

The Minister of Education Supporting the Sunday School

What significance will history place on the role of the minister of education in the Christian church's fulfillment of the Great Commission? The answer to that question may well be decided in your lifetime and mine. The role of the minister of education is expanding. As never before, and rightly so, churches are demanding excellence from their educators. The position of minister of education has moved through its infancy to adolescence and is on its way to maturity.

The very first ministers of education have retired or are in the process of doing so. The forerunner of the minister of education was the paid Sunday School superintendent. This person was often a layperson capable of promoting and organizing a large Sunday School. There is no doubt that the role was a demanding one. The greatest difficulty was getting people to understand the role. To a certain degree this is true of ministers of education today. Yet, the demands upon today's minister of education are greater. His or her role has expanded to include much more than promotion and organization. He or she is to be an educator, administrator, minister, and growth agent.

These various segments of the role include: keeping organizations balanced, aiding in worship services, recruiting volunteer leadership, creating new units, leading visitation, counseling, supervising paid educational staff, training potential leaders, encouraging the building of needed physical facilities, guiding the nominating committee, and helping in hospital ministry. Catch your breath yet?

Ministers of education today are being challenged by both their peers and church leadership to develop educational systems and organizations so complex that the basic question of many is not, "How do I accomplish the task?" but, "How can I find the time to accomplish the task?" There are so many good things that can be done that it is possible we neglect that which is most necessary. The trap of the minister of education today is to become so involved in educating, administrating, and ministering that there is little time left to be a growth agent. If the minister of education is to be effective in creating a climate for church growth, he or she must become a creative manager of time.

The Minister of Education Managing Time

Do you manage time or does time manage you? If you have to think about it, time is probably managing you. How long has it been since you evaluated the way you spend your time and energy? More importantly, how does your spending time relate to the goals and fulfillment of the Great Commission? If you were to do a time log, what percentage of your time are you

spending on the work of the Sunday School? Before answering that question, perhaps we need to clarify why we need to be spending time on the Sunday School. By giving quality time to the work of the Sunday School, we give time to fulfilling the Great Commission using the best organization and structure available to us.

As we give time to reaching, teaching, fellowshiping, witnessing, worshipping, ministering, and interpreting the work of the church and denomination, we are being good stewards of the time that God has given to us. In this sense, every Christian is called upon by God to use time fruitfully for Him. All of us have the same amount of time. The difference comes on how we use our time, and we use our time on what we think is important. Time, like money, gives us a clear indication of our priorities. Managing time, therefore, is not the real problem in our busy schedules. The real difficulty is managing ourselves so that we can appropriately manage our time.

An ancient adage says: "Know thyself." Do you? Have you taken a self-inventory lately? Why are you a minister of education? What are your gifts, abilities, and skills for the getting the job done? What aspects of your ministry are satisfying and exciting to you and why? What keeps you from being your very best as a minister of education? What areas of ministry are most frustrating for you? What can you do about them? The answers to these questions may also be the answer to the reasons you do or do not spend quality time in the work of the Sunday School.

Our likes and dislikes, joys and frustrations, affect the way we spend our time. If you have difficulties with certain parts of your ministry, ask yourself why. Can anything be done to make these easier or more exciting to you? The key to effectively dealing with these will be your ability to embrace them and deal with them instead of repelling them. If, for example, you dislike visitation, ask yourself why and determine to accept within yourself the fact that you dislike that part of your ministry. Then deal with it. Make every effort to find ways to make it less difficult for you. Find

ways to make it a challenge instead of an obstacle.

If you cannot make it a challenge, then accept it. Fighting it only makes the problem bigger than it really is. Determine how important that aspect is to the health and well-being of your church and the fulfillment of the church's mission. If it is essential and imperative, then it must also be a priority whether you like it or not.

The key to successful Sunday School work is discovering the essentials and priorities and excelling in them over a long and consistent period of time. In each community these may vary slightly, but in every community the essentials relate to the tasks of the Sunday School. In this sense, the same essentials are relevant for every Sunday School and church. These include: reaching (visitation/outreach/witnessing), planning (weekly workers' meetings), and Bible study (organization/fellowship). The nine basics of Sunday School work are some way or another related to these three priorities. Spending quality time in these areas creates the climate for effective Sunday School work. Understanding ourselves and our relationship to these priorities helps us to manage ourselves and therefore manage time in such a way that we improve the work of our Sunday Schools.

Our ability to manage time is directly related to our goals and objectives. Our goals and objectives relate to our priorities. If our priorities as leaders of the Sunday School are to reach, teach, and plan, then we will give quality time to the accomplishment of these goals.

Essential to managing time productively is our ability to plan. When we fail to plan we not only fail to manage our time, but actually waste time. Good planning at the beginning of any project will lessen the

amount of time that it takes to implement each part of the plan.

