



DEVELOPING AN OUTREACH PROGRAM IN THE ADULT  
SUNDAY SCHOOL OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
OF MOUNT VERNON, KENTUCKY

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A Project  
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the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

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To Anita,  
the love of my life,  
and to Joshua and Meghan,  
true blessings from the Lord

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
PREFACE .....	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose .....	1
Goals .....	1
Context .....	2
Rationale .....	8
Definitions, Limitations and Delimitations .....	10
Research Methodology .....	10
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF OUTREACH THROUGH THE SUNDAY SCHOOL .....	12
Evangelism Is to Be a Priority of the Church .....	12
The Benefits of Organization for God's People .....	18
Six Functions of the Church .....	24
Conclusion .....	29
3. PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUPS .....	30
Introduction .....	30
Definitions .....	30
Importance of the Small Group .....	31
Characteristics of Small Groups .....	32
Leadership .....	41

Chapter	Page
Challenges Specific to Small Groups . . . . .	44
Ongoing Evaluation . . . . .	46
Conclusion . . . . .	46
<b>4. TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION . . . . .</b>	<b>48</b>
Introduction . . . . .	48
Pre-Project Questionnaire . . . . .	48
Pre-Project Teach Training Session 1 . . . . .	49
Sermon Series Week 1 . . . . .	51
Pre-Project Teacher Training Session 2 . . . . .	52
Sermon Series Week 2 . . . . .	55
Pre-Project Teacher Training Session 3 . . . . .	56
Sermon Series Week 3 . . . . .	57
Pre-Project Teacher Training Session 4 . . . . .	58
Teachers and Leaders Meetings . . . . .	59
Post-Project Survey . . . . .	62
Conclusion . . . . .	62
<b>5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT . . . . .</b>	<b>63</b>
Introduction . . . . .	63
Evaluation of the Project's Purpose . . . . .	63
Evaluation of the Project's Goals . . . . .	71
Strengths of the Project . . . . .	72
Weaknesses of the Project . . . . .	73
What I Would Do Differently . . . . .	74
Theological Reflections . . . . .	75
Personal Reflections . . . . .	77
Conclusion . . . . .	79

Appendix	Page
1. QUESTIONNAIRES .....	81
2. PRE AND POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS .....	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	97

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
A1. I believe a person should attend Sunday school at least two times a month Biblical counseling growth chart .....	89
A2. Evangelism is the responsibility of the Sunday school .....	89
A3. The Sunday school has outlived its usefulness .....	90
A4. Non-church members would be more likely to come to Sunday school than to a worship service .....	90
A5. Sunday school teachers and leaders should encourage students to invite un-churched friends to Sunday school .....	91
A6. The Sunday school is primarily for children and older adults .....	91
A7. I believe Sunday school is an important part of my church's outreach efforts .....	92
A8. A different form of small groups may be more effective than the traditional Sunday school .....	92
A9. Teachers should be required to participate in leadership training .....	93
A10. The Sunday school is not relevant to my life .....	93
A11. The Sunday school should use the Bible as the primary text .....	94
A12. If a person is not involved in another Bible study, they should be enrolled the first time they attend a Sunday school class .....	94
A13. The current Sunday school time (9:40am) is the best time for me .....	95
A14. I would feel comfortable inviting my un-churched friends to my Sunday school class .....	95
A15. My Sunday school class expects to grow .....	96
A16. I would enjoy having a Sunday school class at a time other than on Sunday morning .....	96



## PREFACE

I grew up with Sunday school being an important part of my life. I remember with fondness that my mother and I were among the first ones in the parking lot of my home church on Sunday mornings, thirty minutes early for Sunday school. As a child, I did not always understand why we had to arrive so early. Looking back on those times as an adult, however, I am thankful for my late godly mother, Pauline Nation, who instilled in me the importance of Sunday school.

It was in Sunday school that I was taught the Word of God and learned what it meant to follow Christ. I am thankful for the faithful Sunday school teachers that I have had over the years who helped to shape me into the person I am today.

This Sunday school focused project has been a journey that has taken several years. I am appreciative of those wonderful people who have helped me along the way. I am thankful for a host of godly professors such as Charles Lawless, Timothy Beougher, William Henard, and Adam Greenway who have challenged and encouraged me to do my best.

I am also grateful to my wonderful wife, Anita, who with great patience supported me while traveling on this journey with me. Without her grammatical prowess and resourcefulness, this project would have never been completed. The project may bear my name, but she had a valuable part in it. I am also forever indebted to our children, Joshua and Meghan, for their loving support and hopeful expectation that Dad would one day graduate.

I am thankful for my colleagues in the D.Min. Program who have provided important and encouraging feedback over the course of this project. I am particularly grateful to Charles Frazier, Reed Shepherd, and Todd Gray for their friendship and

insightful wisdom as we worked through our projects together.

I am so indebted to the good folks of First Baptist Church, Mount Vernon, Kentucky, who were willing to cooperate in working together for a better Sunday school. I would especially like to thank Sue Hamm and Albert Griffin for their proofreading and helpful insights that encouraged me to strive for excellence. I would like to thank our church secretary, Beth Saylor, for helping to type some of the revisions.

As is true with any project of this nature, it could not have been completed without the superior insight, expertise, and skillfulness of editors Guy Fredrick and Betsy Fredrick. I will be forever grateful to them.

Ultimately, I want to give thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ. I am thankful for His grace and mercy in my life. I pray that this project has brought glory to Him in an effort to reach the lost through the Sunday school.

William Edward Nation

Mount Vernon, Kentucky

May 2011

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to train an outreach leader, prayer leader, and group leader in and for each adult Sunday school class at First Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, Kentucky.

#### **Goals**

This project sought to accomplish four goals. The first goal was to illustrate the biblical foundation for an evangelistic Sunday school: Leaders and teachers at the Sunday school were introduced to different biblical passages that speak about the importance of small group discipleship and evangelism. By starting with the Word of God, the church understood the foundation on which the Sunday school is established.

This goal was accomplished by preaching a sermon series on the biblical foundation for Sunday school. Also, various training times were offered in which Scriptural passages are examined, shedding light on the church reaching out with the gospel through small groups.

The second goal was to review with the leaders and teachers the history and purpose of the Sunday school organization as an evangelistic tool. Southern Baptists have a rich Sunday school history. Leaders and teachers caught the evangelistic vision in studying the origins of the Sunday school movement. Past methodologies can be helpful in developing a strong Sunday school organization.

The third goal was to discover barriers to Sunday school growth in relation to First Baptist Church. History reveals that there are certain barriers that must be overcome

in order to achieve growth in Sunday school. Teachers and leaders will be challenged to develop an “overcoming” mentality in growing the Sunday school to new heights.

The fourth goal was to lead First Baptist Church to recruit and train prayer leaders, outreach leaders, and group leaders in each adult Sunday school class. Primarily the Pastor, Sunday School Director, and Outreach Director will handle recruitment and training of personnel. This outreach structure is designed to mobilize the Sunday school for evangelism by incorporating a specific, organized way to make contact with prospective class members and, ultimately, the Sunday school should experience numerical growth resulting from this regular and systematic outreach method.

### **Context**

The First Baptist Church of Mount Vernon, Kentucky, was organized in 1887 and has a rich history for missions. It is the parent church to several mission churches in Rockcastle County.<sup>1</sup> Most of these mission churches have disbanded over the years, but some continue to exist as constituted churches.

Mount Vernon is a county-seat town located off Interstate 75 about fifty miles south of Lexington, Kentucky, and is just one mile from Renfro Valley—a place widely known as the “original” country music capital. Another significant tourist attraction in the area is Lake Cumberland, located in adjoining Pulaski County. These attractions draw a wide demographic of tourists seasonally who visit local eateries, hotels, and fueling stations, but few of them look for a place to worship on Sunday. Even with seasonal tourism, Mount Vernon retains a small-town feel.

Change in Mount Vernon has come slowly and, at times, has been resisted fervently. Industry is small and inconsistent; much rural landscape exists, but only a few

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<sup>1</sup>Owens, Floyd L. *History, First Baptist Church, 1887-1987, Mt. Vernon, Kentucky*. (Mt. Vernon, Kentucky: First Baptist Church, 1987), 1, 11.

are able to successfully farm the land for a living. Health care and education provide the majority of employment opportunities while small businesses providing essential goods and services employ a nominal number of residents. Many find employment, both industrial and professional, outside of Rockcastle County with some traveling as much as 50-100 miles for employment opportunities.

In a three-mile radius around the church, there is an approximate population of 3612. There are 1633 households with the average household size of 2.1. The three most populated age brackets in the population are 45-54 years 15 percent; 55-64 years 13.5 percent; 35-44 years 12.2 percent. 25.3 percent of the population of Mount Vernon is under \$10,000 total income within a three mile radius. The income for over half the population (54 percent) is \$0- 24,999. The community is estimated to decrease in total population from 3,612 in 2010 to 3,484 in 2015.<sup>2</sup>

The average worship attendance at First Baptist Church on a typical Sunday morning is 220. The sanctuary will comfortably seat approximately 200 persons. Currently, the church holds two Sunday morning worship services, which helps to make seating comfortable and available for members and guests. The early Sunday service begins at 8:15 am, and the average attendance for this service is approximately 50-70. The second service begins after Sunday school at 10:45 am, and the average attendance for this service is roughly 150. Sunday school average attendance is around 160-170.

In addition to the senior pastor, the First Baptist church staff consists of a full-time secretary, a part-time music director, and a full-time associate pastor to youth and children. The church also employs a family for part-time custodial work.

Over the past five years, First Baptist has grown at a rate of 5.6 percent. The

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<sup>2</sup>Scan/US, Inc., "Demographic Comparison: 2010, Mount Vernon, Kentucky, 40456" [on-line]; accessed 16 March 2011; available from <http://www.scanus.com>; Internet.

average resident membership is 802. The church has averaged 11 baptisms for the past five years. It takes on average about 72 members to lead one person to Christ at First Baptist.

The church membership consists of a diverse group of individuals from skilled laborers to professionals. Because of the large population of educators, small-business owners, and business professionals, our outreach tends to focus on the white-collar population of our county. Focusing our outreach in this manner results not only in growth among young married couples but also in adults in the middle-age category. These young to middle adults are being drawn to First Baptist Church through connections with our members working in the community.

First Baptist Church has a rich and vibrant history. The church was organized in the county courthouse in 1887. The first building was erected on Williams Street in Mount Vernon in 1889. First Baptist Church has always had a heart for missions work. Between the years 1947-1959, the church started several mission churches throughout Rockcastle County.<sup>3</sup> Many of these churches have disbanded over the years, but some continue to grow as constituted churches. One of these that continue to grow is Northside Baptist Church, recognized by the Kentucky Baptist Convention in 2004 for having baptized over 100 people during the year.

In 2000, First Baptist Church built a new educational facility. The cost of the facility was around \$950,000. As of March 2011, the debt has been reduced to approximately \$83,000. The church considered building a new 500-seat sanctuary in January of 2010, but the church failed to receive the eighty percent vote needed to proceed. At the present time the two Sunday morning worship services are helping to alleviate the seating restrictions in the current sanctuary.

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<sup>3</sup>Floyd, *History, First Baptist Church*, 1, 11, 13.

First Baptist has a deep conservative heritage and an evangelical voice in the community. The traditional structure of the building speaks volumes about the traditions of the people. The church has set the pace in Rockcastle County in Baptist polity. First Baptist Church has long been looked to for support and direction from the general population of the county.

Based on the types of congregations listed by Carl Dudley and Sally A. Johnson in *Energizing the Congregation*, First Baptist has multiple self-images. First of all, it could be described as a “pillar church.”<sup>4</sup> The authors explain,

The architecture often reflects this self-image; the strong pillars that lift the roof physically reflects a membership that lifts the community spiritually. Like the building, the members are pillars of the community, good citizens individually and corporately.<sup>5</sup>

Several of the members of First Baptist Church are currently in or have held leadership positions in the community including local government, major businesses, and the school system. The community as a whole is impacted greatly by these leaders, and most change is brought about due to the actions and involvement of key members of First Baptist Church. One example is the Rockcastle Hospital. It was originally founded by local Baptists in the community, and even though today it does not have official Baptist affiliations, many Baptists are employed through the hospital and continue to have a major impact on the direction and vision of the community health care system.

First Baptist could also be classified as a “servant church.”<sup>6</sup> Dudley and Johnson explain that this type of church

attracts people who like to help others in modest ways of quiet faithfulness. They visit the sick, take meals to the bereaved, and send cards to shut-ins . . . Servants see

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<sup>4</sup>Carl Dudley and Sally A. Johnson, *Energizing the Congregation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 4.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 6.

individuals in need and reach out to help them in supportive and pastoral ministries.<sup>7</sup>

First Baptist has a reputation for taking care of its own. The church at times has not always had the evangelistic zeal that it should. The focus at times has been on maintenance instead of outreach. For example, on our weekly outreach night, the members prefer to visit shut-ins and nursing homes rather than seek new prospects through home visits.

The mission orientation of First Baptist would be categorized as “Sanctuary,” from the model put forth by David Roozen, William McKinney, and Jackson W. Carroll in *Varieties of Religious Presence*.<sup>8</sup> First Baptist exhibits the characteristics of this model by the acceptance of one’s status in life, tradition and doctrine, patriotism, and adherence to civil law.<sup>9</sup> First Baptist has a reputation for being staunch defenders of tradition and the Baptist faith.

First Baptist Church has a predominately biblical worldview. School teachers, medical professionals, and small business owners make up a large component of the church roll. Most of these members would be open-minded about new ideas even though the church is very traditional. The church has a strong organizational structure, placing an emphasis on committee work. Because it is a more educated membership, individuals think for themselves and, as a result, there are many strong leaders who are able to assist the pastor in areas of administration, planning, and execution of projects and ministries.

First Baptist has several symbols that help to convey its identity. One symbol is the huge columns at the front of the building, which speak to the tradition and presence of the church in the life of the community. Another symbol of the church is the traditional music with the organ and piano being the instruments of choice. Even though it is not

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>David A. Roozen, William McKinney, and Jackson W. Carroll, *Varieties of Religious Presence* (New York: Pilgrim, 1984), 87.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



unusual to hear a praise song in the worship service, the grand old hymns are the ones most often sung. This method draws people who desire a more traditional style of worship. Other symbols, the Lord's Supper table set in front, the Christian and American flags set in the corners of the choir loft, further speak to tradition passed down for many generations. The one furniture symbol that hints at a slightly contemporary congregation is the kneeling benches at the front, placed there recently due to an increased commitment to prayer by the members of the church.

First Baptist has certain rituals that also help to express its identity. One ritual requires candidates for membership coming from other denominations to be re-baptized. This ritual, founded on the belief that baptisms performed outside the Southern Baptist denomination are invalid, is declared in the by-laws of the church and was a reaction to the Campbellite movement years ago. The observance of the Lord's Supper once per quarter is another ritual that has its origins based on years of tradition. It is served at a Sunday evening service in January, April, October, and then in a morning service in July.

The worship style at First Baptist is fairly traditional. The church secretary prepares a bulletin that is followed very closely most of the time. The primary parts of the bulletin, such as the order of service, have not changed notably in the nearly ten years I have been pastor. The church is beginning to open up to some new ideas such as a projection screen, videotaping morning services, a praise team and band that leads on Sunday nights occasionally. Even though some new things are happening, tradition is still very strong, and change comes slowly.

My leadership as pastor is best described as player/coach. I have been a pastor for over twenty years. I served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church near Taylorsville, Kentucky for twelve years before coming to First Baptist Church of Mount Vernon in August 2001. I do not believe that it is necessary for me to be an expert in every area of church life. First Baptist has many leaders and workers who possess God-given talents and abilities, which are complimentary to mine. My strengths include preaching and

shepherding, which is where I focus my efforts, equipping the saints at First Baptist Church for the work of the ministry. My goal is to help members get plugged into their area of giftedness. This approach creates an environment for growth and gets all involved using the gifts and talents that God has given them. For example, the deacons of the church are requested to assist in taking care of the flock through visitation, phone calls, etc., which helps to free my time so that I can focus more time on preaching and teaching.

### **Rationale**

For years, the Sunday school was labeled the evangelistic arm of the church. The new trend in church attendance, however, seems to be focused on visiting the worship service only, rather than attending Sunday school and worship. Statistics show that only one in 343 unbelievers who attend a worship service will be saved compared to one in three that attends a Sunday school class.<sup>10</sup> The Sunday school can still be an effective part of church growth. In his book *Effective Evangelistic Churches*, Thom Rainer reported that two-thirds of the churches they interviewed identified the Sunday school as their most effective assimilation tool.<sup>11</sup> Rainer also reported that “nearly 90% of the churches in the follow-up interviews identified Sunday school as their most effective assimilation tool.”<sup>12</sup>

First Baptist has a strong Sunday school tradition. The church has averaged about 165-170 in Sunday school for several years. Even though the church has not seen tremendous growth in a number of years, the structure is very sound. The church has developed a maintenance mentality instead of an outward focus. If the church is going to grow, the members need to understand the Biblical foundation upon which the Sunday

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<sup>10</sup>Kentucky Baptist Cooperative Program, *Multiplying Leaders & Units* (Louisville: KBC, 2004).

<sup>11</sup>Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 90.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

school was built. Passages such as Acts 2:42-47 and Matthew 28:18-20 need to be studied in light of the Sunday school. Without an outward focus, the Sunday school can become just a social organization. Since it is easy to lose the evangelistic zeal when a class is full, the first step in developing an evangelistic Sunday school is to show the biblical mandate to evangelize.

For many, the history of the Sunday school is virtually unknown. It would be helpful to leaders and teachers to understand the evangelistic roots of the Sunday school organization. After the beginning of the first Sunday school by Robert Raikes in England in the late 1700s to help impoverished children, it quickly moved to the United States in the 1800s to aid in education and evangelism.<sup>13</sup> If the leaders of the Sunday school better understand the origins of outreach, perhaps it will help create an evangelistic atmosphere.

There will be barriers, of course, to overcome. Finding and training teachers, providing adequate space, and creating new classes, all will require attention. Leaders and teachers can be better prepared to handle the problems if they are properly trained and educated about issues and problems that might arise. Planning to overcome barriers will be helpful in achieving Sunday school growth. If the leaders and teachers will commit to growth in the Sunday school, this mentality will filter down to the members.

Implementation of the organization for growth will occur after leaders and teachers: (1) have been instilled with a biblical basis for the Sunday school, (2) have studied the purpose of the Sunday school, and (3) have been aware of how to overcome the barriers. In each adult class, a prayer leader, an outreach leader, and group leaders will be appointed to aid evangelistic growth. It will be the responsibility of the prayer leader to lead the class to pray for prospects and members of the Sunday school. Outreach leaders will be responsible for making assignments to class members for

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<sup>13</sup>Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches*, 81.

visitation of prospects. Individual members can do outreach at each one's leisure, or it could be incorporated as part of the G.R.O.W. outreach program.<sup>14</sup> The group leaders will be responsible to care for and encourage the members of the class. Each group leader will be assigned 5-8 members to keep in contact with for ministry opportunities.

### **Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

“Outreach” refers to an evangelistic emphasis on those not attending Sunday school on a regular basis. A Sunday school class is made up of a group of people who meet weekly for Bible study, fellowship, and prayer. There are two distinct people groups that were targeted for outreach: (1) non-Christians (including not only those who never attend Sunday school, but also those who may attend on occasion but who have not made a public commitment to Christ) and (2) Christians (including those who may go to Sunday School on occasion, but who have not been enrolled in a Sunday school class or who are not considered “regular” attendees).

