

WHAT HELPS A SUNDAY SCHOOL GROW?

The national Christian Education committee recently surveyed 24 Presbyterian congregations which showed modest or considerable growth in their Sunday school. Were there important patterns? Take a look . . .



UNIQUE FEATURES IDENTIFIED IN GROWTH	NUMBER (OUT OF 24) WHO MENTIONED IT
• Quality of teachers	13
• Making Sunday school family-based— personal contact, newsletters, luncheons, seasonal parties, home visits	13
• Staff support—mainly ministers	9
• Support and training for teachers	8
• Changing to a new curriculum	7
• Integrating the Sunday school into the rest of the church, specifically worship	7
• Introducing the rotation model of Sunday School	7
• Summer programs—VBS, camp	6
• Inviting children in—new Canadians, neighbourhood kids	5
• The congregation loves children/youth	5
• After-school programs	4
• Sunday school became more activity-based	4
• Mission and offering projects are important	4
• Children and Worship program	3
• Church also offers a variety of worship styles	3
• Music is important	3
• Offer an appreciation party for teachers	3
• Young families joined church	3
• Newly decorated educational spaces	3
• Sunday school is a valued program	2

- Sunday school is formally commissioned 2
- Church/Sunday school has a community focus 2
- Organized administrators 2
- Excellence is the norm—even for a few 2
- Prayer—especially prayer partners 2
- Big Christmas program 2
- Attentive to the needs of each learner 2
- Graduation picnic day 2
- March break, PA day programs 2
- Strong focus on youth 2
- New class groupings formed 1
- Offered different time choice for Sunday school 1
- Attached nursery school brought new children 1
- Offer bilingual learning 1
- Added a computer lab 1
- Changed to one room school model 1
- Did consistent follow-up 1
- Constantly changing, assessing, evaluating 1
- Offer communion 1
- Safe environment 1
- Attentive to new babies 1
- Attentive to special needs children 1
- Renamed Sunday school 1

CURRICULUM

We also asked the 24 churches what curriculum they used. They mention 18 different curricula. Twelve (50%) used one of the curricula off our national “approved” list. The curriculum most widely used by this group was David C. Cook...but even that curriculum was used by only 5 of the 24 churches.

CONCLUSION

Wow. What can we conclude from this? It seems all over the map. Perhaps our tentative findings might be these:

- There is no one-size-fits-all secret to growing a wonderful Sunday school. We all need to figure out what works in our own setting.
- Churches that pay attention to their teachers have the greatest success.

- Sunday schools that succeed have high involvement with the whole family.
- Staff and administrative support is vital.
- “Newness” is energizing. Having something new (especially the rotation model of Sunday school) was mentioned 11 times.
- Integrating children into worship and the social life of the church is important.
- There is a wide variety of learner needs and this means there needs to be a wide variety of curricula.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AS YOU PLAN FOR GROWTH

1. What are the unique features of our community and church? How do they affect how we do Sunday school?
2. In what concrete ways will we support, encourage, recognize and appreciate our Sunday school teachers this year?
3. How will we keep families engaged in the Sunday school and social activities of the congregation?
4. Who are the identified staff and/or administrators who give on-going support for the Sunday school? What would help them in this role?
5. Is there something new and fresh we can offer in our Sunday school this year?
6. What steps can we take to more fully integrate children into the worship and social life of the church?
7. What are some of the specific learner needs in our church? Which curricula best suit those needs?