We must learn to develop the best organization for accomplishing the goals and objectives that we have set for ourselves. An organization in and of itself never does anything. Only people do things. If we place the right people in the right places with the right training, then we will not only save time but we will accomplish our goals and objectives.

Our responsibility as ministers of education is to help others discover their spiritual gifts and use them. As they begin to discover their gifts and use them, they begin to grow and the Sunday School becomes stronger. If your Sunday School is not growing, it may be because you are trying to do it all by yourself instead of more successfully managing your time by training others how to do the tasks that you have determined to accomplish.

The Minister of Education Building Teamwork

Teamwork is defined by Webster's as the "work done by several associates with each doing a part but all subordinating personal prominence to the efficiency of the whole." Redefined in the context of the Sunday School, teamwork is a group of Sunday School leaders who are committed to using their spiritual gifts in subjection to the goals of the group to accomplish the reaching, teaching, and nurturing of all possible persons until they become all that God wants them to be. This means that each individual who is part of the team is committed to building God's kingdom, not one's own.

The primary ingredient of teamwork is good relationships. Teamwork occurs when workers care about one another, encourage and affirm one another, and spend time with one another. Teamwork produces a spirit of optimism and confidence within a group of individuals. It is this optimism and confidence which produces great Sunday School work. A Sunday School can be properly organized, growth-minded, and still not grow if the relationships among the Sunday School leadership is shallow. Building teamwork is one of the essential responsibilities of the minister of education. Yet, this is one

aspect of our role that we often take for granted or expect someone else to fulfill. If we are to achieve the goals and objectives of the Sunday School, we must plan for ways to succeed in strengthening the relationships of our Sunday School leadership.

There are several things we can do to create a climate for teamwork in the Sunday School. These include: choosing the right leaders, properly enlisting leaders, making clear your expectations of team members, developing a teamwork mentality, planning opportunities for friendships to develop, making sure that each member of the team understands his or her relationship to the team and the strengths and weaknesses he or she brings to the team, giving leadership to the team, affirmation of good team membership and planning, evaluation of team results.

The ability to **choose the right leaders** is an art. But, it is an art that can be developed. It requires not only sensitivity to people, but it also requires some specific and directed learning activities on the part of the prospective worker. Using psychological and leadership analysis instruments can be very helpful in securing the right leadership for your Sunday School.

Instruments like spiritual gifts inventories, biblical personal profiles, and leadership questionnaires can help us determine who the right people are and where the right place is for these leaders.

Sensitivity to people is listening between the lines, observing their likes and dislikes, how they handle problems and pressures, getting to know them personally. This sensitivity opens the doors to the lives of people and allows us the opportunity to choose the kind of leaders that will make a positive, significant impact on the lives of others.

Developing teamwork also demands that we **properly enlist workers in the Sunday School**. It has been said that we enlist 99 percent of the problems we have in Sunday School work. Problems occur when we fail to adequately inform workers of our expectations of them. People normally give what is expected of them. If we expect little of them, that will be the result. If we expect much from them, greatness can be the result. Teamwork calls for honesty. When we enlist workers and do not share all of the expectations of the job, we effectively subvert the possibility for effective teamwork.

Making clear your expectations of workers defines the specifics of the role you are asking them to perform. This involves the more subtle aspects of the job. What are your specific expectations of workers in terms of attendance at weekly visitation, weekly workers' meetings, planning for fellowships, and training of other workers? Are these clearly defined? If they are, then workers will know if they are doing a good job. If these expectations are unclear, then it is possible that workers will not be able to appropriately evaluate how well they are doing in the work assigned to them. Developing a teamwork mentality is helping

workers to understand that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Sunday School workers must know what it means to be a good team member and that "lone ranger" leadership is not consistent with teamwork.

Training Sunday School leadership to plan for relationships is as important as leading them to plan for organization. Ask the workers to plan specific opportunities for friendships to develop. Some examples are: eating dinner together, recognizing birthdays, and going places together. It is essential for workers to plan for these kinds of events to take place. If they are not planned, they may not occur, and a prime ingredient in your Sunday School's effectiveness is lost.

Good Teamwork is Contingent Upon Good Leadership

As minister of education you have the opportunity to put together and maintain an effective Sunday School team. Your leadership may be the difference in whether the members of your team practice good teamwork skills. Leading with confidence and enthusiasm creates confidence and leadership in the persons that you lead. Your ability to motivate the department directors enables them to lead with confidence also. When key leaders do not lead, a climate of discontent is established. Once this begins to occur it is difficult to change. Success breeds success. In order to be a great leader you must be able to help workers develop their gifts and abilities. When workers feel that you are investing your life in them, they too become great leaders.

There are several skills used by successful leaders. Successful leaders know where they are going, train people well, affirm and encourage their workers, develop a personal relationship with their workers, are not

afraid of change, and are willing to pay the price to achieve their goals. These qualities inspire others and call out the best in them.

