacher when he was what we call today a "tween." If we were to evaluate this teacher on his teaching skills, most of us would agree his teaching skills were limited. Glen had never studied faith development, church history, and educational theory. His method was simple. He asked a child to read a verse and then he would tell the class what he thought it meant. Certainly most of these children learned some Bible stories, but that wasn't all. The teacher encouraged the students to pray and he prayed with them.

This teacher had a dream, a passion about the importance of prayer, about a life of prayer. It was his goal that each child in that class be able to pray, both privately and publicly, by the time they 'graduated' from his class. His love of young people and his belief that prayer was an essential part of a person's spiritual journey left a legacy with three decades of young people.

Teachers should not be led to believe that they must be

complete, mature Christians in order to have something to offer. It is more important to “live the questions” than to have all the answers. No one has all the skills and answers. Recruiting new persons and keeping longtime teachers are often difficult because people feel insecure and think they have nothing to give. They think they aren’t good enough or they don’t know how to teach.

The image of a faith *journey* means that persons can “jump in” and “live the questions” with others before they feel completely competent. We are all, as John Wesley said, “going on to perfection”; we aren’t there yet.

In Patricia Meyers dissertation, *Fostering Faith*, one of the most consistent and revealing findings in her research is that method is less important than a teacher who loves his or her students and models Christian faith. The teacher’s feelings are the most important means of education. Ninety-three percent of the respondents said that the amount of time spent with the teacher was significant. Eighty-eight percent said that the time spent impacted the way that they grew in their faith and beliefs.

Who are the teachers in your congregation who are making a life-long difference in the lives of their students? Is there a way you might honor them? Who in your congregation is waiting to be asked to teach, assured that he or she has wonderful gifts to share?

Prayer of Thanksgiving for Sunday School Teachers

Lamb of God, Gentle Jesus, God who creates and showers us with forgiveness and love, hear now our prayer.

On this day we say thank you for all the Sunday School teachers we have known who have shown us the way of community, of unselfish love, and most certainly of you. In this moment we remember the men, women and youth who spoke plain and nourishing words and exhibited with their lives their love of you and us and brought us into holy relationship that means everything to us.

We plead with you, God, to make our Sunday Schools and educational endeavors with children faith-filled. May we as leaders offer examples through our lives that will convince the children of your incredible love and provide them with hope that will satisfy their deepest longing.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, hear our prayers. Lamb of God, who shows us a better way, hear our prayers. Lamb of God who loves and won’t let go, be with us now and in all the days to come. *Amen*.

(Adapted from Bishop Sharon Radar’s opening sermon at Focus ’05)

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?

In **Exploring Faith** the first three weeks of November continues the story of the Abraham’s family with three stories about Joseph. The children will hear the stories of: Joseph and his brothers, Joseph is sold into slavery, and the conclusion of the story with Joseph’s brothers coming to Egypt, Joseph reveling himself, and Joseph and his father being reunited. The last week in November begins Advent with the Isaiah prophecy.

The month of December begins a new unit: Get Ready. Just as the people of Bible times waited and anticipated the coming of the Savior, we wait and prepare to celebrate the Savior’s birth at Christmas. During December, the children will hear the following stories (from Luke’s Gospel): The birth of John is announced, the annunciation to Mary and the story of Jesus’ birth. The last story will be Matthew’s account of the visit of the wise men.

In November, “To the Ends of the Earth,” is the theme for **Bible Lessons for Youth**. These four sessions will follow the further spread of the gospel through Paul’s conversion to Lydia, Priscilla, and Aquila. Key Bible passages are from the Book of Acts. A new unit, “God’s Redeeming Love,” will begin in December. Youth will study how God brings justice to the world, helps those who suffer, and deals with how we experience God’s love through the Christ Child. Key Bible passages are taken from the books of Isaiah and Luke.

Adult Bible Studies will follow the same unit themes as *Bible Lessons for Youth*. November’s four lessons pick up on the story of Paul. The first lesson explores Paul’s conversion. The second lesson introduces Lydia. The third lesson looks at Priscilla and Aquila. The fourth lesson in this unit includes Paul’s farewell to the church in Ephesus.”

- N6 - Encountering Truth (Acts 9:1-31)
- N13 - Offering of Oneself (Acts 16)
- N20 - Working Together in Ministry (Acts 18:1-19:10)
- N27 - Saying Goodbye (Acts 20:17-38)

December’s theme, “God’s Redeeming Love,” is four lessons based in Isaiah. It explores how God brings justice to the world, provides strength for a weary people, offers hope to those who suffer, and brings good news to all the people of the earth.”

- D4 - Serving Others (Isaiah 41-42)
- D11 - Strength from God (Isaiah 49-50)
- D18 - Hope for Those Who Suffer (Isaiah 53; Luke 1)
- D25 - Be Joyful (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 2:8-20)

Other places to go for help.

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