The outreach project was held for a trial period of fifteen consecutive weeks. At the end of the fifteen week period, evaluation was made concerning the effectiveness of the project. The outreach program was designed with the adult Sunday school class structure in mind; thus, the scope of the outreach program did not reach to the children's Sunday school. If the adult outreach program was successful, then the children's Sunday school would naturally grow as parents bring their children to church with them.

### **Research Methodology**

The focus of this project was education, training, and preparation for an evangelistic Sunday school outreach program, with implementation of the project followed by an objective assessment of the effectiveness of the project. In keeping with

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<sup>14</sup>Jerry N. Tidwell, *Outreach Teams That Win: G.R.O.W* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2001).

the goals of this project, research focused upon (1) measuring the knowledge of each participant in the area of personal evangelism; (2) determining the fervor each participant has toward the task of evangelism; (3) determining the understanding of each participant regarding their responsibility toward evangelism as an act of obedience to the Lord; and (4) determining the level of evangelistic practice for the participants.

The methods for evaluating the aforementioned areas were be a questionnaire and a focus group. These tools were used in pre-test and post-test format. This methodology allowed for understanding and evaluation of the participants' knowledge of evangelism and evangelistic practices. The post seminar questionnaire and focus group were designed to give insight about the effectiveness of the seminar in achieving its goals.

The questionnaire consisted of a number of items to which the participant indicated their agreement or disagreement on a seven point Likert scale. It contained questions aimed at revealing the time participants spend in evangelism and their general attitudes toward the practice of evangelism. The results of the questionnaires were evaluated statistically. The focus group was conducted before the implementation of the outreach project training and again after the contextualization. The participants involved in the outreach project composed the focus group. A series of open-ended questions were given put to the group. The goal of utilizing the focus group was to evaluate morale, attitude, and motivation toward the task of evangelism going into the mission project and training. The post-project focus group served to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of this project.

### **Conclusion**

The First Baptist Church of Mount Vernon, Kentucky was well suited for a Sunday school focused project. Sunday school has been an important part of the church's evangelistic effort for many years, establishing a strong biblical foundation for the membership. It only seemed natural to organize an outreach program through one of the longest standing ministries of the church.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF OUTREACH THROUGH THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

In planning an effective outreach program through the Sunday school, a theological foundation is a must. The Bible gives the structural principles needed to build a growing Sunday school ministry. The Scriptures confirm that evangelism is to be a priority of the church and that organization is needed for effective ministry. Also, the Bible teaches that Jesus used small groups to do evangelism and ministry. The early church is a good model for using small groups for effective outreach. In the following discussion, the biblical and theological principles of outreach through the Sunday school will be examined.

#### **Evangelism Is to Be a Priority of the Church**

In order for the church to do evangelism, a clear understanding of the gospel must be present. God's love is stated beautifully by Jesus in John 3:16. ,

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.<sup>1</sup>

In this familiar passage, Jesus reveals the good news of God's love for lost people. Leon Morris observes that "It is a distinctively Christian idea that God's love is wide enough to embrace all mankind."<sup>2</sup> It is because of God's love for the world that He sent His only

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

<sup>2</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 229.

Son Jesus. Morris offers, “His love is not a vaguely sentimental feeling, but a love that costs.”<sup>3</sup> God’s love for the world means that He acts in the best interest of humankind. J. H. Bernard observes, “Here the love of God for man is an all-embracing love: η γάπησεν ο Θεός τὸν κόσμον.”<sup>4</sup> God’s love is extended to the world. The free gift of salvation is offered to everyone who believes. Wayne Grudem says it well when he says, “Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God.”<sup>5</sup> The promise to everyone who believes is eternal life rather than eternal death. Jesus says the person who believes will not perish. According to Bernard, the word used for perish (απόληται) means “to lose one’s soul; and it refers to a man’s final destiny.”<sup>6</sup> The good news to the world is that salvation is possible through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The bad news is that people without a relationship with Christ are lost and in danger of eternal separation and torment.

Jesus explains in John 3:17-18 that He did not come to judge the world but to bring salvation. Those who believe are not condemned, but those who do not believe are already under God’s judgment. George Beasley-Murray states that “Here the key term is κρίσις, ‘judgment’, and it is used in its twofold sense of separation and condemnation.”<sup>7</sup> A person’s sin causes separation from God. Because of God’s holiness, sin must be judged. Holy God cannot allow transgressions to go unpunished. The good news is that God has made provision for lost humanity. Since man cannot achieve salvation on his

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 229-30.

<sup>4</sup>J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976), 118.

<sup>5</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 710.

<sup>6</sup>Bernard, *St. John*, 118.

<sup>7</sup>George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 51.

own, God has provided a way. The Scriptures teaches, “He who believes in Him is not judged” (John 3:18). It is through the sacrificial work of the cross of Christ that redemption has been made possible. Leon Morris observes that, “John proceeds to bring out the importance of faith.”<sup>8</sup> A person must place their faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved. The person who trusts Christ alone for salvation will receive forgiveness of sins.

On the contrary, J. H. Bernard argues that the one “not willing to ‘believe’ of Him, John says μὴ πιστεύων δὴ κέκριται, ‘he has been judged already’ by his unfaith, the present judgment being anticipatory of the future.”<sup>9</sup> Hence the fact: people are in need of salvation. Without a relationship with Jesus Christ, a person is under God’s judgment. Condemnation comes to those who do not put their trust in Christ as Lord. George Beasley-Murray says that “The Redeemer has come into the world as Light in a dark place, clearly to bring the ‘light’ of salvation.”<sup>10</sup> What a wonderful promise to all who will believe! The problem is that there are many who stand in the judgment of God because of unbelief. There are people who live around the block and around the world who are lost, without a relationship with Christ. The church has been commissioned by Christ to go to a lost world with the gospel.

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus commands the church to evangelize. After the resurrection and before the ascension, Jesus met His disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Matthew records,

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The commission to go into the entire world with the gospel is given by Jesus Himself to the church. He has the authority to give the marching orders. John Nolland observes that

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<sup>8</sup>Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 232.

<sup>9</sup>Bernard, *St. John*, 121.

<sup>10</sup>Beasley-Murray, *John*, 51.



“Through resurrection, God has vindicated Jesus, who now is able to freshly affirm his authority.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus proved His claims when He said He was the Son of God. Leon Morris describes that “First he made clear that in his risen state he was in a situation very different from that when he had been the penniless preacher and healer they knew so well.”<sup>12</sup> The experience of the crucifixion and the resurrection gave Jesus the right to claim all authority. Again Morris comments, “Now he has received the fullest possible authority in heaven and earth.”<sup>13</sup> Believers can boldly share Christ with the world knowing that the Lord Himself, who has all authority, has given them the commission to go.

The command that Jesus gives to His followers is go to the nations, making disciples, baptizing and teaching them to obey all that the Lord commanded. R. T. France argues, “Jesus’ universal Lordship now demands a universal mission.”<sup>14</sup> Jesus tells His followers to “go make disciples of all nations.” Jesus’ command to go with the gospel is imperative, not optional. Daniel Wallace, in his book *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, argues that the participle translated “go” (πορευθέντες) is “an attendant circumstance participle and is often used to introduce a new action or a shift in the narrative.”<sup>15</sup> Wallace continues by saying,

The relative semantic weight in such constructions is that a greater emphasis is placed on the action of the main verb than on the participle. That is, the participle is something of a prerequisite before the action of the main verb can occur.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35a (Dallas: Word, 1989), 266.

<sup>12</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 745.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1985), 413.

<sup>15</sup>Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 642.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 642-43.

Hence, in order to fulfill the mission of evangelism believers must first go and then make disciples.

Jesus has called his followers to go make disciples. Leon Morris observes, “In this Gospel a disciple is both a learner and a follower; a disciple takes Jesus as his teacher and learns from him, and a disciple also follows Jesus.”<sup>17</sup> Morris continues to say that Jesus’ command is go to all the nations, “πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.”<sup>18</sup> Everyone is to hear the good news about Jesus. No one is to be left out. Craig Bloomberg says it correctly that “To ‘make disciples of all nations’ does require many people to leave their homelands, but Jesus’ main focus remains on the task of all believers to duplicate themselves wherever they may be.”<sup>19</sup> Making disciples of “all nations” may involve going around the world or just around the corner. The point is clear: wherever Christians may be, they should share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught that as believers go making disciples, new converts are to be baptized. Baptism is an important part of the salvation experience. Baptism does not bring salvation, but it is an outward expression of what happens in a person’s heart when he places his faith in Jesus. Wayne Grudem observes that “baptism thus very clearly pictures death to one’s old way of life and rising to a new kind of life in Christ.”<sup>20</sup> New believers are to be baptized in the “name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus explained that believers are not only to be baptized but taught to observe all that He commanded. Teaching is an important detail in the Great Commission. The work of making disciples is not complete until believers are taught to obey the teachings of Christ. Disciple means follower, and a Christian is one who follows Christ. A. T.

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<sup>17</sup>Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 746.

<sup>18</sup>Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 266.

<sup>19</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 431.

<sup>20</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 968.

Robertson states, “Christians have been slow to realize the full value of what we now call religious education.”<sup>21</sup> The church has been guilty at times of glossing over the teaching aspect of the Great Commission in an effort to win more to Christ. Nothing of eternal value is gained if the church makes decisions instead of disciples. Again Robertson argues that “teaching is a part, weighty part, of the work of Christians.”<sup>22</sup> A church that takes the time to teach new converts will reap the fruit of its labors and have the approval of the Lord Himself.

The church can go with confidence to make disciples because of the presence of Jesus. Christ promised, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The church moves out to do her work in supernatural power. Leon Morris comments, “The disciple will find that he has a great companion as he goes on his way through life.”<sup>23</sup>

When Jesus makes a promise, he always keeps it. Craig Bloomberg argues,

The Great Commission is empowered by Jesus’ promise to be spiritually present with his followers until the end of this age, that is, until his return, when he will once again be present bodily (although ‘the end of the age’ might be an idiom roughly equivalent to forever).<sup>24</sup>

The work of making, baptizing, and teaching disciples is the task that the church has been called to do. Through the power and presence of Christ, success is inevitable. When believers share the good news of Jesus Christ there will be some who will respond.

Acts 1:8 reveals that every Christian is to be a witness for Christ. Jesus, speaking to His disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension, indicates, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Jesus explained that His followers would be empowered by the Holy Spirit

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<sup>21</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 3, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 245-46.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 749.

<sup>24</sup>Bloomberg, *Matthew*, 433.

to witness for Him. Darrell Bock says, “The Spirit is tied to power (δύναμιν, *dynamis*), which refers here to being empowered to speak boldly by testifying to the message of God’s work through Jesus.”<sup>25</sup>

Every believer is called to bear witness of Christ. John Polhill states, “The Greek word μαρτυρῶς (‘witness’) came to have in later Christian literature the sense of ‘martyr’, one who bore testimony even to death.”<sup>26</sup> The gospel is not always received in a positive way; however, the disciple is not to be deterred from being faithful in proclaiming Christ. Jesus said that believers are to start where they are (Jerusalem) and go to the ends of the earth. C. K. Barrett observes, “The apostles are specifically witnesses to the fact of the resurrection, that is, to the divine vindication of Jesus, the proof that he was what he had claimed to be, what the apostles now claimed that he was.”<sup>27</sup> The Christian witness is to the world. The church once again needs to hear the words of Jesus commanding His followers to go share the gospel with those who have never heard. If the church is going to be obedient to the Great Commission, then she will have to be organized for evangelism and ministry.

### **The Benefits of Organization for God’s People**

The people of God need the proper organization for effective service. The Bible gives several examples of how that organization may appear.

#### **Old Testament Examples**

In Exodus 18:17-27 Jethro counseled Moses on how to organize the people of Israel. God had delivered the people of Israel from Egypt and was leading them to the

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<sup>25</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 63.

<sup>26</sup>John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 85.

<sup>27</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 79.

Promised Land. Moses was busy with every day cares of the people from morning until evening (Exod 18:13). It was clearly more than one person could do effectively. Jethro counseled Moses by telling him,

The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and all these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me: I will give you counsel and God be with you. You will be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace. (Exod 18:17-23)

The advice that Jethro gave Moses about organization can be transferred to the church in regard to working together to do evangelism and ministry. James Bruckner comments that "Moses was blind to his own limitations and the physical limitations of his simple procedure."<sup>28</sup> The work of ministry is too great for one person. Jethro advised Moses to select qualified leaders to help carry the work load. Terrence Fretheim argues, "It is important to note that not just any persons of faith will do; they are to be people of integrity and incorruptible, (on the fear of God)."<sup>29</sup> These qualified leaders would handle the minor disputes giving Moses opportunity to handle other issues that demanded his attention. In this light, John Durham observes, "Jethro completes his counsel to Moses not only with the assurance that the procedure he advises will bring much-needed relief to both Moses and the people, but also with the remarkable assertion that God charges (or 'commands, orders,' פקד) Moses to follow it."<sup>30</sup> The Bible indicates that "Moses listened

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<sup>28</sup>James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 167.

<sup>29</sup>Terrence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 199.

to his father-in-law and did all that he had said” (Exod 18:24). Dividing the workload into smaller groups made the task more efficient and manageable.

The same principles that Jethro counseled Moses will also work in regard to evangelism and ministry. One person cannot carry the workload of ministry alone. Small groups make the task more manageable. The Sunday school gives the perfect opportunity to use small groups to accomplish the work of evangelism. A Sunday school class, working together as a team, can be much more effective than one person working alone.

Nehemiah 4:12-17 is another example from Scripture of how small groups help make ministry more effective. Rebuilding the wall in Jerusalem, toward the end of the exile, Nehemiah divided the workers into smaller groups of families to do the work.

Scripture explains,

Then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears, and bows. When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: “Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses. (Neh 4:13-14)

Nehemiah understood that the people would work more diligently and fight more fiercely if the people tasked with rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem were grouped with their families. Mervin Breneman notes, “Grouping them according to families would strengthen the motivation to fight.”<sup>31</sup> The relational ties of the family were enhanced by the smaller groups. Philip Noss and Kenneth Thomas observe that “Nehemiah is appealing to the people’s loyalty to their closest family members to motivate them to defend the city of Jerusalem.”<sup>32</sup> People have a tendency to accomplish more when there are relational ties that bind. It needs to be noted that the work of

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<sup>30</sup>John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco: Word, 1987), 252.

<sup>31</sup>Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 197.

<sup>32</sup>Philip A. Noss and Kenneth J. Thomas, *A Handbook on Ezra and Nehemiah* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2005), 335.

rebuilding the wall continued despite the pressure of opposition.<sup>33</sup> The smaller groups working together proved to be effective even during stressful times. Small groups proved to be an effective way of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.

### **New Testament Examples**

The New Testament provides many examples of the small group experience. In Mark 6:39-44 an example can be seen of how organization was used to minister more effectively. When Jesus fed the five thousand He divided the people into small groups. He could have fed them in the large group, but He chose to divide them into smaller groups. The Scripture says, “And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties” (Mark 6:39-40).

The ministry of the feeding was more manageable within small groups. Ezra Gould writes, “The disposition of the people in orderly groups was for the more convenient distribution of the food.”<sup>34</sup> It just made it easier for the disciples to keep track on who had received food and who had not. One must not miss the imagery of this passage. Kent Hughes explains, “The word for ‘groups of hundreds and fifties’ literally means ‘garden plot.’ This is a beautiful picture of clusters of colorfully clad people sitting in orderly groups like flower beds cut in a green lawn.”<sup>35</sup>

The imagery is beautiful and the process was practical. James Brooks gives some insight into the text when he observes that “the sitting down in groups may reflect the groupings of Exodus 18:25 and may suggest the gathering and ordering of God’s

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<sup>33</sup>Loring W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1972), 233.

<sup>34</sup>Ezra P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 119.

<sup>35</sup>R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989), 150.

people in the last days.”<sup>36</sup> In any regard, the task of feeding thousands was made easier because of the small groups.

Jesus chose the small group of the twelve to do evangelism and ministry. The Scriptures show that Jesus Himself utilized a small group for the purpose of evangelism and ministry. Luke 6:12-13 states, “It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles.”

Out of all the disciples that were following Jesus, He chose a small group of twelve to be called apostles. Robert Stein argues:

The term “apostles” has a wide range of meanings, and Luke’s meaning was somewhat narrower than Paul’s. For Paul the criteria for being an apostle consisted of (1) being an eyewitness of the risen Christ (1Cor 9:1) and (2) being commissioned to proclaim the gospel (Gal 1:15-16). . . . For Luke, however, the term “apostle” was almost a technical term for the “Twelve,” with Matthias taking the place of Judas Iscariot (cf. 1:26 “the eleven apostles”). . . . No doubt Jesus’ usage of this term, which means *one who is sent*, took on an even fuller sense as the Twelve sought to be witnesses unto the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).<sup>37</sup>

Jesus demonstrated how small groups are more conducive to mentoring and teaching. A. T. Robertson notes, “These twelve stand apart from all the others in that they were all chosen at once by Jesus himself ‘that they might be with him’ (Mark 3:14), to be trained by Jesus himself and to interpret him and his message to the world.”<sup>38</sup> Jesus invested His life in the smaller group of the twelve. Darrell Bock comments that “the twelve chosen by Jesus were called to function as his representatives and mouthpieces for the message of the kingdom (Luke 9:1-6).”<sup>39</sup> Jesus demonstrated the practicality of using

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<sup>36</sup>James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 109.

<sup>37</sup>Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 193. Italics in the original.

<sup>38</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 2, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 84.

<sup>39</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 542.



fewer people to accomplish His purpose of evangelism and ministry. Just as Jesus shared the gospel to those with whom he came into contact, he taught his followers to do the same.

Matthew 10:1-8 reveals how Jesus sent the Twelve out for ministry and evangelism:

Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. . . . These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. (Matt 10:1, 5-8)

Jesus gave the disciples authority to go. John Noland comments, “Faced with needy sheep and a huge potential harvest, Jesus increases the number of workers by giving the Twelve a share in the ministry.”<sup>40</sup> Jesus could have accomplished the entire ministry Himself, but He chose to involve the Twelve in the work. The Twelve formed a small group that was effective to ministry. “The disciples are therefore here given *authority* for mission, not institutional leadership.”<sup>41</sup> The emphasis of the passage is on ministry. Leon Morris notes, “The message the apostles were to preach was constant: they were not directed to preach a variety of topical sermons but simply to say, ‘*The kingdom of heaven is near,*’ the message of John the Baptist (3:2), and of Jesus Himself (4:17).”<sup>42</sup>

As Jesus sent the Twelve out for ministry the small group experience provided accountability. The practical aspect of keeping one another accountable in a smaller group setting should not be missed. Jesus intentionally did not send the disciples out alone, but He paired them up (Mark 6:7). A. T. Robertson observes, “Matthew names

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<sup>40</sup>John Noland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 409.

<sup>41</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1985), 176.

<sup>42</sup>Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 246. Italics in original.

them in pairs, probably as they were sent out.”<sup>43</sup> By placing the disciples together the integrity of the ministry would be easier to maintain.