Affirming the Team's Work

Affirmation is a serendipity of Sunday School work. When we affirm the good work that others are doing, we build effective teamwork. Team members need to know when they are doing a good job. The more we affirm people for the good work they do the more they want to do a good job. Everyone needs affirmation. Sunday School leaders need to hear their minister of education praise them and affirm them.

This does not mean that we affirm people when they are ineffective. It does mean, however, that we change our approach to managing people and look for the good things in their life instead of the negative. Every Sunday School worker is doing something right. If they just show up on Sunday morning and lead the class or department, they are showing some commitment. Find the one thing that your Sunday School leaders are doing right and affirm them.

Affirmation needs to occur in a variety of ways, publicly, privately, through cards and letters, and phone calls. You can make a

tremendous difference in your Sunday School's ability to be great by being a positive affirming person to your Sunday School leaders. They need to know that you love them and have confidence in their ability to become all that God wants them to be.

Evaluate the Team's Results

The team functions most effectively when the process of planning ends in evaluation. Evaluation is the key to improving the work of individuals and the Sunday School organization. Evaluation is comparing what is with what ought to be, and determining ways to make what is what ought to be. Evaluation can be accomplished through a variety of ways. Surveys, questionnaires, dreaming sheets, verbal responses, and specific observations are all opportunities for evaluation to take place. Instead of asking only "What are the things that keep us from growing?" Perhaps we ought to ask the question, "Why do the people who are members of this church stay here?" As we ask that question some very positive answers may come to mind. We can then perhaps find ways to communicate those strengths in order to grow and reach people for Christ, Bible study, and church membership.

The Minister of Education Improving Planning

Adequate planning is a must if we are to fulfill the Great Commission. This planning needs to take place weekly for maximum results. That is why the weekly workers' meeting is such a key ingredient to a dynamic growing Sunday School. In fact, the weekly workers' meeting may be the most important meeting that takes place in a church. Why? Because it is in the weekly workers' meeting that we prepare to fulfill the Great Commission on a weekly basis. In the weekly workers' meeting we solve

problems, coordinate our work, plan for outreach and teaching, develop teamwork, communicate our plans, develop workers, gain momentum, pray, and create the climate for Sunday School growth. An effective weekly workers' meeting motivates us each week to carry out the basics of Sunday School work.

Start with Purpose

All good planning comes from the purpose of the organization. For the Sunday School this means good plans will

move Sunday School leaders to be involved in evangelism, outreach, teaching, and training. Understanding the environment of the Sunday School is also essential. The way you implement actions in one Sunday School may be somewhat different than the way actions are implemented in another. Setting objectives and goals is the process of challenging the people to become involved in the purpose of the organization. The action plan is the process by which we accomplish our purpose, objectives, and goals. When we have finished all of these steps in the planning process, there is still one more thing that we need to do—evaluate. This is the step we most often leave out of the planning process. Evaluation is essential because it helps us to improve. Evaluation of the Sunday School organization and its relationships must be a continuous task. We must constantly be asking ourselves: “Is this excellence?”

Follow a Good Approach

There are **four basic approaches to planning**: planning from perceived needs, planning with groups, planning from organizational objectives, planning from felt needs. All four approaches have both strengths and weaknesses.

Each of us as we lead individuals and groups begin very quickly to identify what we feel to be the needs of the people we lead. When we are constantly trying to be sensitive to the needs of people, this can be an efficient way to plan. As ministers of education we have been trained to pick up on the verbal and nonverbal statements of need in the lives of the people we lead. We cannot do this effectively unless we are willing to stay in touch with people, and be sensitive to what is happening or not happening in their lives. As we begin to understand and pick up on needs in their

lives, we can make plans for meeting those needs. This approach is effective because trained observers are looking for both the spoken and unspoken needs of individuals and the group. Sometimes individuals and groups believe that they know what they need only to find out they are groping for things to treat symptoms of needs rather than the needs themselves. This is where an objective observer can be of great help to an individual or group.

This approach also has weaknesses. If the leader is out of touch with the individual or group, he or she may miss what needs there are and which of the needs is most important. Using this approach can lead us into conflict with the people we lead. If our Sunday School leaders and members feel they have needs that are not being met because we have our own agenda, then we run the risk of conflict that results in negative turmoil instead of constructive change.

Planning from organizational objectives is one of the most commonly used approaches to planning. In business this approach is called MBO (Management by Objectives). This type of planning has many strong points. Planning from organizational objectives insures that when we arrive at the end of planning process and determine the results, our results match the purposes of our organization. First, it makes us search and make sure we understand the purpose of the Sunday School. If our understanding of the purpose of the Sunday School is unclear, it is quite possible that we will engage in actions that will be in opposition to our purpose or at least not specifically related to the Sunday School's purpose. A prime example of this is to build a recreational facility to help your church to grow without determining specific ways to make

sure that facility will help you to reach people for Christ.

