

## The Future of Sunday School

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Mark 10:13-16; & I Corinthians 12:27-28      **Pastor Tom Anderson****

A colleague tells the story of a wounded British soldier dying on the battlefield in France during World War I. His sergeant was with him in the final moments. The soldier made the sergeant promise that after the war, he would go to London and look up a certain Mr. Abramson. He was to relay a simple message to him, "Tell him that what he taught me when I was a child is helping me to die." The sergeant kept the promise and after the war went to London. He found Mr. Abramson a decrepit old man living in a cramped flat. Upon relaying hearing the message, Abramson began to weep and cried, "Yesterday, I had almost given up on 40 years of teaching Sunday school. I thought it had all been a waste of time and effort. I am ashamed of that because now I know it wasn't." Just for the record: whenever you talk about Jesus, it is never a waste of time!

Why do we have Sunday school? We have Sunday school so that, in the words of Deuteronomy 6:2, our children may fear the Lord our God as long as they live by keeping all his commands and so that they may enjoy abundant life in Jesus Christ.

Sunday school is the most consistently powerful tool of evangelism available to the local church. Did you know that 85% of all Christians in America had a connection to Sunday school or youth group before the age of 18? Did you know that 58% of inactive young people return to the church when they become parents themselves? Did you know that 75% of unchurched parents would like to see their children in Sunday school? If you do the math this amounts to 892 unchurched children within a twenty minute drive of our church whose parents actually want them to join a Sunday school. Jesus said it in John 4:35, "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for the harvest."

Our purpose as a congregation is to lead people into a vital and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The best tool we have to do this is our Sunday school.

Consider Jesus' words with me in Mark 10:13, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them..." We know Jesus is the Savior of the world, and when he gives an order, people should jump up immediately to obey. But who is he talking to here? He is not talking to parents. He is talking to the disciples. This is an order given to the church as a whole. To put it another

way, the Sunday school is everyone's responsibility. It doesn't belong just to those with children. It shouldn't be left to those who supposedly have more time. It falls to the entire church as a responsibility, a service in which we should all be engaged. Just as regular Sunday worship is everyone's responsibility, so is our ministry with children and youth.

Today begins a new era of vitality for our Sunday school and I want to invite you to be part a doing a new thing for children's ministry. I call this the F.E.T.C.H plan.

F is for *find*. Today and throughout the month of June, I'm asking you to provide us with the names and contact information of children in this community who do not go to Sunday school. It could be a neighbor, your hair stylist's kids, or your golf partner's grand kids. Put their names and approximate address on the card you received today. More cards are available or use one of your own. Turn it into me or the church office.

E is for *encourage*. In July, the parents of each these children will get a letter of information and invitation about our Christian education program here.

T is for *telephone*. In August, the pastor and some lay people from the congregation will call each family to see if they got our letter and if they are interested in coming to Sunday school in September.

C is for *cultivate*. Those families who express an interest will get a personal visit from the pastor and other willing lay people to welcome and explain our Sunday school program, especially the dates, times, places and teachers.

H is for *high* (no, I'm not high!) I mean schedule a high attendance Sunday. That would be September 12, our Sunday school Rally Day. This would be the day all of us will work hard to bring as many friends and acquaintances we can to fill the pews. We'll brush our teeth, comb our hair and do everything to make this service extra special to welcome and impress our guests that day.

F.E.T.C.H. Think about it, pray about it, participate in it because Jesus is clear: Sunday school is everyone's responsibility.

One last scripture to consider is Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:28:

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

This is the only time in the Bible where the spiritual gifts are ranked 1-2-3. Apostles are first. They are the church planters and those who train and oversee other pastors. Second are

prophets. These are the preachers, the ones who interpret and announce God's word for the congregation. But note who is third: teachers. They come right after people like Peter and Paul and before miracle workers and healers. Teaching should be a position of highest honor and respect in the church. Unfortunately in many congregations it has become at best invisible and at worst a thing to be avoided.

Today, I want to begin to restore the office of teacher in the Sunday school to a place of honor and great respect. To accomplish this I want to make three promises to you as your pastor:

1) There will be no more "life sentences" to teaching. Our teachers work hard and make important commitments of their time and their Sundays to serve Christ and the children. This must never be taken for granted or discounted in any way. When someone says "yes" to teaching in our Sunday school it will be for 9 months at a time. 2) There will be no more loneliness in the class room. Nothing saps the spirit of a teacher than wondering if anyone knows or cares they are there. Our aim will be to have two in each class room and to keep in touch throughout the year. 3) There will be no more begging, threatening, or nagging on Sundays at meetings or in the newsletter in order to find teachers. We will not use guilt or shame as a recruiting tool. We will invite people to teach only if they feel God calling or nudging them to this service.

I propose the following Sunday school teacher's covenant:

"I give myself in disciplined commitment to the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ at Houghton Lake United Methodist Church. I follow Christ and I pledge myself to God and the other on my team to teach Christ's way of love and faith to children in this year's Sunday school.

Therefore I covenant with God and my church:

- To learn God's purpose in the Bible for our lives as well as teach it.
- To surrender myself to Christ's Lordship
- To pray for my students, fellow teachers as well as to teach prayer
- To teach hope to our children
- To be prepared to teach each Sunday
- To begin on time each Sunday
- To be faithful to Christ's love each Sunday.

If you believe God is nudging you for leadership in our Sunday school this coming year. Pray about it first then come and talk with me.

Sunday school is a powerful tool to spread the gospel. Sunday school is the whole church's responsibility. And teaching is to be held in high esteem in the church. Acting on these convictions the Sunday school has a bold and bright future to glorify God.