The smaller groups that Jesus sent out also provided encouragement. Ministry can be demanding and difficult at times. Jesus teaches, “Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet” (Matt 10:14). Jesus stated plainly that there will be occasions that the disciples will not be received. There will always be those who stand opposed to the gospel. R. T. France states that “Jesus fully expected his message, and his messengers, to meet with rejection as well as acceptance: see vv.17-39.”<sup>44</sup> On those days that rejection comes, it certainly helps to have ministry partners. Craig Bloomberg explains, “Shaking the dust off one’s feet was a ritual of renunciation used by Jews when they returned to Israel from Gentile territories (see Paul’s Christian modification of this practice in Acts 13:51).”<sup>45</sup> The command to share the gospel is not dependent on whether or not it is received. Partners in ministry can be an encouragement to one another when the gospel is met with resistance.

### **Six Functions of the Church**

In exploring the biblical and theological principles of outreach through the Sunday school, insights can be gained from the early church. Defining the purposes of the church is of absolute importance. In Acts 2:41-47 the Bible mentions the functions of the church:

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and

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<sup>43</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 1, *The Gospel According to Matthew, The Gospel According to Mark* (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 78.

<sup>44</sup>France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 181.

<sup>45</sup>Blomberg, *Matthew*, 173.

were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

First, the early church spent time in worship. “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple (Acts 2:46a). The early church made worship a priority. F. F. Bruce comments that “day by day, then, in the weeks that followed the first Christian Pentecost, the believers met regularly in the temple precincts for public worship and public witness.”<sup>46</sup> Worship was a daily activity as the disciples went to the temple area. Chuck Lawless explains,

Worship should be a lifestyle of submission and service, as the words used for worship in Scripture indicate: *Shahah* (Heb.) means to bow or stoop before someone (e.g., Exod.4:31). *Avad* (Heb.) means to labor or do service (e.g., Exod. 3:12). *Proskynein* (Gk.) means to prostrate oneself or to kiss the hand (e.g., John 4:24). *Latreuein* (Gk.) means to do ministry or service (e.g., Rom. 12:1).<sup>47</sup>

Believers can get caught up in the rituals of formality and miss the point of worship.

Rick Warren explains that, “Offering yourself to God is what worship is all about.”<sup>48</sup>

Worship is about God and the church’s proper response to Him.<sup>49</sup>

The second function of the church from the book of Acts is that of fellowship. “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to *fellowship*” (Acts 2:42a, emphasis added). Fellowship is more than just sharing a meal together (even though that may be included); it is the close bond that Christians share with one another in Christ. A. T. Robertson explains that “fellowship” is from the word meaning a “partner, sharer in common interest.”<sup>50</sup> Fellowship with other believers is only possible

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<sup>46</sup>F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 81.

<sup>47</sup>Chuck Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2002), 65.

<sup>48</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002), 78.

<sup>49</sup>Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 64-65.

<sup>50</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 3: 37.

through a relationship with Christ. Rick Warren states that “your spiritual family is even more important than your physical family because it will last forever.”<sup>51</sup>

The Christian community has a common relationship with one another. C. K. Barrett explains, concerning the early church, “They continued in faithful adherence to the newly formed community of those who had accepted the Messiahship of Jesus and the belief that God’s salvation of his people was being put into effect through him.”<sup>52</sup> There is a spiritual tie that believers have in common through Jesus. By faith in Christ believers are accepted into the family of God (John 1:12). As members of the same family, believers are bound together by the grace of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph.2:8).

The third function of the church seen in Acts 2 is discipleship. Acts 2:42a says, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ “*teaching*” (emphasis mine). One would have to assume that the apostles were teaching about the life of Jesus. Also it would seem likely that the things Jesus had taught the apostles would be in the curriculum. Teachings about the kingdom of God would be included in what the apostles were sharing with the new believers. Things that Jesus had taught the disciples during those three years together were now being passed on to others. John Polhill explains that, “In keeping with Jesus’ teaching to them . . . this would have included such subjects as his resurrection, the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christian witness, and surely their own reminiscences of Jesus’ earthly ministry and teachings.”<sup>53</sup> These new converts were learning and growing in the Christian faith. Kent Hughes comments, “These 3,000 baby Christians was continually devoting themselves to God’s Word as it came from the

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<sup>51</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 118.

<sup>52</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994) 1:164.

<sup>53</sup>Polhill, *Acts*, 119.

apostles.”<sup>54</sup> Discipleship was taking place in the local church. New believers were being taught what is involved in following Jesus.

Ministry is the fourth function that is seen in the early church. Acts 2:42-45 recounts, “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.” Ministry is meeting the needs of others in the name of Christ. In the early church the believers were sharing with one another as needed. John Polhill explains that, “This is much more in keeping with the Old Testament ideal of community equality, of sharing with the needy so that ‘there will be no poor among you’ (Deut 15:4).”<sup>55</sup> Ministry often involves meeting the physical needs. Feeding those that are hungry, visiting those who are sick, or just giving a cup of cold water in Jesus’ name are just a few of the practical ways that Christians can minister to others. Chuck Lawless comments, “Genuine love for God is expressed in genuine love for others.”<sup>56</sup> Love is to be the motivation that drives the ministry of the church. The Bible states that loveless ministry is futile (1 Cor 13).

Evangelism is the fifth function of the church. Acts 2:47b explains, “And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” God was doing a marvelous work among His people. The church was faithfully witnessing and God was giving the increase. The early church had taken seriously the command of Jesus “to go make disciples” (Matt 28:19). A. T. Robertson says, “It was a continuous revival, day by day.”<sup>57</sup> One of the reasons the church exists is to do evangelism. Believers are to go unto the world with the good news of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is good news and good

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<sup>54</sup>Hughes, *Mark*, 47.

<sup>55</sup>Polhill, *Acts*, 121.

<sup>56</sup>Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*, 128.

<sup>57</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 2: 40.

news is meant to be shared. Christ has commanded the church to be witnesses unto Him (Acts 1:8). Chuck Lawless further observes that “evangelism is itself a spiritual battle, as we take the gospel of light into the kingdom of darkness.”<sup>58</sup> So believers should expect opposition and be determined to remain faithful in sharing Christ.<sup>59</sup>

The sixth function of the church is prayer. Acts 2:42 explains, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to *prayer*” (emphasis mine). Prayer is a vital part of the life of the church. Through prayer believers seek God’s will and direction. Prayer to the church is like air to the lungs; it is an absolute necessity. R. Kent Hughes comments, “The text should probably read, ‘the prayers,’ suggesting specific prayers, probably both Jewish and Christian. The early believers suddenly saw the old formal prayers through new eyes and also, in their new joy, created new prayers for praise.”<sup>60</sup>

Prayer in its basic form is communication with God. If the church is going to be about the Lord’s work, it would make sense to find out His perspective. Prayer is the process through which disciples communicate with the Lord, who is the Head of the church. Chuck Lawless comments that “according to the Acts 2 description, prayer was a vital part of the church’s life.”<sup>61</sup>

All six functions of the church are exhibited in an effective Sunday school. Worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and prayer can all be accomplished in a Sunday school class. As the class gathers, a time of praise could be observed in worship to God. Fellowship occurs whenever the class comes together as a group for various reasons, such as Bible study, prayer, meals shared, and special events.

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<sup>58</sup>Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 83.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>60</sup>Hughes, *Mark*, 50.

<sup>61</sup>Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 150.

Discipleship is accomplished as the Bible is taught and believers grow more Christ-like. Ministry is the practical way that the group reaches out to those in need. Evangelism takes place as believers go into the marketplace and bear witness of what Christ has done in their lives. The essential element that holds the class together is prayer. Corporate and personal prayer should be utilized in an effort to be the church that God desires.

### **Conclusion**

In considering the biblical and theological principles concerning outreach through the Sunday school, several truths need to be considered. Evangelism must be a priority of the church. The Bible teaches that people are lost without a relationship with Christ, and, that the church has been commissioned to evangelize. Every believer is called to be a witness of what Jesus has done in his or her life.

In planning for effective outreach, proper organization is needed. Jethro counseled Moses on how to organize the people of Israel to make his task of administration more efficient and manageable. Jesus organized a large group into a smaller one to make the task of feeding the five thousand easier. Nehemiah also demonstrated effectiveness when he organized the larger group into families in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.

Concerning the effectiveness of small groups, Jesus chose the small group of the Twelve to do evangelism and ministry. Jesus demonstrated how small groups are conducive to mentoring and teaching. The sending out of the Twelve provided accountability and encouragement to the disciples.

The early church, as recorded in the book of Acts, provides a good model for evangelism and ministry. The early church exhibited the six functions of worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and prayer. These six functions can be accomplished effectively in a Sunday school class. The Sunday school class provides the right environment for evangelism and ministry to take place.

## CHAPTER 3

### PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUPS

#### **Introduction**

The use of small groups is not a new concept. In fact, in the last few years, the small-group model has come to the forefront of Bible study curricula. Christian bookstores are filled with a vast array of books dedicated solely to small groups including how-to books, workbooks, videos, CDs, etc. What is all the hype about? What advantage does the small group have over other, more traditional, Bible study models? How might small group principles be incorporated into the most well-known Bible study model—the traditional Sunday school class?

In the following chapter, I will define small group and its importance, structure, and necessary components will be examined. Leadership, communication, and conflict resolution will also be considered. This small group representation might be used in any setting; however, the focus will be on the application of a traditional Sunday school class model.

#### **Definitions**

Larry Baker, Kathy Wahlers, Kittie Watson, and Robert Kibler propose that  
A small group is a collection of individuals, from 3 to 15 in number, who meet in face-to-face interaction over a period of time, generally with an assigned or assumed leader, who possess at least one common characteristic, and who meet with a purpose in mind.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Larry L. Baker et al., *Groups in Process: An Introduction to Small Group Communication* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991), 8.



Rupert Brown gives the following definition of a small group, “A group exists when two or more people define themselves as members of it and when its existence is recognized by at least one other.”<sup>2</sup> David and Frank Johnson give a more complete definition of a small group:

A group may be defined as two or more individuals who (a) interact with each other, (b) are interdependent, (c) define themselves and are defined by others as belonging to the group, (d) share norms concerning common interest and participate in a system of interlocking roles, (e) influence each other, (f) find the group rewarding, and (g) pursue common goals.<sup>3</sup>

A small group, by my definition, is a gathering of individuals with a common goal or agenda with the purpose of completing a task and or fellowship. Small groups exist in a variety of settings. Some groups’ sole purpose is task oriented while others may be focused more on learning or the building of friendships within the group. Other groups may have a primary task of the purpose of supporting one another during a time of addiction or personal tragedy.

### **Importance of the Small Group**

Glen Martin and Gary McIntosh, in their book *Creating Community: Deeper Fellowship through Small Group Ministry*, give seven reasons why a small group ministry is important:

- Reason 1: Small Groups Encourage Spiritual Growth
- Reason 2: Small Groups Nourish Relational Growth
- Reason 3: Small Groups Build Emotional Support
- Reason 4: Small Groups Stimulate Service
- Reason 5: Small Groups Help Incorporate Newcomers
- Reason 6: Small Groups Develop Leadership.
- Reason 7: Small Groups Help Sustain the Great Commission Focus.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Rupert Brown, *Group Processes: Dynamics within and between Groups* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 2-3.

<sup>3</sup>David W. Johnson and Frank P. Johnson, *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), 7.

<sup>4</sup>Glen Martin and Gary McIntosh, *Creating Community: Deeper Fellowship through Small Group Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), 6-10.

Small groups have a valid place in ministry. The benefits of small groups are multifaceted. Steven Beebe and John Masterson give several reasons why people join small groups. They are as follows: “(1) interpersonal needs, (2) individual goals, (3) group goals, (4) interpersonal attraction, and (5) group attraction.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Characteristics of Small Groups**

The common bond that binds individuals together in a group could be anything that the participants have in common, such as a comparable life experience. Randy Frazee states that there are “five characteristics of community around a common purpose; authority, common creed, traditions, standards, and a common mission.”<sup>6</sup> Effective small groups have one or more of these points of connection.

#### **Age**

Age is a connection that brings people together. This fact is especially true in a traditional Sunday school model where individuals are typically broken up into small groups according to school grade or age (e.g., children, youth, young adults, senior adults, etc.) This age grading provides individuals with a source of comfort by providing a setting where they can share experiences, which are typically age-specific such as childbearing, empty nest, etc.

#### **Gender**

Gender is probably the most recognized commonality that links people together. Bible studies are often centered on gender-specific issues and traditional Sunday school classes for either women or men only provide yet another point of

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<sup>5</sup>Steven A. Beebe and John T. Masterson, *Communicating in Small Groups: Principles and Practices*, 4th ed. (New York: HarperCollins College, 1994), 46.

<sup>6</sup>Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 57-63.

connection for participants, helping men and women to better understand their particular roles as well as find support from others who endure similar struggles.

### **Life Situations**

Another point of connection for effective small groups is life situations. People who are going through similar life experiences have a common bond. Groups might be formed around addiction recovery, marital status, or a host of other things. A similar experience creates fellowship among the supporters of the group. When people are experiencing similar situations in life, it binds them together.

### **Common Purpose**

Effective small groups not only have a point of connection but also have a common purpose. This commonality is particularly true with groups that are focused on life situations. For example, a group of parents of preschool children will have a similar agenda when it comes to raising their children. This group of parents may also have the same struggles with finding enough time to be alone with God every day. A Sunday school small group could help address these concerns. A common purpose or goal brings people together.

When a group has a common purpose there will be an achievement of goals. Beebe and Masterson explain, “While participants in small groups may have somewhat different motives for their membership, a common purpose cements the group together.”<sup>7</sup> Working together as a team brings fellowship to a group, which helps to bond the members. A group that has a particular task to be completed works together to accomplish the project. Johnson says, “A group cannot exist unless it has at least one goal that is understood by its members.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Beebe and Masterson, *Communicating in Small Groups*, 4.

<sup>8</sup>Johnson and Johnson, *Joining Together*, 138.

In a Sunday school class, the goal may be to reach new members. The whole membership works for the common purpose of outreach. One may hand out assignments while another prays for the new prospect, and another actually does the inviting, thus involving the entire class in the process of reaching the goals. In a traditional Sunday school model, as well as other small groups, there will probably be more than one goal. The class may have a goal to reach more people, but also a class goal may be to become more Christ-like through studying the Bible. So, it is possible for multiple goals to be reached simultaneously by the group that works together.

Effective small groups realize there is a united mission to be accomplished. A traditional Sunday school model is but one example of how small groups work for efficiency. The same principles apply to other groups not associated with the church. For a group of senior adults, the mission may be to better understand the particulars of Medicare. For a group of students it could be learning test-taking techniques that will help their ACT scores. In a Sunday school class, the mission to be accomplished may be a community-wide evangelistic event that will reach the neighborhood for Christ. Perhaps a Sunday school class has decided to help a needy family in the community. The group is working together to achieve the goal. In any regard, effective groups have a united mission to accomplish. The process of working together gives all the members of the class a sense of ownership and purpose. According to Baker, Wahlers, Watson, and Kibler, "It is goal-directed behavior that holds members together, and the more relevant the goal is to the group members, the more motivation group members will have to maintain the group and their identity in it."<sup>9</sup> More may be done as a group than as individuals. The group process proves to be very effective in accomplishing goals.

Effective small groups have a high level of commitment to the group. Commitment takes place when members assume ownership in the group. When people

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<sup>9</sup>Baker et al., *Groups in Process*, 10.

in the class have the same beliefs and passion concerning the goal of the group, then commitment is increased. Participants must see the importance of the group meeting. The goal must be seen as important, even necessary, for commitment to attain its highest potential. The greater the understanding of the mission of the group, the higher the commitment level will be. If for some reason class members do not share the same goal or purpose that the group as a whole has adopted, then the level of commitment will be diminished within that class.

One reason that effective small groups have a high level of commitment is the value that is placed on the group experience because of shared goals and a common purpose. A common goal or purpose brings commitment to the class. Stephen Macchia gives several reasons why goals are important:

- Goals concentrate our energy and attention.
- Goals move us toward specific accomplishments.
- Goals require greater effort than they require for attaining.
- Goals provide a basis for periodic evaluation.
- Goals bring discipline into our life together.
- Goals encourage consistency and stability.<sup>10</sup>

Participants that have the same priorities will share the same commitment to see the goals accomplished. Beebe and Masterson argue that, “Once individuals adopt group goals, however, their individual goals are superseded.”<sup>11</sup> There will be a higher commitment level when the group verbalizes the goals. For example, if a gathering of adult men have a shared goal of being more Christ-like in their homes, then this will bring a higher commitment level because the entire group shares it. The whole class has taken ownership with the goal and made it credible and acceptable.

Goals that are not stated are not as easily realized. It is necessary for the effective small group to articulate what the goal or goals of the class are to be. Goals

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<sup>10</sup>Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Team: 5 Traits of Vital Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 120-21.

<sup>11</sup>Beebe and Masterson, *Communicating in Small Groups*, 52.

may be stated in a variety of ways. A written statement of goals for the class posted in a visible location will be a helpful reminder of the shared goals. From time to time, the goals of the class need to be shared verbally to renew the commitment level of the hearers. The leader or a designated person who has a passion for the purpose of the group would be the natural choice to keep the goals before the entire class.

### **Real Relationships**

Another key component of effective small groups is the building of authentic relationships. As relationships grow and develop the commitment level increases. Michael Mack expresses the following in regard to relationships within the small group:

Researchers have consistently found that making new friends in the church is a major factor in retaining new members. Converts who make seven or more new friends normally do not drop out. If transfers do not find a meaningful group within six months, they tend to drop out or become inactive.<sup>12</sup>

The fellowship within a class or small group binds the members together. The longer a group is together the stronger the ties should be. True relationships do not develop overnight; time is needed. The more time and experiences that a group shares, the greater the relationship, and the greater the commitment will be to the overall group. Actually two things are happening simultaneously within the group. First, greater friendships are being developed as members get acquainted with one another. Second, a deeper commitment level is being developed. Relationships within the group are the glue that holds the class together. If relationships suffer, the entire group experience will suffer. On the other hand, if relationships are growing and thriving, the group experience will also improve as a whole.

### **Accountability**

Persons must sense that they are needed or they will not come back. Individual

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<sup>12</sup>Michael Mack, *The Synergy Church: A Strategy for Integrating Small Groups and Sunday School* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 35.

accountability is another key element in enhancing the commitment level of an effective small group. Members of the group require some method of accountability to promote attendance such as taking roll, giving out individual assignments, and or asking for class participation. Another way to improve attendance through individual accountability is to assign members the task of getting in touch with other members of the group through personal contact, e-mail, phone call, or letter to remind absent class members that they are missed and appreciated or to provide information on upcoming events or activities involving the class or the church body. Making contact with members not only improves class attendance and participation, it also helps members to feel appreciated, loved, and informed.

If members of a small group are absent and are not contacted, the absent participants may start to feel as though they are not needed or valued. Keeping members accountable may be one of the real challenges in an effective small group. Steven Macchia explains the need for accountability in the group setting:

Being accountable to one another is a good way of expressing our desire for growth. We open ourselves to the work of God's Spirit in our lives as we entrust the evaluation of our service to the hands and hearts of co-laborers. In essence, we are saying to others that we trust them with their input into our lives.<sup>13</sup>

Life is busy and unpredictable. If some form of accountability is not established, group members will often become unresponsive.

