



So You're A... Sunday School Officer



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Sunday school leaders and officers can make the difference between an exciting, dynamic growing and spiritual Sunday School and one that is just barely getting along. The Sunday school has always been the teaching arm of the church. The real challenge for every Sunday school officer is to have the vision to see the Sunday school as effectively leading the people of God toward maturity in Christ, and then, with God's help, to make that happen.

Personal Qualification

The apostle Paul said that he "pressed toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14) It is assumed that your first requirement in holding this office is that you are a child of God and that you recognize that you have a high calling to serve Jesus Christ. It's your privilege to fulfill this in the context of the Sunday school, and so you must consider your work a divine appointment to God. As God's servant, what you are will be as important as what you do. You can be an effective officer in the Sunday school if you give attention to your own personal spiritual growth and have the right attitude. If you show people that you believe in the work of the Sunday school, if you give your service freely and willingly, seeking to build it up and make it grow, then your service will be a challenge to others. People will respect your work and give themselves to it. If you serve only from a sense of duty, doing only what you must, the opposite will be true. Your attitude sets the tone for others, so it must be right. It goes without saying that a Sunday school leader must fully support the scriptures as the Word of God and the saving Work of Christ. You should also be familiar with the DISCIPLINE of the Evangelical Congregational Church, and be ready to explain and support it. Your life should be lived in harmony with it.

You are no doubt saying that is certainly a lot to expect. Do I really make all that difference? Yes, you do make a difference! People have high expectations for you and they should, because your leadership can make for an effective Sunday school. You can deeply influence your church and all those who walk through its doors.

Using Your Resources to Meet Your Needs

The first secret of a well-run Sunday school is preparation and planning. It has been said that three-fifths of the work of Sunday school teaching should have been done before the teacher and pupil come together. If teachers and administrators plan and prepare, the time spent in the classroom will be effective. Most Sunday school teachers know the value of good planning. They know that it is important to select the proper materials for teaching and to spend time in preparation. There may be some that do not yet realize this, and will have to be encouraged to spend more time in their own preparation and in preparation of materials for class. But what is true of Sunday school teachers is true of the Sunday school as a whole. The Sunday school officers need to sit down as a team and consider what the specific needs of the Sunday school are. For example, who attends, what are they seeking to learn, who is not attending, why are they not attending, and what needs to be done to make the school more effective? And then, understanding what the needs are, it is possible to start to attack the problems and formu-



training those who will someday lead the church. May God give you Grace as you undertake this responsibility.



phasis in our day and age. The first is that our Sunday schools need to look for ways to which they can innovate. In many cases we have Sunday school programs that have continued for years. These have been valuable and many students have been saved and built up through them. However, it may be time to look at these programs to see if they could be better. There are many new teaching materials available today that were not available ten years ago. Thus, there may be opportunities for teaching Sunday school which did not exist before. We want to use these to do the very best job we can for the Lord. Some of our Sunday schools are losing members because we have not been willing to provide new things and attract new students. It may be time for a change in our Sunday school.

Another priority is to find and train new Sunday school teachers. In many of our Sunday schools the same people have been teaching Sunday after Sunday for 10, 20 or 30 years. Thank God for these faithful ministers of the Word over all this period of time! Without them we could not have carried forward our Sunday school program. But it is time that some of these people got a day off.

Some enjoy teaching enough to want to continue for years, but there are others who feel that Sunday school teaching is a kind of life sentence. As a result, they do not start because they know they may be expected to continue indefinitely. We need to find and train new Sunday school teachers so that they can teach for a period of time and then, in a sense, have a vacation. They can have time off so they can become a student again and learn from the Word. This is by now means an easy task, but if people understand that they are being asked to teach for a specific period of time perhaps one year or two years, and then would have some vacation, they may be more willing to undertake the training and become involved in the Sunday school. We can find new Sunday school teachers if we work at it and both they and the Sunday school will benefit.