The weakness of this approach is that if we are not careful, the organization can become more important than the people who make up the organization. An organization is people. Organizations never do anything on their own. It is the people who make up that organization who make things happen or keep them from happening. The Sunday School is ultimately a people organization.

Keep a Balance

We must always balance the tension between organization and relationships in all that we do in Sunday School work. Age-grading adults is a specific example where we understand the tensions involved between organization and people. Everything that we know about Sunday School growth tells us that we must have annual promotion and create new classes for new age groups if we want our Sunday Schools to grow. But, how do we do that when the people whom we lead say: "I

want to stay in my class. I love my teacher. If I have to leave this class I will quit coming to Sunday School." When faced with these kinds of adults the epitaph that comes to mind is: "Here lies a minister of education, tried to grade adults and died in degradation." When we really care about people we want what is best for them. At the same time we must help people to understand that we really love them and understand the difficulty of change.

The solution to the organization/-relationship tensions of Sunday School work is never letting go of the principles, and at the same time taking time to help people understand the need to change. In other words, we cannot make adults promote, but we can lead adults to promote and create new classes and departments when we firmly lead them and gently love them. In using the planning-by-objectives approach we must never forget that it takes both good organization and good relationships to grow great Sunday Schools.

The Minister of Education Organizing for Growth

Creating a climate for growth in the Sunday School is contingent upon the ability to organize properly to ensure that goals and objectives are reached. Good organization requires knowledge of how the Sunday School works. As minister of education your responsibility in understanding and organizing the Sunday School for growth is primary. When it comes to organization our knowledge must be both general and specific.

The big picture of Sunday School work is imperative for the minister of education. He

or she must be able to see how each of the parts of the Sunday School fit together. In this regard, the minister of education is a generalist. The key to this generalist approach is helping each group/division move in the same direction. The minister of education, however, is also a specialist. He or she must understand the dynamics of each age group, and support each age group as they attempt to become their very best. This is a difficult tight rope to walk. There are always pulls on both the generalist role and the specialist role. Both of these roles

are essential in creating an organization that produces growth.

Essential in organizing for growth is the ability to act. Action is required if any organization is to grow. But, just any action will not do. The right actions must take place at the right time if the Sunday School is to grow. These actions include: Evaluating the existing organization, using growth criteria for making changes, implementing a new organization, and providing ongoing encouragement toward excellence.

Evaluating the Existing Organization

The first step in organizing for growth is to take a good look at the existing organization. Many organizations crystallize into maintenance and declining structures because they're never evaluated. The Sunday School must be evaluated on a continuous basis to determine if it is effective. Both general and specific areas must be evaluated to determine the Sunday Schools potential for growth. General areas of evaluation include: the excitement; motivational level of your Sunday School leadership; evangelistic concern among leaders and members; the process used in the discovery and enlistment of workers; and the short-term and long-term training provided. As these are evaluated you will find clues to your Sunday School's potential for reaching people. These aspects of the Sunday School organization are not as specific as others, but all of these are important factors in the organization's potential for growth.

Specific questions concerning the organization must also be asked for adequate evaluation to take place. These include: Is this the proper organization for effectively reaching people? In what ways is this organization succeeding? Are there

needs among leaders and members that are not being addressed? Do classes and departments have an adequate number of leaders and are the leaders properly trained to carry out their responsibilities? Where can improvements be made? What are the major negative stresses on the organization that keep it from functioning effectively?

Using Growth Criteria for Making Changes

Once you have evaluated the Bible teaching program, the next step is deciding what changes must be made for improvement. When determining the ways the organization can be improved, the imperative of reaching people must be a priority. Criteria for developing a reaching organization have been established and the results evaluated in Southern Baptist churches for over seventy-five years. Arthur Flake stated these in his book *Building a Standard Sunday School*. These have become known as Flake's Formula. His formula consisted of five points: know the possibilities, expand the organization, provide the space, train the leaders, go after the people. Harry Piland focuses on nine basics of Sunday School work: make a commitment to reach people; identify and enroll people; start new classes, departments and Sunday Schools; enlist workers; train workers; provide space, equipment and materials; teach the Bible to win the lost and develop the saved; conduct weekly workers' meetings; conduct weekly evangelistic and ministry visitation.

These criteria determine the effectiveness of the Sunday School organization. Giving extra attention to three of the nine basics is necessary for growing Sunday School organizations. These are new classes and departments, developing the suggested outreach organization within the overall

Sunday School organization, and weekly workers' meetings.