When members of the class are asked to participate, it brings ownership to the small group and heightens the commitment level. The class leader may ask for an individual to assist in the next meeting. Added participation not only intensifies commitment of the one helping, but it also brings variety to the class meeting. If members of the group are not personally committed to the class it will not survive.

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<sup>13</sup>Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Team*, 88.

## Communication

Small groups that are effective, communicate with each other. Communication is a key component in any relationship. Bill Vaughn contends that “Communication means, literally, to ‘make common’—that is, to create in a receiver’s mind an idea or image similar to the one in the mind of the sender.”<sup>14</sup> Effective groups understand the importance of knowing what is going on in the lives of the individual participants. Also it is important to communicate what is going on in the details of the group. This understanding will only be accomplished through communication.

When members of a group do not communicate, the mission of the group is impaired. The leader of the group must take the initiative in communication. It will be the leader’s responsibility, or someone designated by the group leader, to share with the group pertinent class information. The goal or purpose of the group needs to be articulated regularly to the members. It will only be through communication that participants might be aware of upcoming events and activities.

Honesty and openness are paramount to effective communication in a small group. If a group is to share true fellowship, then members of the group must be honest and open with one another. As group members become more familiar it becomes easier to open up and talk. New classes must work at getting over the initial fears of silence in order to improve the group experience. The question needs to be asked, what should be gained from this group experience?

Different types of groups will have different levels of openness and honesty. For example, a group in charge of hiring a new employee will need to be honest and open about issues in relating to the new job and to the applicant. Members of the group may not share their feelings and struggles about personal issues. On the other hand, if the small group is a support group for weight loss, the openness would be more personal and

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<sup>14</sup>Bill Vaughn, *The Dynamics of Small Groups within the Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1980), 40.



confidential in substance. In a Sunday school class setting, openness would be in regard to the Scriptures and personal Christian growth. Stephen Macchia says that, “Trust is the starting point for all healthy relationships, the fuel for team ministry, and the cornerstone of group effectiveness.”<sup>15</sup> In any regard, honesty is an important part of the group experience.

Listening is an important key to effective communication within the small group experience. One has to wonder at the paradox of our anatomy, that people have two ears and one mouth. It is said that “one should listen twice as much as one speaks.” Steve Beebe and John Masterson give the following insight about listening:

Listening is a skill that can be improved with practice. It is an active process through which people select, attend, understand, and remember. Listening takes effort. To listen effectively, people must actively select and attend to the messages they receive. This includes filtering out other stimuli that competes for their attention.<sup>16</sup>

Listening is essential if group members are going to communicate effectively.

Communication involves both speaking and listening. The road of communication is a two way street.

According to Beebe and Masterson, there are ways to improve one’s listening skills:

Active listening is an attempt to clarify and understand another’s thoughts and feelings. To listen effectively involves several steps. You need to: (1) stop, (2) look, (3) listen, (4) ask questions, (5) paraphrase content, and (6) paraphrase feelings. *Stop.* Before you can effectively tune in to what someone else may be feeling, you need to stop what you are doing, eliminate as many distractions as possible, and focus fully on the other person. *Look.* Now look for nonverbal clues that will help you identify how the other person is feeling. Most communication of emotion comes through nonverbal clues. The face provides important information about how a person is feeling, as do that person’s voice quality, pitch, rate, volume, and use of silence. Body movement and posture clearly indicate the intensity of a person’s feelings. *Listen.* Listen for what another person is telling you. Even though that person may not say exactly how he or she feels, look for cues. Match verbal with nonverbal cues to decipher both the content and the emotion of the person’s message. *Ask Questions.* As you try to understand another person, you

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<sup>15</sup>Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Team*, 53.

<sup>16</sup>Beebe and Masterson, *Communicating in Small Groups*, 106.

may need to ask some questions. *Paraphrase Content.* Paraphrasing is restating in your own words what you think another person is saying. *Paraphrase Feelings.* Paraphrase would allow[a person] to clarify how she's feeling.<sup>17</sup>

Listening, as well as other aspects of communication, must be put into practice in order to be effective. Small groups that practice listening, will benefit greatly from one another's insight as well as being immeasurably ahead in more effective communication.

### **Conflict Resolution**

In any group setting, conflict is going to arise. Effective groups deem it necessary to deal with conflict. Conflict is not always a negative thing. Often, individuals and groups can grow through conflict. The important benefit to remember is what can be gained from the disagreement. There needs to be an effective way to work through areas of conflict. First, the conflict needs to be defined. What is the issue? What is the conflict really about? Second, find common ground. Are there areas of agreement? Usually there will be issues upon which both parties agree. Third, both sides need to work toward an acceptable compromise. One must ask the question, "Can I give a little in this situation so that an agreement can be reached?" Conflict is bound to occur, but when it does, it is not the end of the world. Conflict can actually be a way of growth if properly addressed and worked through. It may take some time to work through the areas of disagreement, but time and cooler heads will prevail.

Conflict might be a sign that communication is not taking place. Perhaps individuals are misinformed about goals or the mission of the group. Conflict may arise when leadership is being questioned or challenged. Again, most conflict might be resolved when people take time to talk through the issues.

Conflict might also be a challenge to the effectiveness of a group. Whenever you put two people together, it is just a matter of time before conflict occurs. Beebe and Masterson explain that "Conflict occurs when members disagree over two or more

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 109-10. Italics in the original

options that a group can take in trying to make a decision, resolve a problem, or achieve a goal.”<sup>18</sup> It is through conflict that the group is able to grow and accomplish the task for which it was created. Gerald Phillips states the following about conflict:

Conflict can be made to work for the welfare of the group. An examination of the motives of conflicting members often provides clues to resolution. A dispute over facts, for example, can be resolved by examining sources or getting new information. An extraneous conflict can be broken up by laughter over the irrelevancy. Gossip fails if it is ignored. The competitive urge can be suppressed by presenting good reasons why one man is treated differently than another. Each type of disruption through personality conflict has its antidote, if the leader and members move quickly. If the group settles on a pattern of conflict, however, consensus may be impossible. If someone can get the group into habits of cooperation, personality conflict will be resisted.<sup>19</sup>

Conflict does not have to be a negative issue; it might lead to the growth and effectiveness of a small group.

### **Leadership**

Effective small groups understand the importance of good leadership. The leader of the small group or Sunday school class sets the pace for the rest of the group. According to Beebe and Masterson, leadership can be defined as “behavior that influences, guides, directs, or controls a group.”<sup>20</sup> The initial question that must be answered is, “How are leaders chosen?” In some group settings, such as a Sunday school class, the leader would most likely be chosen by a nominating committee or by the pastor. In other situations, a leader may be chosen by a consensus of group members where individuals may express interest in becoming leader of the group. No matter how a leader is chosen, the group’s leader greatly impacts the direction of the group through his or her vision, goals, and agenda for the group.

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<sup>18</sup>Beebe and Masterson, *Communicating in Small Groups*, 226.

<sup>19</sup>Gerald M. Phillips, *Communication and the Small Group*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational, 1973), 156.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 259.

## **Training**

Once the leader is chosen, training is essential. The leader must never stop growing. The leader must continue to labor for excellence in personal development. In a Sunday school setting, the leader, which will most likely be the teacher, must continue to grow spiritually. The small group probably will not rise above the spiritual level of the teacher. Therefore, the leader or teacher must spend time in God's Word to grow and develop personally before others may be taught. If the leader has a heart for God, members of the group will develop a heart for God as well.

There are different types of training that may be utilized for leadership preparation. In the church setting, the pastor or staff person may lead the training for small group leaders. Conferences and seminars are also a possibility for leaders preparing to be better. Perhaps a leader in the community might come in to share with leaders of a Sunday school class some basic principles of leadership. At the very least, leaders of a class may be given helpful books or articles that cover a variety of leadership subjects.

## **Principles for Effective Leadership**

There are several principles for effective leaders of small groups. First, the leader must chart the course for the rest of the group. In other words, just as the name implies, one must lead. It is difficult to get others to go where the leader will not go. So, the leader must have an awareness of where the group needs to go. The leader must understand the group's goals and purpose so he or she may lead the group in that direction. Glen Martin and Gary McIntosh indicate that "then in turn the leader needs to communicate this purpose and vision to the group members so they will want to be a continuing part of the team."<sup>21</sup>

Second, a leader or teacher in a Sunday school class must have an adequate understanding of the Bible. The leader should not be a new believer, but should be a

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<sup>21</sup>Martin and McIntosh, *Creating Community*, 88.

seasoned Christian who is maturing in his or her faith. Not that one has to have all the solutions to life, but the leader should be one who has experience and has proven to be faithful and wise. Again, the class will not rise above the spiritual level of the leader. The leader or teacher should be someone who has reached a certain level of maturity. This is not easy to measure at times. Effectively selecting leaders should be done with much prayer and discernment by the nominating committee and or pastor.

The leader of the small group should be one of character and integrity. One of the most effective ways of leading is by example. Small group members will often look to their leader to see how to respond to certain situations. Martin and McIntosh say, “Any leader is a role model, especially in the church.”<sup>22</sup> Effective leadership often takes place outside the small group experience in everyday life. So for this reason, the small group leader needs to be aware that their leadership extends far beyond the small group or Sunday school hour.

Effective Sunday school leaders must have a love for the people to which they lead. A relationship develops between the leader and the small group. Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges state the following in regard for the love that the leader needs to have for the group:

If you do not truly love Jesus, then you will not love the people you lead. Nothing but the love of Christ will compel you to go cheerfully through the difficulties and discouragements you experience as a leader. However, Christ’s kind of love will make your work easier, and it will encourage those you lead to serve wholeheartedly.<sup>23</sup>

If for some reason the group is unsure about the leader’s concern for them then the group will cease to follow. But, on the other hand, if a small group is convinced of the leader’s interest in them as individuals, they will follow faithfully. Being a leader of a small group or Sunday school class is about people. Successful leaders build

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2005), 178.

relationships with class members to develop friendships, which will strengthen the quality of their leadership.

Effective leaders are good communicators. The leader of the small group needs to be able to convey ideas to the group and understand from where the members of the group are coming. Bill Vaughn states the following about effective leaders:

The leader is a good listener. In many ways, his main function is to be involved in *listening* so he can understand and clarify for the rest of the group that which may be unclear. He is careful about interrupting speakers unless a dominating member is talking too much of the time.<sup>24</sup>

Communication is important in the entire group process. Without communication between the leader and group members it cannot function effectively.

### **Challenges Specific to Small Groups**

Effective small groups must also overcome challenges to growth. In order to have a successful small group it takes work and corporation. Glen Martin and Gary McIntosh list eight problems that may arise in a small group.

- Problem 1: Church Leaders with Poor Self-Image
- Problem 2: Fear of Failure
- Problem 3: Discouragement and Disappointment
- Problem 4: Spiritual Dryness
- Problem 5: Poor Time Management
- Problem 6: Relational Conflicts
- Problem 7: Overload and Burnout
- Problem 8: Conflict with Authority<sup>25</sup>

Groups that succeed are intentional in staying focused with the mission of the group. It is important for a small group to understand its purpose. If the group does not have a common purpose or mission then there will not be a united effort in the same direction.

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<sup>24</sup>Vaughn, *The Dynamics of Small Groups within the Church*, 49. Italics in the original

<sup>25</sup>Martin and McIntosh, *Creating Community*, 41-45.

The first item of business for the group is to develop a mission statement for the group. What is the purpose of the group? What does the group exist to accomplish? These questions need to be answered before the group may be effective. The answers may be as simple as increased fellowship among the group members, but at least everyone coming into the group knows what is expected. In the small group setting of a Sunday school, one of the primary purposes would be to teach the Bible to the class members in such a way that the Scriptures are believed and practiced in daily life. A mission statement gives direction and guidance to a small group to ensure that goals are identified and met.

One obstacle for effective small groups is to become inward focused. After a group has been together for a certain amount of time it loses its focus to reach new people. The group starts to get comfortable with those that are in the group and new people may challenge the dynamics of the group. A new person will bring new ideas and thoughts to the group that may not agree with the current status. So, the tendency of groups may be to focus on those that are in the class and not reach out to new people. After all, the group that has been in existence for some time knows one another and new people are a threat to the current power structure of the group.

As a result of becoming inward focused, stagnation occurs within the group. The group loses sight of its mission and becomes ineffective. The mission and purpose of the group has been aborted and a new mission has been adopted which is to appease the members of the group. The group exists just for the sake of the group. When a small group digresses to this stage, intervention needs to occur in order to become effective again.

When stagnation occurs, the group must refocus. The group members must make an intentional effort to review the original purpose for which the group exists. The leader of the group will most likely need to be the one to initiate this action. Reviewing the mission statement may be helpful in keeping the focus of the group on its purpose.

### **Ongoing Evaluation**

Ongoing evaluation is needed to keep the group fresh and committed. A quick survey on occasion will help the leader know what the group members are thinking. This survey might be accomplished in an informal manner just by asking for a show of hands on a particular subject or project. It is the primary responsibility of the group leader to review periodically the mission and purpose of the group so that it will stay on task. The mission and purpose must be communicated to the rest of the group to ensure growth and stability.

Evaluation also includes analyzing the attendance of the group. Increased participation indicates new growth that is occurring within the group. Hopefully, at least some of the new growth will be conversion growth, not just a reshuffling of existing members.

The starting of new classes is a way of evaluating the effectiveness of a small group ministry. When new classes are needed to meet the various needs of the people, it indicates more people are being reached.

Another form of ongoing evaluation is in the area of leadership. Leaders who are growing in leadership and teaching skills will be a benefit to the class members. If leaders are growing, it makes sense that the class members will be growing as well. Accountability is needed for ongoing evaluation to occur. Leaders must take the initiative to keep class members on task. Reminders to the group of the purpose of the class will keep participants all heading in the same direction.

### **Conclusion**

Small groups have their place within the life and ministry of the church. It is in small groups where people find a point of connection through common experiences and life situations. When there is a united mission and purpose the small group is strengthened and enforced. Effective small groups have a high level of commitment, which is enhanced by authentic relationships and accountability. Effective small groups



learn how to communicate with each other. Communication involves both speaking and listening to one another. Leadership is also a key to small group success. Effective small groups learn how to overcome challenges to growth to keeping the group focused on the mission of the group.

## CHAPTER 4 TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION

### **Introduction**

The Sunday school focused outreach project of the First Baptist Church, Mount Vernon, Kentucky was begun in September 2010. The project lasted for fifteen consecutive weeks, concluding in December 2010. The project consisted of five weeks of preparation and ten weeks of the actual implementation of the outreach project. The following gives the details of how the project was carried out.

### **Pre-Project Questionnaire**

The purpose of the pre-project questionnaire was to find out basic information about the members of the adult Sunday school classes of First Baptist Church. A total of 22 Sunday school leaders and members were asked to give information about themselves, as well as their perception of the Sunday school. The participants were asked to identify their appropriate age group, how long they had been a member of a Sunday school class, and their highest level of education. The participants were then asked various questions that pertained to Sunday school, such as attendance, evangelism, effectiveness, class time, and the Bible. Participants were asked to give their birth month and day as a way of distinguishing between the questionnaires.

The results of this questionnaire were used as a base line for evaluation of the outreach project. This same questionnaire was given at the end of the project to see if opinions and attitudes changed after the outreach project was finished. The questionnaire was given on September 12, 2010.

### **Pre-Project Teacher Training Session 1**

The purpose of the teacher training was to lay a foundation in developing an evangelistic Sunday school. The priority of evangelism must be established if Sunday school is going to become outward focused.

The biblical mandate was first considered. The Bible is very clear that the church has been called to share the Gospel. Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:14-15, Luke 24:46-47, John 20:21 and Acts 1:8 were used in laying a foundation for the church's responsibility to evangelism.

After laying the foundation for the church's responsibility to share the Gospel, a brief history of Sunday school was considered. A history of the Sunday school would be incomplete without examining the work of Robert Raikes. Raikes's work began in England with impoverished children in the latter part of the eighteenth century and was noted as the beginning of our present day Sunday school. By the nineteenth century, the salvation of children had emerged as the primary goal. In 1824, the first Sunday school was introduced in America, and until the 1950s, Sunday school enjoyed much success as the main evangelistic tool of the church.<sup>1</sup>

Jeri Tanner, in "A Brief History of Sunday School," argues that Sunday school has been in a decline over the past half-century or so.<sup>2</sup> One reason for the decline seems to be that the emphasis of Sunday school has changed. The focus has shifted from evangelism as the main priority to discipleship and fellowship.<sup>3</sup> Sunday school is no longer viewed as an evangelistic organization. Instead, it is thought of more as a place for committed believers.

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<sup>1</sup>Jeri Tanner, "A Brief History of Sunday School" [on-line]; accessed 17 September 2010; available from <http://ministry-to-children.com/history-of-sunday-school>; Internet.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Sunday school, however, is a proven tool for evangelism in the church. This author, borrowing from Wayne A. Poling, in his work *Conducting Potential Sunday School Worker Training*, gave ten reasons why Sunday school is a proven evangelistic tool.

1. The Sunday school is to witness and lead persons to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
2. The text book of the Sunday school is the Bible, which points the way to salvation and the Christian life.
3. The Sunday school is church centered. Our Lord gave His commission to the Church—no other entity has this task. The Sunday school derives its purpose from the mission of the church.
4. The Sunday school has the largest membership of any organization. More persons are enrolled in Sunday school; hence, a potentially large force exists to assist the church in its mission.
5. The Sunday school has the greatest potential membership. Sunday school is for the youngest baby, children of all ages, youth, and adults- married or single. Sunday school has the potential to reach out to all members of all families. Anyone, regardless of his/her spiritual condition can study God's Word. Sunday school has a wonderful opportunity to lead lost persons to study God's Word and to come to know Him as their personal Savior.
6. When the Sunday school is used as the outreach organization, less overlapping and duplication in efforts takes place.
7. The Sunday school meets 52 weeks a year. Sunday school is not an "off and on" organization. It takes no vacation; it does not temporarily disband. It is solid and stable. Throughout Southern Baptist history, the Sunday school has remained viable and alive—in both good times and bad times.
8. The Sunday school has the largest number of workers. The Sunday school in most churches has more workers than all the other organizations combined.
9. Sunday school is organized for outreach, for witnessing, for Bible study, and for ministering. The structure is there and the people are available. In fact, the genius of Sunday school outreach, witness, and ministry, is the assignment of small groups of persons to a worker.
10. The Sunday school takes the Great Commission and divides it among all people. The Sunday school is organized and mobilized with each class and department responsible for specific people.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Wayne A. Poling, *Conducting Potential Sunday School Worker Training* (Nashville: Convention, 1992), 2.

Based on my experience that Sunday school is a proven tool for evangelism, four keys to a healthy Sunday school were discussed borrowing from Thom Rainer in his book *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works, and What Doesn't*.

1. A Healthy Sunday School is Evangelistic
2. A Healthy Sunday School Provides Biblical Education to All Age Groups
3. A Healthy Sunday School Provides Means and Opportunity for Ministry
4. A Healthy Sunday School Assimilates Church Members.<sup>5</sup>

The session concluded with a proposal of an outreach project through the Sunday school classes. The project will include a prayer leader, outreach leader, and group or care leaders for each adult class. Teachers were asked to select individuals for these important positions. There was discussion about how assignments would be made through each Sunday school class in an effort to reach new people. This effort would intentionally help each class regain an outward focus. Also, group leaders would help to keep up with the ministry needs of each Sunday school class. The prayer leader would keep the class focused on the importance of prayer in the work of the Sunday school. After closing prayer, the meeting was dismissed.

