

Considering Your Sunday School Teachers and Youth Leaders

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Whether you have one teacher or 21 in your congregation, it is important that ministers and the session do three things:

1. Provide an **orientation** session
2. Provide or arrange for **training**
3. Provide **support** during the year

Things to include in orientation

Orientation is the process that gives people general information to prepare them for their ministry (job). All teachers/leaders—whether experienced or new—must attend your orientation session.

Orientation is best done in late August or early September when the functional church year starts but should be repeated whenever new leaders/teachers begin. The orientation session will also include important information about safety practices. Orientation includes:

- A review of ministry (job) position descriptions. Does everyone know what their job entails? (If you do not have job descriptions, sample descriptions may be found in *Leading with Care* found on the church website (www.presbyterian.ca) under Church Documents on the left hand side of the home page).
- Safety issues such as fire procedures, transportation (if necessary), washroom practices and other safe practices which are specific to your situation.
- What to do in the case of a sudden illness. People should be given instruction about who to inform and how to find a replacement teacher/leader for their program.
- How to access supplies and equipment
- How to access buildings, cupboards, rooms
- Overview of training sessions that will be available in the year ahead. (These may be done with other churches in the presbytery, through video or book resources or by leaders in your congregation.)
- Watch the video *Leading with Care in your congregation*, available from church offices (800-619-7301) by August 31
- All teachers/leaders should fill out a Teacher/Leader Form. (If you do not have a congregational Teacher/Leader Form, you may find one in *Leading with Care*, referred to above.) This form includes important contact information which you may not know. Even in small congregations, you may not know a person's work number or who they would like you to contact if there is an emergency. In addition, filling in a Teacher/Leader form is an act of commitment to their ministry task.
- Teachers/leaders must be given a record book to record attendance carefully in case parents need to be advised about a health or safety concern. Attendance should be recorded at the beginning of each program and the attendance book taken to a central place.

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Teacher/leader training options

There are several ways that your teachers and leaders may be trained for their ministry. All are effective, so choose one or more that best suits your congregation.

- If the leaders are youth leaders, contact your regional staff for training events or borrow *Volunteer Youth Worker Training Course* (video and work books) and Peer Ministry Video from Church Offices.
- Watch for conference opportunities for your church leaders/teachers. APCE (Association of Presbyterian Church Educators) offers an excellent yearly conference with a wide variety of workshops. Canada Youth conferences offer a strong leader training component for youth leaders every three years. In addition, other special Canadian Presbyterian conferences emerge from time to time and are listed on the church website (www.presbyterian.ca). Lay people may apply for one third of cost of these programs through the national church's Lay Bursary Program (800-619-7301).
- The national church offers a program called TLC (Teacher/Leader Courses). Contact the Education in the Faith department (800-619-7301) for a list of the courses and how you can arrange a TLC event for your presbytery. TLC offers a wide variety of courses for leaders and teachers of children, youth and adults.
- Buy and use the book *Equipping the Saints* by Sara Coven Juengst (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). This book has 39 do-it-yourself workshops for teachers and leaders. The author has arranged the workshops in three general categories—Basic biblical background, Foundations for faith (basic Christian belief), Timely teaching tips (practical help).
- New teachers/leaders may be paired with more experienced teachers/leaders in a mentoring relationship.
- If the leaders are elders, contact the Elder's Institute for training options (www.standrews.edu/elders; 866-794-8888, toll free). Every PCPak and the church website have an issue of *For Elders* which contains helpful articles and procedures for training elders. Back copies of this resource are available from the Book Room at Church Offices (800-619-7301).

As you plan for teacher/leader training remember that your regional staff can be a valuable help. (For a list of Regional Staff, consult The Presbyterian Church in Canada national website www.presbyterian.ca.)

On-going support

After orientation and training, it is important to give on-going support so the teachers do not feel disconnected from the congregation.

Use some of these ideas:

- Arrange to visit the Sunday school class or youth group occasionally and express interest in both the program and learners.

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- Offer to prepare snacks or craft activities for the teacher/leader.
- If teachers with young children need to arrive at church early to set up their class area, offer to do something interesting with their children.
- Make sure that teachers/leaders have the equipment and supplies they need. Teachers and leaders should never have to "fund raise" for their own supplies.
- Ask specific people in the congregation to pray for the teachers and the children they teach.
- During the year, meet with the teachers to see how things are going. If they have worries or frustrations, work together on solutions.
- Have a commissioning service for Sunday school teachers in September.
- Host an appreciation breakfast, lunch or dinner for teachers in the late spring.
- Find out, through conversation, what small surprise would be welcomed by each teacher. My personal favourite? When I was teaching junior high students at a church, the superintendent found out that I love Tim Horton's coffee with cream and she always arrived with one for me (and the other teachers) as we were setting up our class on Sunday morning.

Service of Commissioning for Sunday School Teachers and Leaders

Leader: As the people of God, we are always growing in faith and understanding. We give thanks to God for the people who commit themselves to the church's teaching ministry. It is through the work of willing teachers that we are helped to come to know and love our Lord Jesus Christ.

Will the congregation please join me in the responsive liturgy found in the bulletin?

Leader: Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.

People: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Leader: Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

People: Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Leader: Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead.

People: And write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(Deuteronomy 6:4-9, NRSV)

Leader (addressing teachers): You have been called to share the stories of faith with our children and youth. You are charged to do this with gentleness and insight as the Spirit guides you in your words and witness. Through your teaching and example, the faith of our children and youth will be nurtured and deepened.

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Do you promise, by the grace of God, to give yourself willing to this calling and to serve with diligence, energy, love and to be guided by the Spirit and Word of God?

Teachers/Leaders: We do, by the grace of God.

Leader (addressing children and youth):
Will the children and youth please stand? These teachers and leaders are a gift from God. Will you promise to work carefully with them as, together, you learn about God's ways? Please answer, "We will."

Children: We will.

Leader: The congregation will please rise. The teachers and leaders before you have been chosen to help us as a congregation fulfill the vows of baptism. Do you promise to encourage and support them through your presence and your prayers?

Congregation: We do, by the grace of God.

Prayer: Spirit of the Living God, in every age you have appointed teachers to tell of your power, justice and love. We thank you for these men and women in faith who will teach us your ways and words. We give thanks for the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Fill us with strength and peace as we follow Jesus, the Christ, our Master and Friend. Amen

Association of Presbyterian Church Educators (APCE)

BURSARIES

In the November PCPak you will find a booklet about the APCE conference in Vancouver, February 2-5, 2005, Westin Bayshore Resort and Marina. This conference features Dr. Leonard Sweet at plenary speaker and hundreds of practical workshops for clergy and lay people. The theme is "Be transformed: Grow out in faith."

Bursaries are available for both clergy and lay people. (Visit the website www.presbyterian.ca and find bursary applications under Christian Education). Bursaries will cover one-third the cost of this event (combined travel, registration, shared hotel room). Your congregation and/or presbytery may have funds to cover the rest.