Creating new classes and departments is the key to developing a healthy, dynamic, and growing Sunday School organization. However, creating new classes and departments brings about growth faster than any other area of Sunday School work that we give our time and effort to. In regards to creating new units, we must remember that when we create new units we are dealing with people. Creating new units out of existing units must be accomplished with care and understanding. In every way possible, we must communicate our knowledge of what the creation of the new unit is doing to the relationships of those persons who are in the existing units. We must be compassionate and understanding when members tell us that they want to stay in the group where they presently attend. At the same time we must challenge members to create new units and thereby create new relationships so that they as individuals and the Sunday School as a whole might continue to grow. The challenge is to reach out to others by being willing to accept the opportunity to grow through new relationships with new members of a new Sunday School class. Your support and encouragement of members can be helpful in their commitment to help new units begin.

The minister of education's role is to create the right kind of relationships and motivation through which members will not only understand the importance of creating new units, but also want to participate in helping those new units get started.

Implementing a New Organization

There are two important emphases that must be maintained in creating a growing Sunday School organization. These are annual organization and annual promotion

of adults. These are best accomplished together. Getting some adults to promote may be one of the most difficult tasks of Sunday School work; yet, it is one of the most essential to Sunday School growth.

Reorganizing the Sunday School and emphasizing promotion have often been difficult for ministers of education. There is some real risk in implementing a new organization. This risk is one of the prices we pay for leadership. There are some things, however, that can reduce the risk of job loss in creating a reaching Sunday School organization. These include: cultivating good relationships with both leaders and members, being sensitive to the needs of those who do not agree with the principles of Sunday School growth, and using good judgment regarding the proper time to make changes in the Sunday School organization.

One factor that keeps us from creating growth organizations may be a fear of not being liked by everyone. Many of us have such a need for affirmation that we lead in ways that will get us that kind of attention.

Another reason that we may not implement a new Sunday School organization and emphasize promotion is that we are afraid of creating conflict in the church. While we should not desire conflict neither should we fear it.

Conflict can be very healthy for a church if it is handled correctly. The way to handle conflict correctly calls for allowing everyone to have input into the process and solution to the problem.

Promotion and reorganization are educational in nature. We must continually be educating our leadership and members in the reasons why promotion and reorganization are so important. At the same time we must also allow the

educational process the time to become a reality in the lives of the people we seek to lead.

A key concept in our ability to do this is patience. Most of us are too impatient when it comes to growth in the Sunday School. Sunday School growth takes time and energy and a lot of teaching and training. It takes more time and more energy in some places than it does in others. We often give up too easily. We want everything to happen today if not sooner. It takes years to grow a great Sunday School. Yet, we give up on programs too soon. Take the weekly workers' meeting for example. We start workers' meetings in our churches and if we do not have 90 to 100 percent of our workers in attendance the first year we give up and stop the meetings. It may take three to five years to grow a great weekly workers' meeting. Why? Because it takes that long to convince some workers of the importance of the meetings. The same is true for Sunday School

reorganization and promotion. We cannot create a new organization every five years and expect people not to react when we make organizational changes. It takes reorganizing the Sunday School annually and emphasizing promotion every year for two or three years before we begin to see significant results.

The importance of yearly Sunday School reorganization cannot be underestimated. Reorganization gives the opportunity to evaluate the organization and to start new units that are needed to insure the continued growth of the Sunday School.

We can be significant growth agents through the Sunday School when we are willing to educate people in Sunday School growth principles through promotion and annual reorganization. We can give significant support to the Sunday School by paying the price of leadership so that we might reach people for Bible study, Christ, and church membership.

The Minister of Education Facilitating Teaching

The minister of education has great opportunity to help teachers become proficient in the gift of teaching. This requires sharing with teachers the important steps in creating a teaching/learning environment. These steps include: becoming familiar with materials and needs, deciding on learning goals, selecting methods, guiding group interaction, and evaluating results. As minister of education you have the responsibility of leading teachers to create a teaching environment that helps members to seek, discover, learn, and apply biblical principles to everyday life.

This process of teaching teachers to teach can occur in a variety of ways. The key to helping teachers learn these principles is getting them in touch with a variety of

teaching-learning experiences. Important avenues for facilitating effective teaching through the Sunday School include methods workshops, lesson preparation training, needs discovery and analysis, along with instruction in group dynamics.

Perhaps the greatest possible way that we can help teachers to develop their teaching gifts and abilities is to help them get away from an emphasis on facts alone. This does not mean that facts are not important, but it does mean that mere facts do not necessarily indicate that learning has occurred. People learn in a variety of ways. Learning is contingent upon the age of the learners, the background of the learners, the spiritual experiences or lack of them in the learner, the learning environment itself. To assume

that if we give people the facts that they will apply them in their lives is an inadequate concept of learning. Each and everyday we all act opposite to known facts. The fact that overeating causes heart disease does not keep many of us from overeating. Something has to happen in the life of an individual beyond just knowing facts. A change in attitude has to occur. A new commitment must take place. As minister of education we must be helping teachers develop skills that help them to change attitudes and philosophies concerning life.