### **Sermon Series Week 1**

A three-week sermon series on the Biblical foundation of evangelism began. The first sermon was simply entitled “The Great Commission” taken from Matthew 28:16-20. The purpose of the message was to lay a foundation for the church to be evangelistic. Listeners were encouraged to make disciples, baptize disciples, and teach disciples. Emphasis was made that God has called believers to share their faith locally and around the world. Attention was given to the point that there is urgency in telling

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<sup>5</sup>Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works, and What Doesn't* (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 90-93.

others about Jesus. The Sunday school was mentioned as an important tool in implementing the command to teach disciples. A plea was given for the congregation to share their faith with someone who was lost. An invitation was given, and the service closed with song.

### **Pre-Project Teacher Training Session 2**

The second session of teacher training opened with prayer, and then each participant was given a list of questions to answer in regard to Sunday school. This group of Sunday school teachers, leaders, and participants served as a focus group to give greater insight into the needs and opinions about Sunday school and evangelism. There were 10 people in this focus group, which consisted of 6 women and 4 men. The ages of the participants ranged from the forties to sixties. Seven of the 10 were teachers, 1 was the outreach leader, and the other 2 were faithful members of the Sunday school. The questions that the focus group answered were as follows:

1. What is the purpose of the Sunday school?
2. What are some obstacles that keep us from inviting people to Sunday school?
3. What are some suggestions to help motivate people to share their faith?
4. How can we develop an outward focus in the Sunday school class?
5. Do you think our Sunday school is effective in reaching new people? Why or why not?
6. Do you have any suggestions for making our Sunday school more evangelistic?
7. What fears do you have about evangelism?

After the questions were returned, discussion took place in reference to the answers given. Due to time constraints, some had to leave early; however, those who were able to remain for the entire meeting were attentive and interested in seeing the Sunday school grow. The answers given by this focus group would help in understanding what some are thinking with regard to the work of Sunday school.

In reviewing the answers given by the focus group, some valuable information was gleaned. The majority of the group believed the purpose of the Sunday school was to teach the Bible. Outreach, fellowship, Christian growth, training, support, and to build a stronger relationship with the Lord were also listed as purposes of the Sunday school.

The group indicated that fear presented the biggest obstacle in inviting others to Sunday school. Words like anxiety, shyness, afraid, fear, and lack of power of the Word were cited. A couple of participants indicated that not having enough space was an obstacle to inviting people to Sunday school. Other obstacles discussed included time constraints, lack of commitment, and limited knowledge of potential prospects, discouragement, few results, and few opportunities.

Training was suggested as the best motivator to help people share their faith along with practice and role-playing. Other suggestions given to motivate people to share their faith included prayer, creating awareness, accountability, studying the Bible, getting involved in small groups, and just doing it.

A variety of ideas about how to develop an outward focus in the Sunday school class were presented. The common idea of intentionality emerged. The group indicated specific ideas about reaching out to prospects for their classes and sharing information to keep people reminded. It appeared that the group knew that one must be intentional if an outward focus is to occur. Also mentioned to help develop an outward focus was prayer, encouragement, leadership, teaching, getting into God's Word, and teacher training.

The group was divided on the question of whether the Sunday school was effective on reaching new people. Those who answered "yes" to the question seemed to believe that that the small group was beneficial for God's work and getting to know others better. A couple of others who indicated "yes" thought that perhaps new people would need to come to worship prior to coming to Sunday school. This author finds that response interesting. The idea of coming to worship prior to coming to Sunday school seems to indicate that evangelism is not thought of as the first priority of Sunday school.

Hopefully, during this outreach project, opinions may be changed to see the Sunday school as an evangelistic tool.

Those in the group who did not feel that Sunday school was effective in reaching new people gave some insightful information. The reasons varied from members not inviting new members regularly, being comfortable with the people in the classes, lack of God's movement, and allowing prospects to come to the church rather than the church going after prospects.

When asked about suggestions for making Sunday school more evangelistic, the group had several ideas. Suggestions included: finding new prospects, sending cards and letters, being more intentional, strong leadership, specific duties of individual class members, going after church members first, calling members, visiting members, training, and prayer. All of the suggestions were great ideas. It appeared the group understood that something needed to be done as opposed to nothing being done.

The group indicated all kinds of fears about evangelism including rejection, failing, giving the wrong answer, not having enough information about the prospect being visited, lack of God's power, fear of imposing on others, being asked a question that they cannot answer, shyness, lacking boldness, how to approach an individual to share your faith, not knowing enough Bible, not having enough practice, and people making accusations of being hypocritical.

This focus group shed some light on where the leaders of the Sunday school are in relation to Sunday school work and evangelism. It appears that the leaders want the Sunday school to grow, but perhaps unsure as to what needs to be done. Over the next few weeks, a plan was implemented that gave an organizational structure for evangelism through the Sunday school.

The remaining time of the training was spent on discussion of the implementation of the outreach project. The teachers voiced concern that the appropriate personnel would not be in place before our projected start date. Therefore, it was decided that the



implementation of the project would be postponed one week to allow time for each class to enlist an outreach leader, prayer leader, and group leaders. The group seemed to believe that this would help to ensure the success of the project. The session closed with prayer.

### **Sermon Series Week 2**

During the second week of the sermon series on evangelism, a message was preached from Acts 2:42-47, entitled “Qualities of a Healthy Sunday School.” The qualities found in the early church may be found in a healthy Sunday school as well.

Nine traits were listed:

1. Commitment (2:42a)—In the sermon, teachers, leaders, and participants were challenged to commit to implementing an outreach structure for growth in the Sunday school. There will be no growth without commitment.
2. Teaching the Bible (2:42b)—The Bible must be the primary text of teaching in the Sunday school. Commentaries are helpful, but nothing can take the place of God’s Word.
3. Fellowship (2:42,46b)—Fellowship is an important part of the Sunday school experience. In Acts 2:42-47, the disciples shared meals together. There seems to be something good that happens in the fellowship time shared over a meal.
4. Prayer (2:42c)—All work must be saturated in prayer. God is the One who causes growth in a Sunday school class, church, or the believer’s life.
5. Awareness of God’s Presence (2:43)—When God begins to move on a congregation or class it is evident. Only God can change people’s hearts and bring transformation.
6. Unity and Harmony (2:44a-46a)—Unity and harmony are qualities that show that the members have surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. When believers are of heart and mind under the authority of Christ, good things happen in the church or classroom.
7. Ministry (2:44b-45)—A Sunday school class that is growing will minister to the needs of the class and community. The class does not exist just for itself, but to reach out to others.
8. Worship (2:47a)—Worship is also an important part of the believer’s life. Even in the classroom there can be a time of worship.
9. Evangelism (2:47b)—A growing Sunday school involves evangelism. The Sunday school should be outward focused. There are people who are perishing without Christ; Sunday school is a good tool to be used for evangelism.

The congregation was challenged to share their faith with others. After a time of invitation, the service closed with a song.

### **Pre-Project Teacher Training Session 3**

The purpose of the third teacher training session was to show how the Sunday school is organized for effective evangelism and ministry. After an opening prayer, the Great Commission was reviewed as the biblical mandate to keep the focus on evangelism. The church has been called to make, baptize, and teach disciples, and the Sunday school provides the best organization to accomplish the task.

In order to show how Sunday school may be effective in accomplishing evangelism and ministry, several biblical passages that deal with small groups were studied to gain valuable information about the importance of small groups. First, Exodus 18:13-27 was studied to see how small groups make the task more manageable. Just as Jethro suggested for Moses to select able men to help carry out the administrative duties of his day, the same principles may be applied to the Sunday school. The work is too great for one person to do alone. Sunday school provides an effective structure to reach new people and minister to the needs of those already involved.

Nehemiah 4:12-17 reveals that people may accomplish more when there are ties that bind the group. Nehemiah placed families together in small groups to work and to keep watch for the enemy. The family relationships kept the groups intact and effective. In Sunday school, meaningful relationships keep the group together. As group members get to know one another, lasting relationships are built that may last a lifetime.

During the time of study, Luke 6:12-13, where Jesus chose His twelve disciples, was also examined. Small groups are more conducive to mentoring and learning. Jesus chose a small group to teach and mentor. Sunday school is also effective to mentor new believers as well as to teach the Word of God.

Next, Matthew 10:1-15 was considered in the context of effective small groups. Jesus commissioned the twelve to minister and evangelize. As the disciples were sent out, it showed that more may be accomplished together than on one's own. These small groups also provided accountability and encouragement. Sunday school provides opportunities for people to work together for the cause of Christ. The structure

of an outreach leader, prayer leader, and group leaders also provides accountability and encouragement for the evangelistic work of the Sunday school.

The Sunday school was shown to be an excellent way to accomplish the purposes of the church found in Acts 2:42-47. In this passage, the six purposes of the church are listed: worship, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, evangelism,<sup>6</sup> and prayer.<sup>7</sup> In a Sunday school class, all these elements may be found and exhibited.

After examining Scriptural evidence involving the benefits of small groups, six principles were given for effective small groups. The principles were taken from chapter 3 of this project and merely listed and expounded upon. The principles are as follows: connection, commitment, relationships, accountability, communication, and leadership.

The training time also gave opportunity to discuss some challenges to growth that may occur. Two primary challenges were discussed: inward focus and conflict. The group was encouraged to gain an outward focus to reach new people in Sunday school. A word of warning was given in the area of conflict, knowing that the devil would try to disrupt. After discussion and prayer the training session ended.

### **Sermon Series Week 3**

The sermon series concluded with a look at Exodus 18:13-27. The title of the sermon was “Organize to Evangelize.” The sermon title was borrowed from Larry L. Lewis and his book on church growth, *Organize to Evangelize*.<sup>8</sup> The point of the message was to show how small groups help the church to be more efficient in accomplishing the work of evangelism and ministry. In the passage, Moses’s father-in-

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<sup>6</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 49.

<sup>7</sup>Chuck Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That Are Equipped For Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 23-24.

<sup>8</sup>Larry L. Lewis, *Organize to Evangelize* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988).

law, Jethro, gives him advice on how to be more efficient after watching him work all day long to give God's judgment to the people.

The passage teaches that leaders need to understand their limitations. Ministry takes everyone working together to accomplish God's work. The task is too heavy for one person; a cooperative effort is needed. Additionally, the passage teaches that each Christian must find their place in ministry. Moses still had a specific role to play as the leader of God's people. He was God's representative and was called to teach the statutes and laws of the Lord. Moses was advised to select qualified leaders who would help him; men of integrity who loved the Lord. The same is still true today. The church needs qualified leaders who love the Lord and stand for truth. Finally, the passage shows that small groups make the task more manageable. Moses listened to his father-in-law and did what he said (Exod 18:24).

#### **Pre-Project Teacher Training Session 4**

In the last teacher training before the implementation of the project, time was taken to help the teachers and leaders become familiar with the project itself. The project had been introduced several weeks earlier, but this particular session was used to discuss the responsibilities of the outreach leader, prayer leader, and group leaders.

The outreach leader in each class would be responsible for giving out prospect assignments to be contacted each week. Contacting new prospects would help the class to develop an outward focus.

The prayer leader in each class would be responsible for keeping the prayer needs before the class. The group leaders should be consulted each week to see if they had discovered ministry needs within the class.

The group leaders would be responsible for four to eight members of the class. The group leader would contact any absent members within his or her group. This contact by group leaders would help to ensure accountability within the Sunday school class.

## **Teachers and Leaders Meetings**

Weekly meetings were held with teachers and leaders to discuss implementation of the project and weekly results. Teachers were asked about potential barriers to the implementation of the project and were also asked for feedback and suggestions further development of the Sunday school.

### **Week 1 Meeting**

The project itself was implemented on Sunday morning, October 17, 2010. A brief teachers meeting was held later that afternoon to discuss the implementation of the project and to answering any questions that had arisen. It was discovered that some of the classes still did not have all the needed personnel in place. Other teachers lamented that some class members were reluctant to participate. After a time of discussion, encouragement was given to enlist a prayer leader, outreach leader, and group leaders for each class. Overall the meeting was upbeat and positive in nature.

One item of business that came out of the meeting was a need for a sign board to help newcomers to find their way to classes. It was indicated that it is confusing for new members or prospects to find the appropriate classes. This idea is being considered by the trustees of the church and is scheduled to be implemented within the next six months.

### **Week 2 Meeting**

A week following the implementation, on Sunday, October 24, 2010, a brief teachers meeting was held to discuss any problems that may have arisen due to the outreach project. Both teachers and leaders were in attendance. Some classes participated more than others, but overall the project seemed to be underway.

### **Week 3 Meeting**

On Sunday, October 31, 2010, another brief teachers meeting was held to evaluate and discuss the progress of the outreach project. Only 4 teachers and I were present at the meeting, but everyone seemed to believe the project was working.

Teachers commented that they were running out of prospects to contact. Therefore, this week new prospects would need to be gathered for the classes. The pastor and outreach leader would be in charge of this assignment.

The starting of a new couple's class on November 21, 2010, was also part of the discussion of the meeting. The new class would be a co-ed class for ages 40-60. Discussion occurred about this new class as well as the possibility of future classes that might be started. I could sense tension from one of the teachers about the possibility of splitting his class to start a new one. A new class for the age group was formed; no members from the class mentioned, however, were asked to change classes. After further discussion, the meeting closed with prayer.

#### **Week 5 Meeting**

On Sunday, November 14, 2010, a teachers meeting was held to evaluate and encourage teachers and leaders about outreach. Discussion was made in regard to the project. Each teacher present was asked to evaluate the process of outreach in their class. Overall, teachers thought that the outreach emphasis was working. New prospects seemed to be the challenge for each class.

#### **Week 7 Meeting**

A meeting was held on Sunday, November 28, 2010, to continue the evaluation of the outreach project. Overall it seemed that things were working well. One improvement that needed to be made was to provide more prospects for the classes to contact. One teacher commented that his class had been suffering from sporadic attendance. He lamented that guests would attend the class but then not come back. It makes one curious as to what the problem may be that guests fail to return after attending. One suggestion could be that the class has become cliquish and newcomers do not feel welcome.

Suggestions were made about ministry needs to a particular family that had lost a loved one. Also a suggestion was made to have a special dinner to help create interest for the Sunday school classes. After prayer the meeting ended.

### **Week 9 Meeting**

A teachers and leaders meeting was held on December 12, 2010, to discuss barriers to growth of the Sunday school at First Baptist Church. The first barrier that was identified was the facility. Additional space or a new configuration of space would be needed to better accommodate new classes. A possible solution may be to evaluate our current facility to see where new classes could meet.

A second barrier determined was that classes have become cliquish in nature. A problem exists in many of the adult classes of people not wanting to promote up to the next class. Many classes have become stagnant and comfortable because of this inward thinking. It would be difficult to convince people to move up to new classes, but a concentrated effort could be made to encourage promotion in the future.

A third barrier discussed to overcome was a lack of variety of Sunday school classes. It was suggested that different classes such as a special needs class, a choir class, or possibly a *Celebrate Recovery* class could be offered to help meet the needs of the church family.

A fourth barrier mentioned was trying to get over the 200 barrier in Sunday school attendance. Discussion was made about the mental aspect of reaching new ground in attendance.

A fifth barrier pinpointed was punctuality of members and teachers. It was stated that some of the children's teachers had not been on time and the parents have been tardy to their class as a result of waiting with their children for the teacher's arrival. Certainly punctuality is important to a growing Sunday school.

Teacher preparation was discussed as a sixth barrier to Sunday school growth. It was agreed that teachers should be ready to teach. There was no solution offered to

remedy the problem. A seventh barrier identified was a lack of teachers. A spiritual gifts inventory or leadership development training could be offered to help discover new teacher prospects.

I was pleased with the discussion from the participants of the barriers to Sunday school growth. It appeared that the leaders and teachers seemed to have a good understanding on what was needed for the Sunday school to grow. After closing in prayer the meeting concluded.

### **Post-Project Survey**

A final teachers meeting was planned for Sunday December 26 to complete the post project surveys. A total of 22 leaders and members of the Sunday school had participated in the pre-project survey, but due to inclement weather and other circumstances, most were not able to attend. Therefore, arrangements were made for those who were not in attendance to fill out the post-project surveys at their own convenience. The purpose of the post-project surveys was to identify any changes in attitudes or opinions regarding outreach and the Sunday school. Additionally, information may be gleaned about the effectiveness of the project itself.

### **Conclusion**

Over the fifteen weeks, an outreach project was implemented in the adult Sunday school classes of First Baptist Church, Mount Vernon, Kentucky. A series of sermons were preached on the importance of evangelism, and teacher training was provided to better equip teachers for outreach. Each adult class was asked to enlist an outreach leader, prayer leader, and a group leader for every four to eight members of the class. Teacher and leader training was provided during the course of the project to help encourage and troubleshoot problems that arose.

Throughout the course of this project, many suggestions were offered that may be implemented in future projects in regard to the Sunday school. Chapter 5 discusses in detail the methods for possible improvements in future Sunday school outreach programs.



CHAPTER 5  
EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

**Introduction**

Evaluation of the project's purpose, goals, strengths and weaknesses, coupled with reflection, both theological and personal, is important. In the following pages, I have endeavored to present the outcomes of the outreach project as well as lessons learned along the way with the hope that this information will be useful in the planning, preparation, and implementation of future outreach efforts and ultimately for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

**Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to train an outreach leader, prayer leader, and group leader, in and for each adult Sunday school class. In order to better understand what the Sunday school teachers and leaders were thinking in regard to outreach, a pre and post-project questionnaire was given during the project. Also, a focus group was conducted during the beginning and at the end of the project asking the teachers and leaders of the Sunday school to answer questions that pertained to Sunday school and evangelism. A brief survey was also given to several individuals who do not attend Sunday school to glean a better understanding of why some choose not to attend. In the following, the data of these surveys and questionnaires was analyzed to help gain understanding in implementing an outreach project.

A pre-project and post project questionnaire was given to teachers, leaders, and regular attending members of the Sunday school. Fourteen individuals completed both of the surveys. Of the 14, 1 was 41-50 years of age, 4 were 51-60 years of age, and 9 were

60 years of age or older. When asked how long they had been a member of the Sunday school, 1 indicated 6 to 10 years, 2 replied 10 to 20 years, the remaining 11 responded 20 years or longer. In answering the question about the highest level of education, 1 responded high school, and 2 responded some college or technical training, and 11 indicated graduate or professional education.

The participants were asked sixteen questions regarding Sunday school and evangelism. The purpose of giving the questionnaire before and after the project was to see if attitudes and opinions changed during the project. The research instrument used for this analysis was the seven point Likert scale. Examination of the results revealed no significant change in the responses from before to after. One possible reason this response may be true is that the participants are older Christians who have been around Sunday school for many years. The answers given reveal a biblical understanding of evangelism and the Sunday school. In other words, on some of the questions, the respondents answered correctly the first time in the author's estimation. Therefore, the same answer the second time is not necessarily a failure.

One question asked the participants if evangelism is the responsibility of the Sunday school. Ten of the 14 respondents agreed before the project that evangelism is the responsibility of the Sunday school. The post-project survey revealed that 10 still agreed with evangelistic responsibility of the Sunday school, but where 4 strongly agreed before the project, 5 strongly agreed after the project.