The Salt of the Earth

If you are to be a Sunday school officer, you will find that you are truly the salt of the earth. If the teachers are little recognized, you will find that you will be even more of an unsung hero. Frankly, nobody thanks a coordinator, a superintendent, a treasurer or an assistant. They do not often have visible gifts. They are not before a class ministering the Word. Much of what you do is in a closet, but it is very important. Good Christian training just doesn't happen. The Holy Spirit and those people He calls to lead our Sunday schools are the ones that make it happen. Good planning, good use of personnel, good communication, good understanding of the job, innovation and faithful hard work mean a Sunday school program that goes forward.

The stars in your crown will come later. God will decide who gets them and in which order. If the Christian is the salt of the earth, you are the salt of the Sunday school. You must not lose your savor. Tomorrow's leaders in the church are those that are trained today. As a Sunday school officer you have the precious opportunity to



late plans for their solution. Then it will be possible to assign the work, divide the tasks and initiate the programs that will meet the needs.

You need to consider as a team what resources the Sunday school has. Is it fine teachers? Is it excellent facilities? Is it good teaching material? Is it a fine attitude on the part of the members of the Sunday school toward the program? Then also, frankly consider your resource shortcomings. Perhaps your facilities are not what they should be or some of your Sunday school teachers are overworked and need help. With a good assessment of your strengths and weaknesses, it is possible to plan ahead. Long range planning should include a 5 to 10 year program. In general, it is usually wise to plan your Sunday school program at least one year in advance. This means that during the spring and summer, you are planning the program which will carry you through to the next spring or summer. Whatever the time of year your Sunday school plans its program, it is important to realize that it should not simply do the same thing that it did last year, the same program, the same people and the same format. Rather try to innovate, start new things and to make each moment in class count. Many deficiencies in resources can be overcome when careful planning uses what you have to its best advantage.

Obviously, one of your most important resources in the Sunday school are the Sunday school teachers. Get to know your teachers, get to know the kind of things they like to teach and teach well. Get to know the kind of things which they don't like as well and perhaps don't do as well. Every good coach knows that a winning team cannot rely on just one good player. It takes the cooperation of every player and a contribution from each. In order to have a good Sunday school, it's important to have every Sunday school teacher doing the thing that he or she does best and enjoys doing. It's also very important that the Sunday school teachers realize that they are appreciated. All too often we find someone who has been faithfully teaching Sunday school for a very long time and has not received the appreciation and the thanks of the students that they teach. In the long run, we work not for each other but for the Lord Jesus Christ who is the head of the church. We know that our ultimate rewards come from Him, and are spiritual and personal rather than external and public. Nonetheless, showing proper appreciation for someone who has worked long and hard is a too often neglected and very necessary part of the work of the Sunday school officer. A word of appreciation has far reaching effects.

It's important to provide variety for our teachers. Sometimes teachers have taught in one department for many, many years and have grown tired of that position. They would like to change and do something different. They would like to try teaching in another department or perhaps they would like to have a period in which they do not have to teach. It may be a good investment to ask your teachers if they would like to take a break from Sunday school teaching for a period of time. They might take a special course or enjoy some other activity in the Sunday school that they cannot enjoy while they are teaching. A concrete example might be a teacher in the junior department that would very much like to take a specific 13 week elective course. Because he or she is considered a vital member of their department, that opportunity never presents itself.



Be sensitive to the needs of your teachers. It would be better to encourage your teachers to take an elective course so they can be renewed in their teaching skills and enthusiasm for the Sunday school even if it takes some effort to find a temporary replacement. It's often possible to find someone to fill that position on a temporary basis if we work at it. Temporary replacement for Sunday school teachers who are in need of refreshment should be given a propriety in many of our Sunday schools today.