Indeed we must help the teachers of our Sunday Schools to understand that there must be life changes in individuals for learning to have occurred not just cosmetic tinkering with shallow concepts about the Bible and life. An example of this is the conversation I recently had with my next door neighbor. He and his family had not been attending church for some time. I had worked on developing a relationship with him, and out of that relationship he attended our Sunday School and church. The Sunday School department director and teacher of his class showed real concern for him and his family. After he attended I asked him how he liked the Sunday School class he attended. He responded by saying, "The people of the class and department are really nice. The department director has called me twice and the teacher has called me twice. They are really nice people. There is just one thing that bothers me. When I went back to Sunday School I really

thought the things would have changed some from twenty years ago. But it was basically the same. We talked about the same things we were talking about then. When I go to Sunday School I want to deal with things that are relevant to my life right now. People are afraid to ask difficult and deep questions' " My neighbor is right. A weakness of the Sunday School is that we are often asking irrelevant questions concerning the Bible and life and not the important questions that help us discover God's direction for our everyday lives.

As ministers of education we must help the teachers of our Sunday Schools understand how to apply the teaching of the Bible to actual daily experiences of the people in our communities. My neighbor is not an exception. He is like the majority of adults who come to our Sunday Schools looking for answers to life. If we do not help our teachers learn to ask the right questions concerning life and God's purpose for our lives, we have no hope of reaching our communities, nation, or world for Christ.

We must help our teachers to think and desire to learn as never before. When we are leading teachers to think and search out the Scripture rather than just putting people in touch with a curriculum, we are in the process of facilitating dynamic teaching. We as Southern Baptists have the greatest curriculum in the world. We must help our Sunday School leaders use that curriculum effectively and relate the Bible to the issues of daily living.

The Minister of Education Encouraging Training

The essential quality of a Sunday School worker is someone who is not only willing but desires to learn and grow. If someone desires to grow and learn, many other obstacles to effectiveness can be overcome.

This is why it is so very important to encourage training among the Sunday School leadership we guide. Getting people involved in training is essential in improving the work of the Sunday School. Every

Sunday School leader and every Sunday School can improve their effectiveness. Training provides the opportunity to do so.

There are **basically three types of training** that must occur if we are to develop effective dynamic Bible teaching programs in the church. These three types of training are: **potential leader training, basic leader training for in-service readers, and advanced leader training for experienced Sunday School leaders.** All three of these types of training are based upon answering the following questions: What are the needs of leaders? Which of these needs is most important? and What are my goals for meeting these needs? In answering these questions, we are defining and developing a plan for meeting the training needs of our Sunday School leadership. Out of the answer to these questions come an annual training calendar, specific dates and events, and priority goals for improvement in our Sunday School work

Potential leader training is one essential to a growing Sunday School. We can find classroom space, provide resources, and offer training; but without persons who are willing to become leaders we cannot grow the Sunday School. It takes leaders to create an organization that works. In other words, without the right leaders nothing else matters. Potential leader training gives prospective leaders the opportunity to learn about the duties and responsibilities of leading through the Sunday School. It gives people the opportunity to test the waters of leadership, discover their giftedness, and explore their abilities to lead. Potential worker training needs to be occurring all year not just in September when preparing for a new Sunday School year.

In conferences all across America, a major objection to the principles of Sunday School

growth is the statement, "That sounds great but we can't get enough Sunday School workers to do that." Often the reason that we cannot get enough workers is that we do not offer them the opportunity to make the decision to serve based upon all the facts. Many people do not have enough confidence in themselves to say yes to teaching or leading through the Sunday School because they do not understand that they are gifted and equipped to lead. They say no out of fear rather than yes out of understanding. Consistent leader training can dramatically change the growth potential in the life of your Sunday School.

Just as potential leader training is essential in getting Sunday School leaders, **basic leader training is essential in keeping leaders.** Sunday School leaders cannot be left to "lone ranger" leadership. They must understand that they are an important member of a team, and that the team is there for encouragement, support, and help. Ongoing basic leadership training keeps leaders keeping on. It is in ongoing basic leadership training that inspiration, continued commitment, encouragement, and affirmation are acknowledged and accepted. It is when leaders become "islands" in themselves that they quickly begin to burn out, become negative, and slowly but surely determine that they are ineffective, and thus become ineffective.

When workers have an opportunity to continue to grow by being exposed to new methods of leading and relating, they are much more likely to teach and lead over a long period of time than when they are left to fend for themselves. Basic ongoing training provides leaders help in teaching skills, interpretation skills, relationship skills, and organizational skills. Unfortunately, many ministers of education have

developed a "get rid of" philosophy instead of a "train them" philosophy of leadership development. Often, we get rid of the ineffective worker instead of attempting to understand them and train them to become effective. It really does not take a great educator to get rid of people who are not effective in their responsibility. We can enlist anyone in the church to go around and get rid of leaders. It does, however, take a great educator to lead an ineffective worker to become an effective worker.