One interesting observation that surfaced during the surveys concerned the question about whether or not participants believed that non-church members would be more likely to come to Sunday school than to a worship service the first time. Before the project, 4 agreed and one slightly agreed with that statement. After the project, only 1 agreed, and 1 slightly agreed that non-church members would be more likely to come to Sunday school than worship. Perhaps the reason for the change of opinion was due to

discouragement from a lack of response during the project to get non-members to attend Sunday school.

Another question asked if Sunday school teachers and leaders should encourage students to invite un-churched friends to Sunday school. Before the project, 11 strongly agreed, 1 agreed, and 1 strongly disagreed with that statement. After the project, 10 strongly agreed, four agreed and no one disagreed that teachers and leaders should be inviting un-churched friends. Teachers and leaders need to set the example for the class members of inviting others to Sunday school.

A positive note surfaced when the participants were asked if they believed the Sunday school was an important part of the church's outreach efforts. Before the survey, 10 strongly agreed, 3 agreed, and 1 strongly disagreed with that statement. After the project, 11 strongly agreed, 3 agreed and no one disagreed. Someone in the group changed their opinion about the outreach efforts of the Sunday school.

*Focus Group Pre-Project Questionnaire*—Prior to implementing the outreach project, I gathered together a group of Sunday school teachers, leaders, and participants to serve as a focus group to give greater insight into the needs and opinions about Sunday school and evangelism. Ten people participated in this focus group, which consisted of 6 women and 4 men. The ages of the participants ranged from the forties to sixties. Seven of the 10 were teachers, 1 was the Outreach Leader, and the other 2 were faithful Sunday school members. It was important to me to determine what teachers and leaders in the church understood about evangelism through Sunday school prior to the implementation of the project. The insight provided by this focus group was important as I sought to understand what the church body believes about the work of Sunday school. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly describe the group's responses to each question.

*Purpose of Sunday school*—The majority of the group believed the purpose of Sunday school is to teach the Bible. Other stated purposes of Sunday school included

outreach, fellowship, Christian growth, training, support, and building a stronger relationship with the Lord.

*Obstacles to inviting others to attend Sunday school*—The group indicated that fear provided the biggest obstacle to inviting others to Sunday school. The group answered with words like anxiety, shyness, afraid, fear, and lack of power of the Word. A couple of participants mentioned inadequate space. Further obstacles mentioned include time, lack of commitment, unaware of prospects, discouragement, few results, and few opportunities.

*Suggestions to help people share their faith*—The group suggested training, including practice through role playing, as the best motivator to help people share their faith. Other suggestions included prayer, creating awareness, accountability, studying the Bible, getting involved in small groups, and just doing it.

*Developing an outward focus*—A variety of ideas about how to develop an outward focus in Sunday school were shared. The common idea of intentionality emerged. The group provided specific ideas about reaching out to prospects including prayer, encouragement, leadership, teaching, getting into God's Word, teacher training, and constant and consistent sharing of information to keep people reminded.

*Sunday school as an effective tool to reach new people*—Responses to this question were divided. Some believed that the small group setting is beneficial for God's work and getting to know others better. Others indicated that perhaps new people would need to come to worship prior to coming to Sunday school.

*Suggestions for making Sunday school more evangelistic*—Suggestions included finding new prospects, sending cards and letters, being more intentional, employing strong leadership, specifying duties for individual class members, enlisting church members first, calling members, visiting members, training leaders, and specifically praying for non-members.

*Fears about evangelism*—Fears included being rejected, failing, providing incomplete or incorrect answers to theological questions, not having adequate information about the prospect, lacking God’s power, being perceived by prospect as imposing on their privacy, not having confidence, not knowing how to approach an individual to share faith, not knowing enough of the Bible, not having enough practice, and being accused of being hypocritical.

Towards the conclusion of the project, a group of Sunday school leaders, teachers, and participants was again gathered and asked to complete a post-project questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of seven questions concerning the effectiveness of the outreach project.

*Strengths of the project*—The overwhelming answer is that the project created a greater awareness for reaching new contacts through Sunday school. It was also mentioned that the teacher’s and leader’s meetings were beneficial in creating unity and re-focusing the efforts of the Sunday school.

*Weaknesses of the project*—Time constraints were mentioned as one of the primary weaknesses of the project. It was difficult for all teachers, leaders, and participants to find a common time to meet due to other meetings and ministries of the church. A lack of viable prospects for each class to contact during the project was also mentioned as a weakness. Some classes ran out of prospects very quickly, and new prospects were difficult to find. I perceived in advance that this would be an issue and, though I attempted to combat this issue, I found it difficult to ensure that enough new prospects were available for each class. Another big issue involved follow-through. Not all teachers put forth the effort to follow through with the plan for outreach or simply did not develop the plan as instructed which resulted in a lack of results, and proved to be a discouragement to the Sunday school members and leaders.

*Changed attitudes*—The third question of the survey asked participants to list any attitudes in regard to Sunday school outreach that were changed due to the project.

The respondents overwhelmingly stated their attitudes had been changed to a renewed focus on outreach to individuals and families not involved in Sunday school. Additionally, those surveyed indicated that they believed Sunday school was more organized to reach out to people as a result of the project, citing a renewed emphasis on ministering to hurting members and those who no longer attend. In some cases, numerical growth helped to change attitudes for the better and served to emphasize the need to follow through with the project. In general, the leaders and teachers seemed to have gained a new perspective about Sunday school.

*Changes in the evangelistic attitude of the church as a whole*—Many indicated that they believed that the church’s overall evangelistic attitude had improved as a result of the project. Some responses, however, were a little less certain; answering with statements such as, “I think so,” “somewhat,” or “hopefully.” Overall, the answers indicated that the participants wanted to see a greater outreach emphasis by the church, but many remained somewhat cautious.

*Organization of Sunday school for outreach*—Participants were asked if they thought Sunday school was organized to outreach. The general consensus of the group was that Sunday school is organized for outreach, but the work must be carried out by the members. Several indicated that although improvements had been made to the outreach structure of Sunday school, merely having the structure in place does not guarantee success. People must be willing to work together to reach out and more, and regular encouragement of teachers and leaders is needed.

*Personal evangelistic growth*—This question asked the participants how they would describe their own evangelistic pilgrimage before and after the project. Most mentioned that they had been revived or renewed to the importance of teaching and evangelism. More than one indicated a new commitment and enthusiasm to invite people to Sunday school. One person stated that he had never thought of Sunday school as evangelistic. Other answers included a desire to do better, try harder, pray more, and to

take teaching responsibilities more seriously. Two of the respondents indicated little change in their evangelistic pilgrimage but viewed outreach as important.

*Attitudes about inviting others to Sunday school*—The final question of the survey asked if the participants had been encouraged to invite their un-churched friends to Sunday school. Fourteen of the 15 respondents answered yes. One of the participants indicated that Sunday school could be intimidating and believed that people should be invited to worship before Sunday school. Also mentioned was the need to be persistent and patient in inviting new people to Sunday school. Again, the importance of reminders and encouragement for the entire church to provide new prospect information was stated.

*Reflections*—In reflecting on the post-project survey, it appears that there is an optimistic attitude with regard to the work and purpose of Sunday school. Overall, I believe that the project was an encouragement to the teachers and leaders, and it has given them a renewed sense of vision of what Sunday school could become. Perhaps for the first time, some have begun to see Sunday school as an evangelistic tool.

Part of the project analysis included a survey of select individuals not enrolled in or not attending Sunday school. The purpose of this survey was to find information as to why some do not attend Sunday school, as well as to see what First Baptist Church can do to better minister to those not involved in Sunday school. Ten people who do not currently attend Sunday school were surveyed. Four of the 10 were aged 20-25, one was over age 30, 1 was over age 50, and 4 were over age 65. Of the participants in their 20s, 3 were female, and one was male. Those between the ages of 30 and 50 are male. Of those over age 65, three were female and 1 was male. The six questions asked focus on the participant's personal opinion about Sunday school.

*Reasons for non-attendance*—The first question asked the participants their opinion about the reasons some do not attend Sunday school. Of those surveyed in their 20s, 3 of the 4 mentioned not wanting to get up early. Other answers given by those in their 20s included being uncomfortable in the classroom setting (group is too small—a

larger group would provide more anonymity), not having a class for their age group, and not having enough time/being too busy. The 30-50 year olds mentioned that classes are too crowded, the fear of being singled out, and not having enough time/being too busy. The older respondents, aged 65 and older, indicated almost in unison that the main reason for not attending had to do with health issues including not being able to sit comfortably for long periods of time.

*What can the church do to attract people to attend Sunday school?—*

Respondents were asked what it would take to personally persuade them to attend Sunday school. Those aged 20-30 indicated that a larger class of similar-aged people was desired. One participant noted a younger teacher for the college-aged class would be preferred. One of the other contributors added that a special class or a special study would be of interest. Other participants did not respond to the question.

*Time and location of Sunday school classes—*Respondents were asked if a different time or place for Sunday school would interest them. The youngest of the respondents, aged 20-30, all indicated that a different time, place, or both would be desired. Starting class later in the day and/or holding class on a different day of the week were mentioned. Older respondents indicated that a different time or place for Sunday school would not be of interest to them.

*Invitation to Sunday school—*Respondents were asked whether or not they had been invited to Sunday school over the past six months. Six of the 10 responded that they had been invited within the past six months.

*Fears—*Survey participants were asked to list any fears about Sunday school that they may have. Fears identified by respondents aged 20-64 included large crowds, small classrooms, being called on to pray, and being put in a class with a different age group. Those over age 65 did not report any fears about Sunday school.

*Invitation by friends—*The final question asked participants if they would attend Sunday school if they were invited by a personal friend. All but 1 indicated that



they would at least consider going if invited by a friend. One respondent stated that health reasons would prevent her from attending even if invited by a friend. Others from the over 65 age group indicated that health reasons could prohibit them, but there was a willingness to go, especially if invited.

*Observations*—Some interesting observations were gleaned from the survey of non-Sunday school attendees. Health issues, including inability to sit for long periods and classroom accessibility, may be major reasons why older people do not attend Sunday school or worship regularly. I, along with other Sunday school leaders, should consider relocating some senior classes in order to improve accessibility. The younger age group indicated that getting up early or not having a large enough class for them and their peers was a major reason they do not attend. These issues should be addressed by church leadership in order to find ways to better reach the 20-30 year old age group. It was noted that those who completed this survey were extremely cooperative and did not appear to be the least bit offended by the questions asked. I was a little concerned that some would take offense in being questioned about their lack of Sunday school attendance.

Many of those surveyed previously attended Sunday school regularly, but for a variety of reasons, were not currently attending. All of the respondents seemed to have a positive attitude about Sunday school in general, and I believe they can be reached with proper planning, persistent communication, and building of personal relationships.

### **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

The first goal of this project was to demonstrate to First Baptist Church the biblical foundation for an evangelistic Sunday school. To accomplish this goal, I preached a sermon series on the biblical foundation for Sunday school, and I offered various teacher trainings where specific passages of Scripture were examined. The sermon series and training opportunities were designed to introduce teachers and leaders to different biblical passages that speak about the importance of small group discipleship and evangelism. The sermon series also helped them to understand the foundation on

which the Sunday school was established and served to emphasize how the church should be reaching out with the Gospel through small groups.

The second goal was to review with leaders and teachers the history and purpose of Sunday school organization as an evangelistic tool. To accomplish this goal, one of the teacher and leader training sessions focused on the history of the Sunday school and the foundational work of Robert Raikes.

Discovering barriers to Sunday school growth in relation to First Baptist Church was the third goal. To achieve this goal, teachers and leaders were challenged to identify possible barriers to Sunday school growth at FBC and to offer solutions to overcoming these barriers. Barriers identified include lack of adequate space, cliques within Sunday school classes, lack of variety of classes offered, mental barriers to reaching higher attendance goals, punctuality, preparation of teachers, and a lack of qualified teachers. The leadership of First Baptist including Sunday school teachers, leaders, and our outreach leader, has discussed some of the logistical barriers, and plans are being made to address them. Other barriers such as mental barriers and cliques must be addressed on a much more personal level as we continue to train our teachers and leaders.

The final goal was to lead First Baptist Church to recruit and train a prayer leader, outreach leader, and group leaders in each adult Sunday school class. Teachers have been trained and asked to implement this structure within their classrooms. This outreach structure has mobilized Sunday school, in large part, for evangelism. Recruitment and training is ongoing and is primarily the responsibility of myself as pastor and of the outreach leader. Sunday school did see growth in the form of a new class for middle-aged couples and plans are in progress for a new class designed for senior adult couples. Overall, the Sunday school averages did not increase from those reported in 2009.

### **Strengths of the Project**

This outreach project had several strengths that helped the overall spiritual health of the Sunday school of First Baptist Church. Evangelism became a priority of the

Sunday school during the time of the project. Sunday school teachers and leaders began to think about reaching new people for enrollment their classes. Members began to consider potential prospects that might attend their Bible study group. Instead of regarding Sunday school as merely a Bible study for Christians, the church began to think of Sunday school as a means of reaching new people—seeking to provide an inviting atmosphere where friendships may begin to be formed.

This project also served to supply a source of much-needed unity to the whole Sunday school organization. Teachers and leaders meetings greatly assisted in bringing about a sense of purpose for Sunday school as we worked together to develop and implement the outreach plan.

A sense of excitement was noticed in the Sunday school organization as the project progressed, bringing a renewed interest in evangelism that had been missing for a while. The pastor, Sunday school leaders, and teachers all seemed to appreciate the renewed emphasis on the Sunday school.

A new class for middle-aged adults grew out of the renewed emphasis on evangelism. This coed class, focusing on the needs of the adults aged 40-50, was conceived and put into place by one of the deacons and his wife. The class is currently growing and the enthusiasm created by this class is helping to encourage and spur other classes to grow. There are also plans for starting an additional co-ed class for adults ages 60 and up to begin started in February. This class will be led by a retired pastor and his wife and will help to meet a need for reaching some of the church's older couples who are not currently participating in a Sunday school class.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The lack of potential prospects proved to be the weakness that seemed to have the most impact on the success of the project. Effort was made to gather plenty of prospects for the classes to visit, but this effort proved to be a real challenge. Without adequate new prospects, class members became disheartened about evangelism. Some of

the classes actually went through most of their prospects during the first week or so of the project. Securing new prospects is a primary obstacle that must be overcome for this outreach plan to be successful.

Implementation of the project, as far as getting all the outreach personnel in place in each Sunday school class, has proved to be more difficult than was expected. In spite of continued reminders and encouragement, some classes failed to appoint an outreach leader, prayer leader, or the group leaders needed. These leaders did not believe that this structure was needed for effective outreach in the Sunday school. Additionally, participation was limited in some classes, a fact that seemed to hurt the entire project as a whole. One particular class refused to appoint the personnel needed for the project even though they committed to inviting people to attend their class. For some classes who did implement the proper personnel, there was some confusion as to exactly how the process was supposed to work. For example, the outreach leader was making all the contacts for the entire class instead of having it done by group leaders as outlined in the project.

Inclement weather played a significant role in overall church attendance during the month of December. Attendance was low on at least two Sundays during the project, with at least one Sunday having a 50 percent drop. Because of this fact, it will be difficult to get an accurate number in order to measure the success of the project in terms of numerical growth. Of course, numerical growth is only part of the measurement, but it is an important factor in gauging the impact of the project on the growth of the Sunday school. The project lost momentum due to factors related to the inclement weather, including the impact on visitation as well as attendance. The attendance rebounded somewhat, but not in the way that was desired.

### **What Would I Do Differently**

The excitement of the teachers and leaders did not seem to transfer to the entire church. Some of the people saw the outreach project as merely academic, a means of helping me finish my degree. They failed to see the big picture of growing Sunday school.

Although I take full responsibility for not being able to get everyone completely on board with the project, I do view the project as successful as far as encouraging our teachers and leaders to become more intentional about evangelism through the Sunday school.

As pastor, I have to be the biggest cheerleader with regard to Sunday school. More intentionality was needed on my part to motivate the entire church to get on board with the project. Perhaps moving the sermon series that was preached on Sunday nights to Sunday mornings would have helped. I initially chose Sunday nights for the project series because I was already in the middle of preaching a different series on Sunday mornings. For some who did not attend on Sunday nights, the teaching on evangelism through the Sunday school was missed and thus not applied.

Weather turned out to be a major factor. In hindsight, I would have chosen to begin the project earlier in the year when weather would have likely not been an issue. The weather was unseasonably harsh on at least two Sundays, which caused attendance to plummet. It will be difficult to evaluate Sunday school averages during the project due to the poor attendance on the bad weather days. Spring or early autumn would probably be the best time for a Sunday school emphasis.

### **Theological Reflections**

During the course of the project several theological impressions have been considered. No matter how organized one is, God is the one who gives the increase (1 Cor 3:6). The work of evangelism and outreach is a spiritual work. Only God can touch hearts and draw people to himself (John 6:44). As a church seeks to grow, planning is important, but seeking the Lord through prayer should be the first priority. Prayer should be a main concern in the work of the church. Everything done should be bathed in prayer. Sometimes church leaders are guilty of planning and then asking God to bless the work. Before the work begins, the church should be praying, asking God for his will to be done. As a church, organization is important and should be done, but God is the one who gets the glory for the kingdom growth.

As the project progressed, I became increasingly convinced that prayer would be key to the success of the project. Sometimes it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the work of the church is a spiritual work. Perhaps the project was not as successful as it could have been due to a lack of prayer.

I was also impressed by the many different Scriptures that speak about small groups. When the idea was first considered about using small groups in Sunday school for evangelism and outreach, I really did not comprehend how many passages in the Bible spoke about the use of small groups. Jesus used small groups in the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:39-44), and the sending of the Twelve out to do evangelism and ministry (Luke 6:12-13; Matt 10:1-8). Nehemiah used small groups when rebuilding the wall in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 4:12-17). The early church in Acts could be considered a small group that began growing and ministering in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:42-47). Moses used small groups in the wilderness at the advice of his father-in-law Jethro, to better help in judging the people of Israel (Exodus 18:18-27). The use of small groups in the Bible helps to better solidify the use of small groups in Sunday school.

In reflecting about the theological lessons learned from the project, one consideration is that the church is God's instrument to reach a lost and dying world. The Sunday school is but a part of the entire church. The Lord commissioned the church to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). In trying to bring the evangelistic emphasis back to Sunday school, the emphasis for evangelism and outreach needs to become a priority of the entire church. Just like many Sunday school classes, the entire church thinks inwardly rather than outwardly. It is easy to become so focused on our own needs that we forget about the lost and hurting people outside the four walls of the church. In the process of thinking about outreach through Sunday school, the purpose for implementing the project in the first place should be foremost in our minds. People need to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that the project has not only been academic, but that significant spiritual growth has occurred. I

hope that the members of First Baptist Church have a renewed awareness of lost people living not far from the church and our responsibility to seek after them.

In the process of being obedient to the Great Commission, we may discover that some of the people we need to reach with the Gospel are very different from the typical member of First Baptist Church. During a teachers meeting, one of the teachers was honest enough to admit that he knew some prospects that needed to be in church, but he was not sure if they would fit in at First Baptist. This response begs the questions, “Who are we trying to reach?” Are we concerned only with a particular group or is everyone welcome? Are there some people who would not feel welcome or comfortable at First Baptist?”