Criticism and Communication

You will find that as an officer in the Sunday school, you are a personnel manager. You will have to learn how to delegate some of your responsibilities, and to set standards for the things you want to have done. You will have to be a team builder and know how to handle criticism as well as praise. Too often, our Sunday schools do not know how to handle criticism and grievances positively. It is important that you listen and find ways to turn what might be negative criticism of a teacher or of a program into a positive suggestion which will encourage the teacher to do better or provide a program which is more effective.

This latter point touches on the matter of communication. As a Sunday school officer working with teachers and with Sunday school members, communication is a big part of your job. It is by good communication that teachers understand what they are to teach and how that program fits into the overall teaching mission of the Sunday school. It is by good communication that the pupil understands what they are to expect of their teacher and, indeed, what is expected of them. Communication is, of course, a two-way street. It is important to communicate what the programs of the Sunday school are intended to be and also for you to learn what the Sunday school members and teachers want from the Sunday school so your planning can be more effective. For this reason it is very good to keep minutes of the Sunday school Board or officers meetings and to post or distribute these minutes. This helps the teachers who may not always be able to attend the meetings to really understand the intent of the Sunday school program and to be involved in the plans that have been made.

Know Your Duties

Quite often you'll find the Sunday school holds a prime Christian Education responsibility in the church. Some churches have a director of Christian Education who has responsibility for all educational functions done within the church but many churches do not. Thus it falls upon the Sunday school officers to take the primary responsibility for Christian Education. In this case, you will find that the Sunday school officers should work with the pastor and perhaps with some other organizations, for example, the Christian Endeavor, which also have some Christian Education function. It's necessary for the leaders of these groups to meet together so that excessive overlap does not occur between the programs of the Sunday school and the other programs that are going on within the church, or that gaps do not develop.



Every job requires training. If you have not served the Sunday school as an officer before, then it will be necessary for you to find some ways to train yourself for this position. The best way to start this is to write down a specific job description for the duties you are to do. Sometimes Sunday schools have very well developed job descriptions. If that is the case, be sure to obtain a copy and read it carefully. Discuss with the officer who has served in that position before you what duties he or she did and how they are approached. Find out if there are job descriptions for the remaining officers and take a look at those, they may give you some idea of how your various jobs fit together. By all means ask the pastor or the Sunday school superintendent what specifically you are to do so that the job may be done effectively. This is all part of good communication and you should not hesitate to find out what is expected of you. And then, using that as a background, think about what other things could be done that are not being done. This is not to provide extra work for you to do, but rather to provide a Sunday school that is growing and thriving and providing new and interesting things for its members.

If possible, attend seminars, conferences or conventions that talk about the work of the Sunday school. Some Sunday schools have leadership training courses. If this opportunity presents itself, by all means take such a course. There are a number of excellent books on the topic of Sunday school training. Of course, one of your most important resources is the Bible itself. In its pages God tells us how he trained a number of leaders, Moses, Joshua, Paul, Peter and so on, many of whom had only modest abilities but to whom God gave great talents and responsibilities. So by all means avail yourself of this resource which has in it some of the finest examples of the training of leaders that could be found anywhere.

If no job description or set of specific duties has been created for your position, it might be very helpful for you to prepare one. Think about the job and what is expected of you and prepare a written description. Prepare it carefully; be as specific as you can. What responsibilities do you have directly? What responsibilities do you have jointly working with others? Perhaps the job description may not be as specific as you would like or perhaps you don't know the answers to all the questions. It may take you some time to develop them, in which case a job description may not be as specific as you would like or perhaps you don't know the answers to all the questions. It make take your some time to develop them, in which case a job description may grow over a period of time. If you do it effectively, the one that follows in your position will at least have a basis on which they can begin their work without going through the same uncertainty. A written job description makes the Sunday school officers work together as a team so that they don't have one officer trying to do something that really is the responsibility of another and neglecting their own responsibility in the process. Most Sunday schools have a constitution and by-laws in which some of the duties of the officers are indicated. This may be an excellent starting place for a job description.

Priorities For Today

There are two aspects of the Sunday school officer's work which need em-