Basic leader training keeps workers from developing into ineffective workers and helps new workers to become great workers.

Advanced leader training brings creativity and excellence to the work of the Sunday School. Advanced leader training is a must for a growing Sunday School. Those veteran leaders of the Sunday School need new and advanced

opportunities for growth and development as leaders. If they do not have this type of training, they seldom continue to lead with consistent motivation and excellence. All of us from time to time need to be exposed to outstanding leaders. These outstanding leaders help us to become outstanding leaders. Advanced leader training gives us the opportunity to expose our Sunday School leadership to the very best leaders in our convention. Ridgecrest and Glorieta are examples of this type of training.

As ministers of education we have significant impact on the effectiveness of our Sunday Schools by providing potential, basic, and advanced leadership training for our leaders. Training is the process by which we lead leaders to become all that God intends for them to be.

The Minister of Education Delegating

One of the basic dangers in being a minister of education is getting so loaded down with responsibilities and details that we do not have time to think creatively or dream about great things that could be happening in the life of the Sunday School. If we are not careful, we either burn out or become overwhelmed and do nothing at all. If we are to support the Sunday School, be effective in our responsibilities, and grow great Sunday Schools, we must learn to delegate.

There are several reasons why we do not delegate assignments of work to others. These reasons include: (1) the feeling that things will not get done unless we do them ourselves; (2) our unwillingness to share our power; (3) the idea that if we delegate to

volunteers we will end up spending so much time supervising them that we feel we could have done it ourselves much more easily; (4) we don't want to lose control.

Each of these reasons for not delegating keeps us from being effective in our ministry. In examining these we may come to understand how important delegation is to succeeding in the task of supporting the Sunday School.

The feeling that things will not get done unless we do them ourselves is very easy to experience when it seems we are the only ones who get things done. In reality, however, we know that this is not true. All we have to do is go on vacation, or be sick for a week to know that indeed life goes on without us. We cannot delegate our

responsibility, but we can delegate our authority so that others can become involved in the process of leading and grow as a result. Things do get done when we delegate. In fact, things get done more productively when we delegate. If we are given a specific assignment by our pastor, a committee, or the church membership, we cannot delegate our responsibility. In other words, if we are given the responsibility to see that all Sunday School leadership is enlisted before the new Sunday School year begins, no matter how many people we involve in the process of enlistment, the ultimate responsibility for having enough Sunday School leaders is our responsibility. It is like the captain of a ship. The captain of the ship may allow others to steer and clean the ship. He may even assign other officers to supervise the ship hands, but the safety of the ship is still his ultimate responsibility. If those that the captain has enlisted to help him in the assignments that keep the ship afloat are to be effective in carrying out their responsibility, they must be given the authority to carry out their assignments.

Our Unwillingness to Share Our Power

While we cannot delegate our responsibility we must share our power. Delegating power allows others to oversee specific projects. We are often fearful of delegating our power. When we delegate our power we are fearful that someone will use it incorrectly or not at all. We are also fearful that they will not use it in the exact way that we would. Instead, we often give others an assignment to perform and then do not give them the power or authority to carry out the assignment. You and I can become so intent on protecting our power that we cripple our ability to be successful in the ministry we have been assigned.

“Delegation takes time. I might as well do it myself.” The idea that we will end up spending as much time supervising volunteers as if we did the job ourselves is sometimes true. Delegating assignments does require time in supervision of volunteers. While it takes time, however, it is much more meaningful to delegate than to attempt to do everything ourselves. When we attempt to do everything ourselves we deny others the opportunity to serve and grow.

Each person within the body of Christ has at least one spiritual gift. When we do not delegate ministry to these persons, we are keeping them from exercising their gifts and from growing to maturity in Christ. The Sunday School and church should be the laboratory for helping members discover and use their spiritual gifts. As ministers of education we can be facilitators of spiritual gift discovery as we delegate ministry to others. We don't want to lose control. An essential element in our unwillingness to delegate is our need to control everything. We are often uncomfortable when we hand over to another individual an assignment that we feel is important. We are uncomfortable because we know that when we give the assignment to someone else they may not carry out the assignment in the same way we would. Indeed, they may not carry out the assignment at all. This leaves us with very little control over the situation.

The important thing to remember is that just as there is the possibility that others will not carry out the assignment as we would, they might carry out the assignment in a better way than we would. We must trust others to use their gifts that God has given them just as we want others to trust us to use the gifts God has given to us.

To Whom Should We Delegate?