In reflection upon the project, another theological perspective that needs to be considered is the Bible. Sunday school is about teaching the Bible, God’s Holy Word. Sometimes in the midst of reaching out, leaders need to be reminded of the purpose of reaching new people. People need to hear the gospel. The Bible tells the way of salvation. The purpose of Sunday school is to reach people in order to share the gospel and to help believers grow in the faith. The Bible is to be the textbook of Sunday school. While it is important to have quality Bible study materials, nothing can take the place of the Bible itself. In evaluating this project, I realized that the full implications of this project will only be known in eternity. The teaching of God’s Word will not return void (Isa 55:11).

### **Personal Reflections**

Several lessons can be learned from the process of planning and implementing a new outreach project. First, it is important to set goals for ministry. The goals set for the project served as directional moorings. Without goals to give direction, one could go in circles accomplishing very little in ministry.

Second, it can be difficult to get volunteers to participate. In a paid position, the threat of losing a salary is enough to motivate participation, but in the church, where most of the workers are volunteers, it is a different story. People need to feel that the work

to be done is important and necessary or they will not take part. During this project, I found at times that the level of commitment was not what I hoped.

Third, proper planning is key to the success of any project. We can rely upon God to do his part, but people often fall short. Throughout the project, planning was needed. From the sermon series, to the teacher training, to the actual implementation of the project itself, nothing could take place without proper planning.

Fourth, evangelism needs to be an intentional priority of the church and Sunday school. During the time of the project, evangelism was seen as first priority. If evangelism is to remain a priority, the pastor and leaders of the Sunday school will need to be continually reminded.

Fifth, the completion of this outreach project has prompted several implications for further study. One implication based on the responses obtained from the younger respondents who do not currently attend Sunday school, is that further study should be done concerning meeting times and class structures. The survey of those aged 25 and younger indicated that the traditional Sunday school time of 9:40 a.m. may not be the best time to meet. Perhaps a different location, or a later time would be more accommodating to college-age adults. Additional dialogue is needed to understand how the church can better reach young adults through Sunday school. The church itself needs to be willing to step outside the walls of tradition to be more creative in offering other Sunday school venues. Perhaps this younger group may be representative of other groups in the church and community that would benefit from a Sunday school class offered at a different time and location.

Identifying new prospects for outreach is another implication for further study. A lack of prospects definitely hurt the project as a whole. The church must be more intentional about discovering potential members for Sunday school. A plan should be developed to identify prospects that attend other activities at the church. Participants of Upward ministries, AWANA, the church's Christmas programs, and Easter services



would all provide potential contacts that are not currently associated with Sunday school. Perhaps the outreach leader and pastor can join together to develop a plan to discover these new prospects for Sunday school.

Continuing to be a student of the Sunday school is a final implication for further study. The pastor and church leaders must constantly evaluate methods used for outreach in the Sunday school to determine which of these methods are most effective in reaching new people. Continual assessment of classes and the overall organization is also needed to ensure the growth and effectiveness of the Sunday school program. The pastor and church leaders must commit to participating in on-going training in an effort to become better equipped for the work of the Sunday school.

### **Conclusion**

In the overall evaluation of the outreach project, I would have to conclude that the project was not successful in increasing Sunday school attendance. The average Sunday school attendance was 166 during the fifteen weeks of the project from September to December. The average Sunday school attendance for same time frame of 2009 was 173. While the Sunday school attendance did not increase, there were other positive results, which will lead to future Sunday school growth.

A more outward focus exists in the Sunday school. Class members are making strides in having a more evangelistic attitude and external focus. New units, which are needed to develop a growing Sunday school, have been established since the project began. These new classes confirm that growth is taking place.

Communication with teachers and leaders has improved. Monthly meetings established during the project serve as a key means of communication between teachers and leaders. These meetings provide teachers and leaders the opportunity to come together for a time of prayer, continued training, and encouragement. The meetings also provide an opportunity for me to communicate more clearly how outreach through

Sunday school should be organized and implemented and to build unity and excitement about Sunday school.

Prior to the implementation of this project, Sunday school was often overlooked as an evangelistic tool among the many other outreach ministries of Mount Vernon First Baptist Church. As a result of this project, the importance of the Sunday school as an important evangelistic tool has been established.

The project as a whole was a learning experience, not only for me, but also for many of the members of First Baptist Church. Many teachers and leaders undertook the project with a willing attitude. As a result of the committed efforts of these teachers and leaders, our Sunday school is growing, not just in numbers, but also in less tangible ways such as attitude and commitment to sharing the Gospel with our community and the world.

APPENDIX 1  
QUESTIONNAIRES

**Pre and Post Project Questionnaire**

(This survey was presented to a non-specific group of volunteers representing Sunday school teachers, leaders, and participants both prior to and after completion of the project.)

Birth Month/Day (example 11/01): \_\_\_\_\_

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to provide basic demographic information and general information about your perception of the Sunday school so that at the end of the study, a comparison can be made. This research is being conducted by William E. Nation for purpose of project research for a Doctor of Ministry program. In this research, you will provide basic demographic information as well as answering some general questions in regard to the Sunday school. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential* and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

The first part of the questionnaire will focus on attaining demographic information about the group participation in the Sunday school outreach project. Please provide your birth month and day (NOT year) at the top of this form. Doing so will allow for statistical analysis and comparison of the pre and post project questionnaires.

Circle your appropriate age group.

18-29                      30-40                      41-50                      51-60                      60+

1. How long have you been a member of the Sunday school?  
0-5 years                      6-10 years                      10-20 years                      20+ years

2. Highest Level of Education
- Graduate / Professional
- Four-Year College
- Some College / Technical

High School Graduate

Some High School

Less than High School

3. Using the following scale, please indicate the number that best corresponds to your feelings in response to the question.

Statement	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Slightly Agree 3	Undecid ed 4	Slightly Disagree 5	Disagree 6	Strongly Disagree 7
I believe a person should attend Sunday school at least two times a month.							
Evangelism is the responsibility of the Sunday school.							
The Sunday school has outlived its usefulness.							
Non-church members would be more likely to come to Sunday school than to a worship service.							
Sunday school teachers and leaders should encourage students to invite un-churched friends to Sunday school.							
The Sunday school is primarily for children and older adults.							
I believe Sunday school is an important part of my church's outreach efforts.							
A different form of small groups may be more effective than the traditional Sunday school.							
Teachers should be required to participate in leadership training.							
The Sunday school is not relevant to my life.							
The Sunday school should use the Bible as the primary text.							
If a person is not involved in another Bible study, they should be enrolled the first time they attend a Sunday school class.							
The current Sunday school time (9:40am) is the best time for me.							
I would feel comfortable inviting my un-churched friends to my Sunday school class.							
My Sunday school class expects to grow.							
I would enjoy having a Sunday school class at a time other than on Sunday morning.							

### Focus Group Pre-Project Questionnaire

(This questionnaire was presented to a group of teachers, leaders and Sunday school participants.)

#### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to provide general information about your perception of the purpose and function of the Sunday school so that at the end of the study, a comparison can be made. This research is being conducted by William E. Nation for purpose of project research for a Doctor of Ministry program. In this research, you will provide your opinion about basic assumptions about the Sunday school. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

1. What is the purpose of the Sunday school?

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2. What are some obstacles that keep us from inviting people to Sunday school?

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3. What are some suggestions to help motivate people to share their faith?

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4. How can we develop an outward focus in the Sunday school class?

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5. Do you think our Sunday school is effective in reaching new people? Why or why not?

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6. Do you have any suggestions for making our Sunday school more evangelistic?

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7. What fears do you have about evangelism?

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### Focus Group Post-Project Questionnaire

(This questionnaire was presented to a group of teachers, leaders and Sunday school participants.)

#### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to provide information about the results of the outreach project in the Sunday school. This research is being conducted by William E. Nation for purpose of project research for a Doctor of Ministry program. In this research, you will provide your opinion about the results of the project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

1. What were the strengths of the project?

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2. What were the weaknesses of the project?

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3. What attitudes in regard to Sunday school outreach were changed due to the project?

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4. Is the overall evangelistic attitude of the church different now than it was before the project?

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5. Is the Sunday school organized to outreach?

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6. How would you describe your own evangelistic pilgrimage before and after the project?

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7. Have you been personally encouraged to invite your un-churched friends to Sunday school?

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**Survey of Non-Sunday School Participants**  
(This survey was presented to a group of persons who  
are not regular Sunday school attendees.)

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to provide basic information to develop a more effective Sunday school. This research is being conducted by William E. Nation for purpose of project research for a Doctor of Ministry program. In this research, you will provide your opinion and perceptions about the Sunday school. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

1. In your opinion, what are reasons that people do not attend Sunday school?

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2. What would it take to interest you personally in Sunday school?

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3. Would a different time or place for Sunday school interest you?

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4. Has anyone invited you to Sunday school in the past six months?

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5. What are some of your fears about Sunday school?

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6. If a friend invited you to attend a Sunday school class with them, would you go?

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APPENDIX 2

PRE AND POST PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

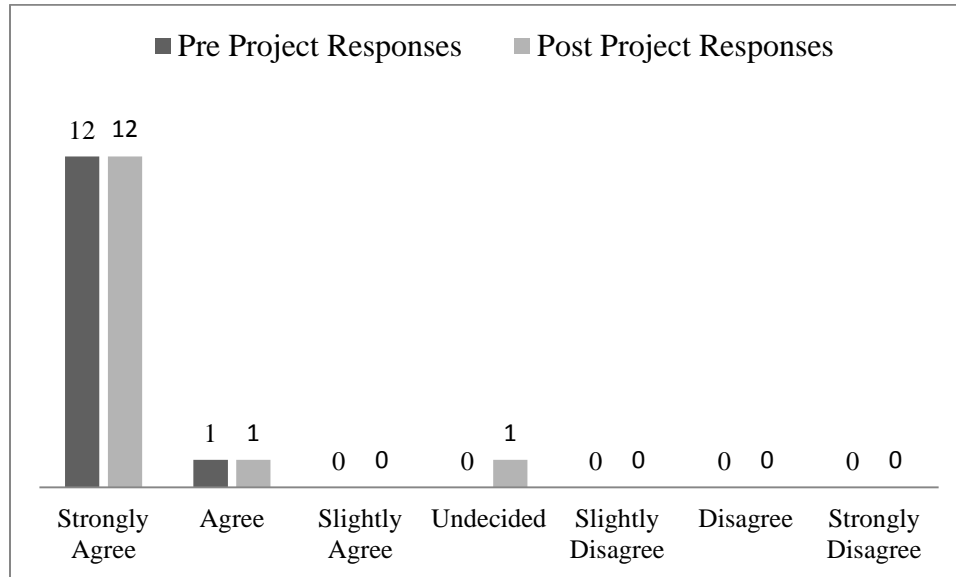


Figure A1. I believe a person should attend Sunday school at least two times a month

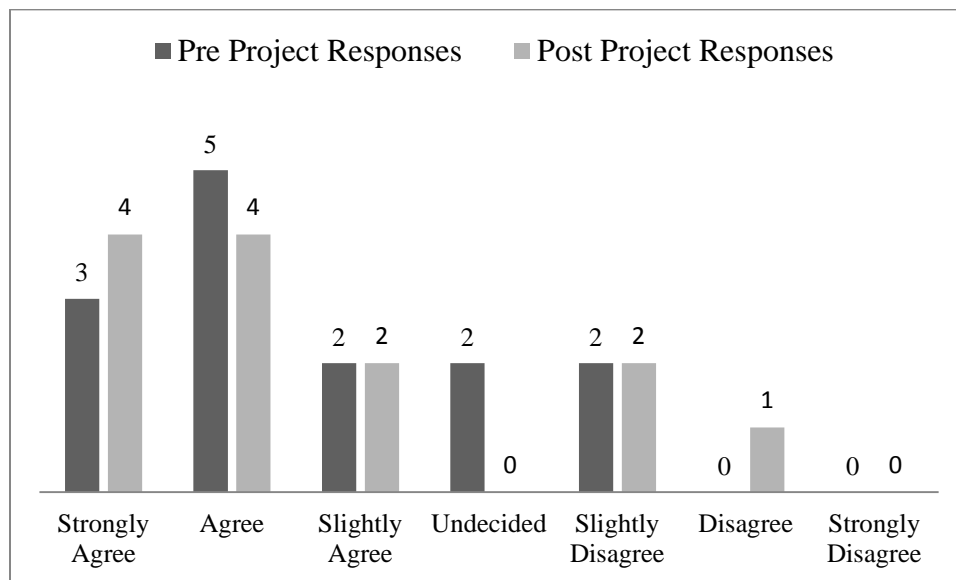


Figure A2. Evangelism is the responsibility of the Sunday school

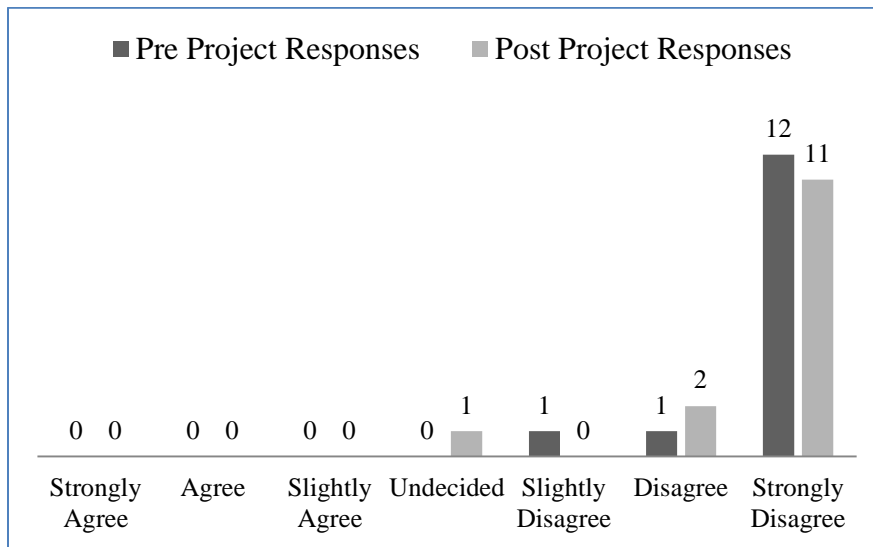


Figure A3. The Sunday school has outlived its usefulness

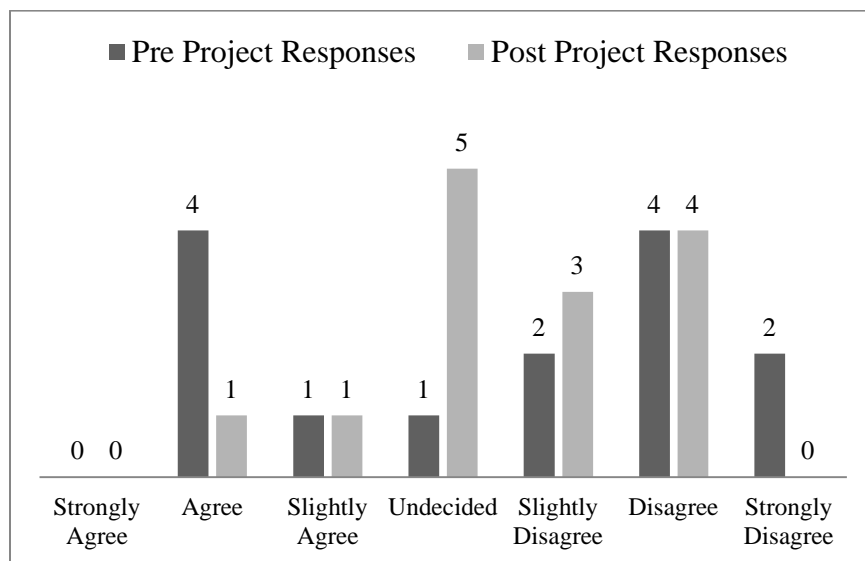


Figure A4. Non-church members would be more likely to come to Sunday school than to a worship service

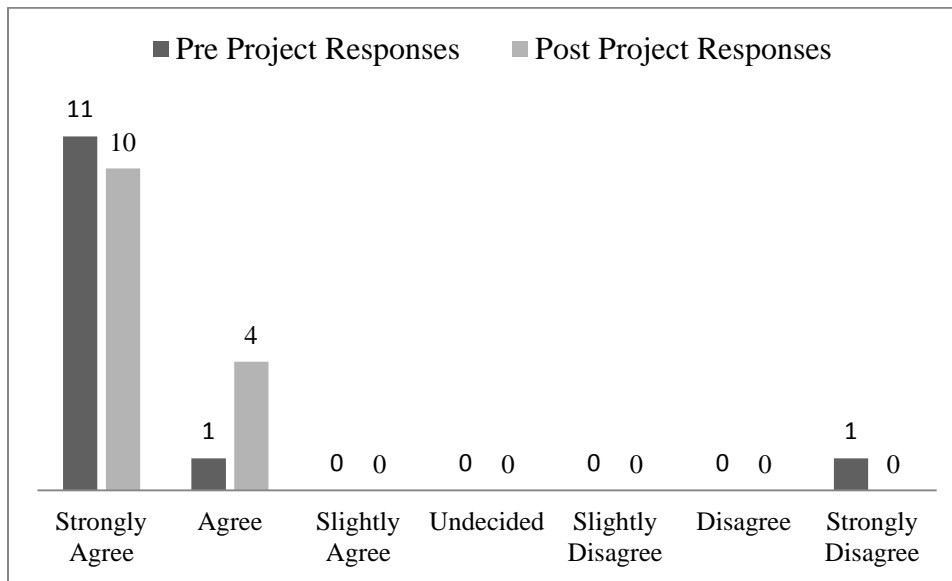


Figure A5. Sunday school teachers and leaders should encourage students to invite un-churched friends to Sunday school