There are several persons and groups to whom we can delegate assignments and authority. These include: the Sunday School director, general officers, division directors, department directors, teachers, outreach leaders, the Sunday School Council, and committees. These persons and groups are important leaders who can

help you achieve ' both your personal goals and the goals of the Sunday School organization. Don't allow these very valuable persons to be leaders in name only. Delegate to these persons important tasks that will help you to create a growing dynamic Sunday School. Do not be afraid to delegate, both by assignment and authority, the important tasks that will help your Sunday School reach people for Christ.

The Minister of Education Knowing Resources

The often-quoted statement "We do not need to know the answers to every question, but where to find the answers" is an appropriate statement for the minister of education. Indeed, we should be persons who are well versed in the resources that help us to achieve our purposes as a Sunday School and church. Adequate knowledge of curriculum and resources is an indispensable tool for the minister of education. Resources include a great variety of articles and objects. Not only should we have a good knowledge of resources, but we should also have a good understanding of where to find those resources and how they can be used to accomplish the tasks of the Sunday School. Particularly important to the minister of education's work related to the Sunday School are *BREAKTHROUGH: Sunday School Work* and the related age-group "BREAKTHROUGH" books; + *Sunday School Leadership* and the related age-group "Leadership" periodicals; * (replaced by *The Sunday School Leader: Larger Church Edition* as of 10/91), the annual *Sunday School Plan Book*, + *Training Potential Sunday School Workers*, + and *BTN* tapes (see the annual *BTN Church Video Service Catalog* sent to each church).

Our greatest ability to support the Sunday School may be our knowledge and

understanding of resources. Our members expect us to know where to find help for them in their specific assignments and responsibilities through the Sunday School. There are several categories that resources can be placed in. These include curriculum resources, administration resources, evangelism resources, growth dynamic resources, and minister of education resources.

To adequately understand the importance of curriculum resources, we must also understand how those resources are determined and developed. The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention seeks to develop quality Bible study materials. They adhere strictly to guidelines regarding doctrine and educational principles, and seek to base all curriculum on the characteristics of good curriculum.

These characteristics include: biblical and theological soundness, relevance, comprehensiveness, balance, sequence, flexibility, correlation. Each and every periodical that the Sunday School Board produces is an attempt at the very best. As each resource is produced, that material is biblical and theologically sound based upon The Baptist Faith and Message. The material must be relevant to everyday life.

The material must be comprehensive in nature. Sequence is an attempt to get the curriculum in the best possible order for learning. Flexibility is important in helping churches to adapt the curriculum to meet their needs. Correlation is the attempt to get the curriculum to relate to the total curriculum plan.

The Sunday School Board's curriculum planning process is extensive. It takes approximately three to five years to produce a curriculum piece that ends up in the hands of members in the local church. As ministers of education we should see ourselves as players with the Sunday School Board in helping to produce the very best curriculum possible. We hear first hand the criticism and affirmation of the curriculum. As ministers of education we have the hearing of those responsible for developing the curriculum. The planning and developing of Sunday School curriculum is a long and arduous task. We should be familiar with the process of curriculum development and be able to explain this process to our members and leaders. It is so easy to become a critic and negative. We have the possibility of having a positive impact on curriculum design and development. We should accept the role with keen understanding and humility.

It is impossible to list the hundreds of helps provided for leaders and members through the curriculum and other materials. For more help in knowing about and understanding these resources, see the

annual Church Materials Catalog sent to each church. For other helpful descriptions of resources, see the annual *Church Study Course* Catalog.

As ministers of education we have a vital role in helping our Sunday Schools and churches to grow. Our support of the Sunday School is strategic in developing a growing church. Our personal goals and desires will become realities as we lead our Sunday Schools to reach out to people with the good news of Jesus Christ. As we effectively manage our time, build teamwork, improve planning, organize for growth, facilitate teaching, encourage training, delegate, and have knowledge of the resources available for getting the job accomplished, we are creating the foundations for an outstanding ministry and a growing Sunday School.

Let's not settle for the mediocre. **Let us pursue excellence.** The fate of the over 160 million unchurched and lost persons of our nations may be determined by our willingness to support the Sunday Schools of our churches. Great ministers of education have gone before us and given us principles by which to guide our churches to grow. It is up to us to move from adolescence to maturity as ministers of education. Our churches are counting on us to lead them, the lost need us to lead our churches to reach them, and God is counting on us to be faithful servants with the gifts and abilities He has given to us. The future is ours. Let's claim it for Jesus Christ!

This material prepared by R. Wayne Jones, associate pastor/education, First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Virginia.

Wayne Etheridge, growth *specialist*
Pastor-Staff Program Section-James E. Fitch, Manager Sunday School Growth and Administration Department -
James V. Lackey, Director
Sunday School Division-Harry M. Piland, Director
Billie Pate, Associate *Director*

Office of Church Programs and Services-Gary Cook, *Vice President*
The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention-Lloyd Elder, President