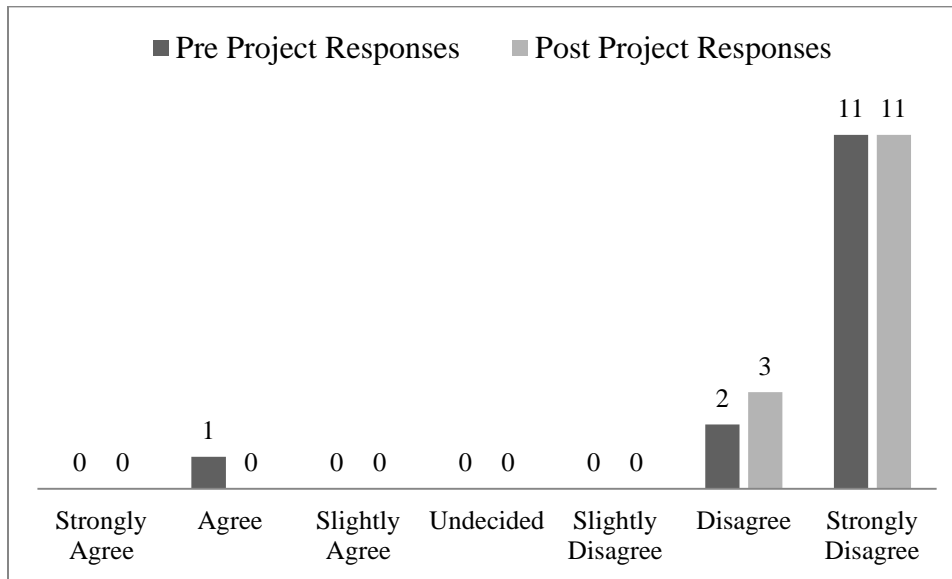


Figure A6. The Sunday school is primarily for children and older adults

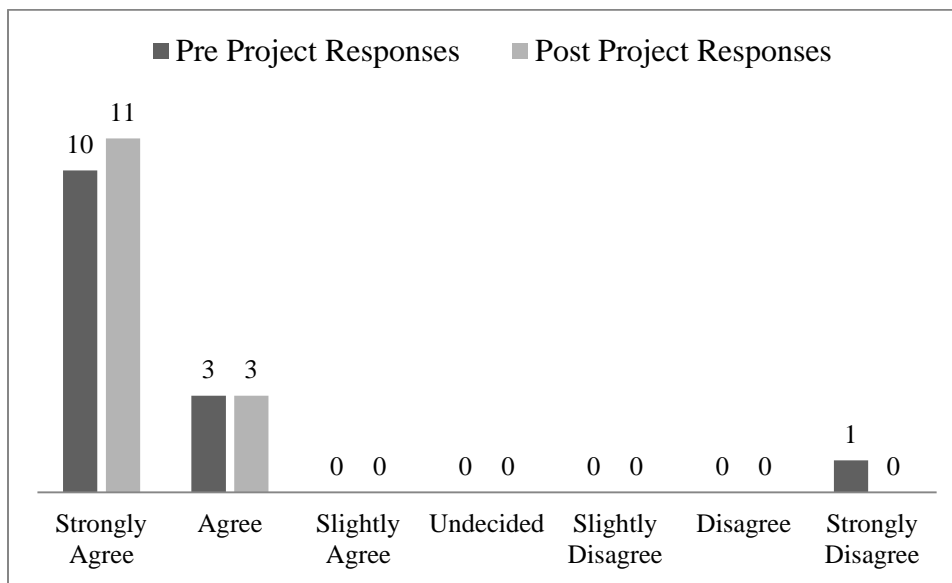


Figure A7. I believe Sunday school is an important part of my church's outreach efforts

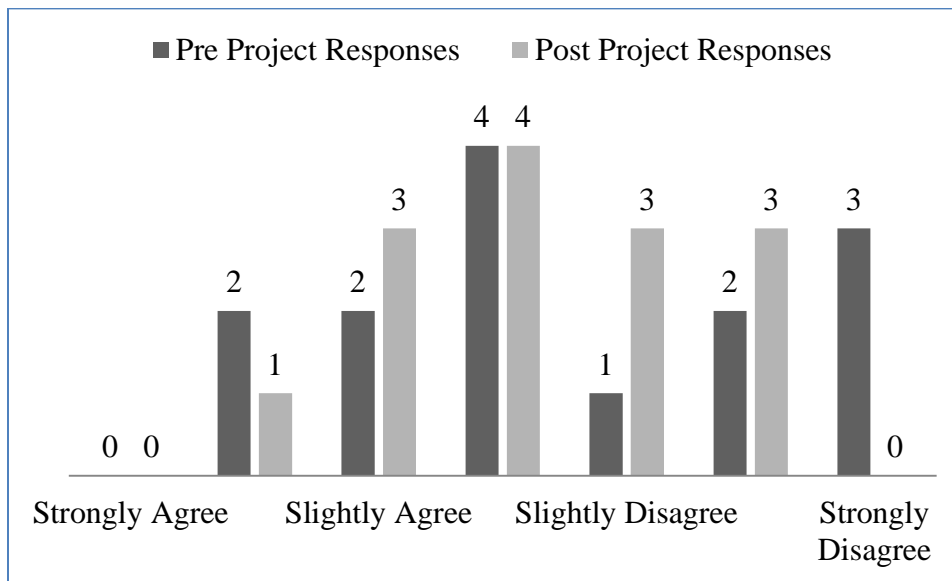


Figure A8. A different form of small groups may be more effective than the traditional Sunday school

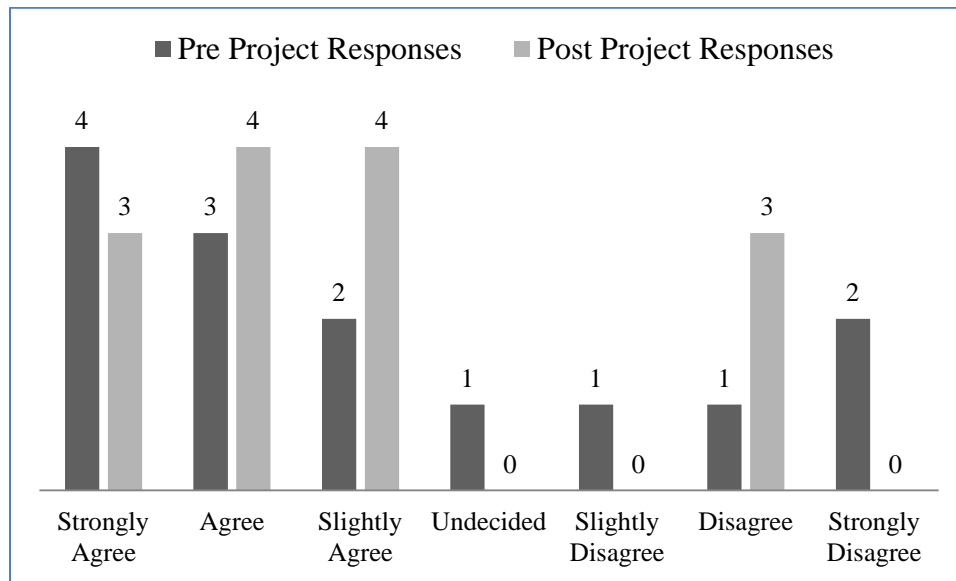


Figure A9. Teachers should be required to participate in leadership training

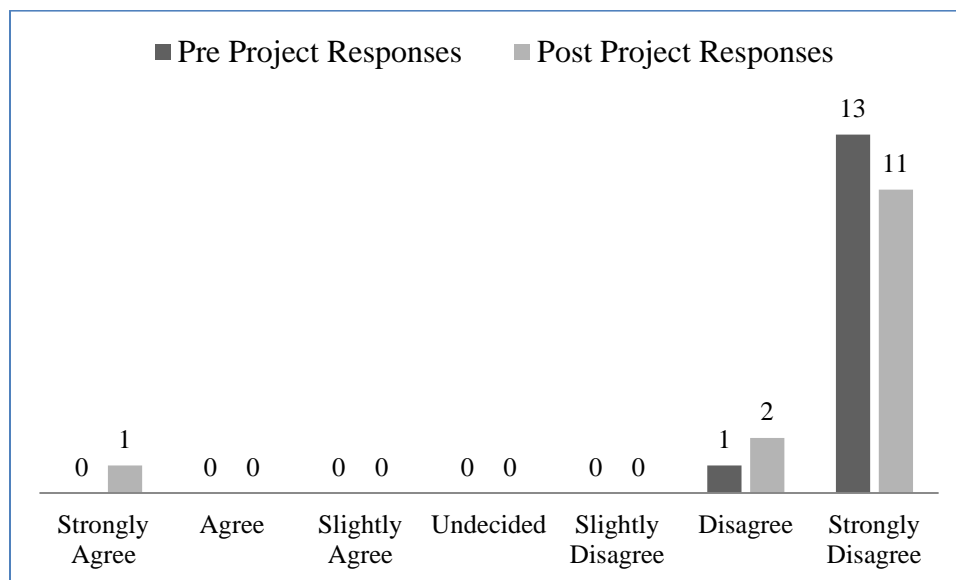


Figure A10. The Sunday school is not relevant to my life

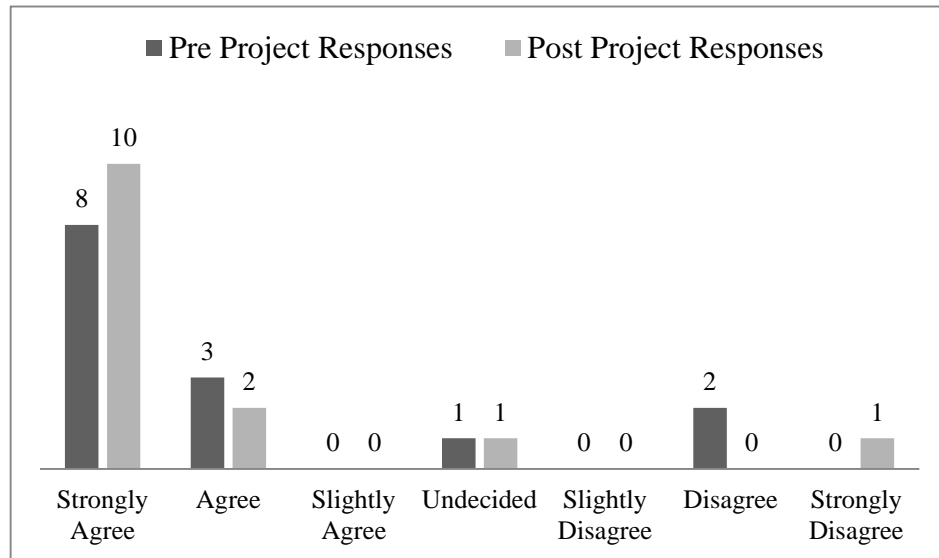


Figure A11. The Sunday school should use the Bible as the primary text

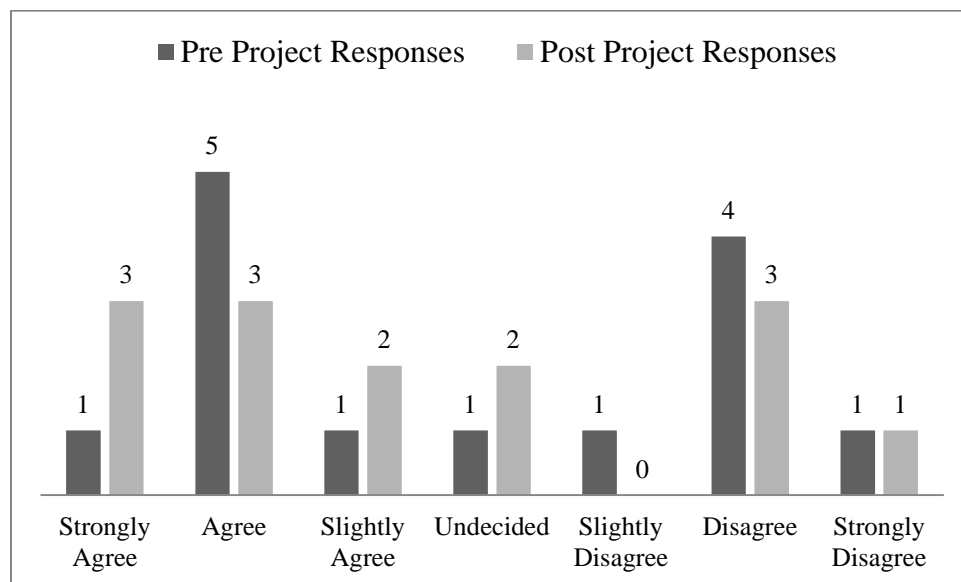


Figure A12. If a person is not involved in another Bible study, they should be enrolled the first time they attend a Sunday school class



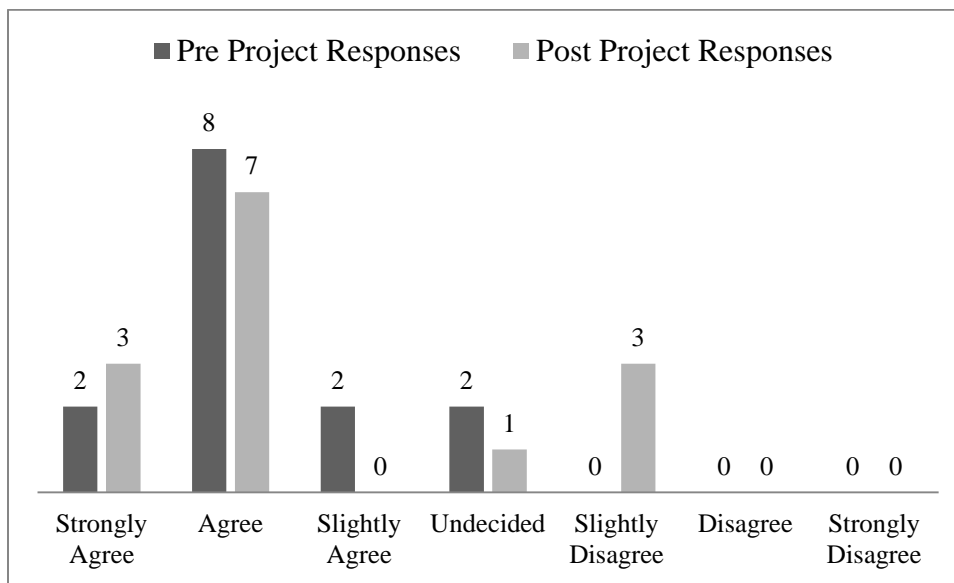


Figure A13. The current Sunday school time (9:40am) is the best time for me

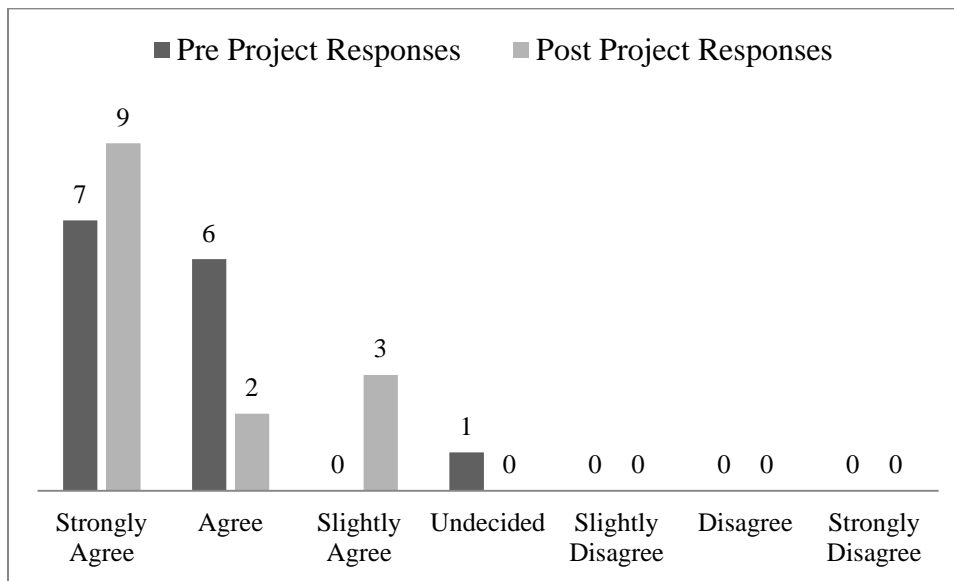


Figure A14. I would feel comfortable inviting my un-churched friends to my Sunday school class

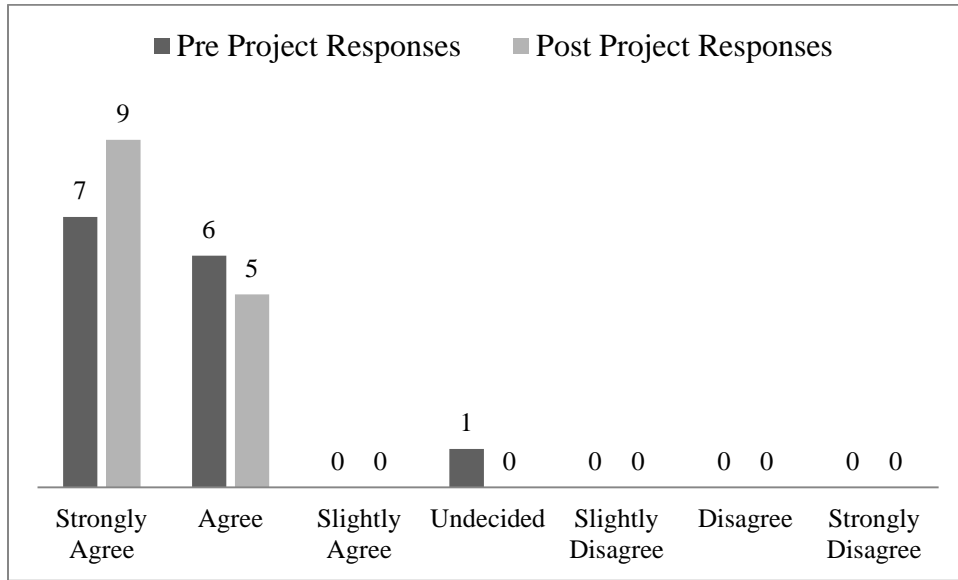


Figure A15. My Sunday school class expects to grow

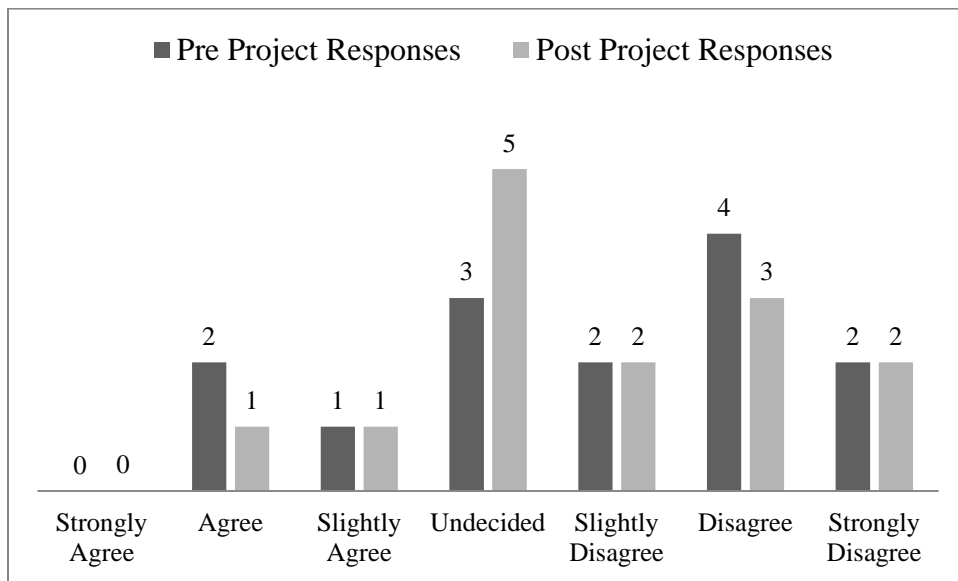


Figure A16. I would enjoy having a Sunday school class at a time other than on Sunday morning

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING AN OUTREACH PROGRAM IN THE ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF MOUNT VERNON, KENTUCKY

William Edward Nation, D.Min.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. William D. Henard III

This project seeks to develop an outreach program in the Adult Sunday school of the First Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, Kentucky. Chapter 1 describes a proposal for outreach through the adult Sunday school including goals, church and community context, and the rationale for the project. Chapter 2 examines the biblical and theological principles of outreach through Sunday school. Evangelism is established as a priority of the church and emphasis is given to effective organization. Chapter 3 explores the principles of effective small groups. Group dynamics such as connection, common purpose, commitment, communication, and challenges are considered. Chapter 4 gives details of the actual implementation of the outreach project. Research instruments were utilized and a methodology was adopted for outreach. Chapter 5 reviews the effectiveness of the project. The data is analyzed and the goals and process is evaluated.

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