

Handbook
For
Sunday School Teachers
Douglas E. Wingeier

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FOREWORD

The Board of Christian Education is very grateful to Dr Douglas E Wingeier for putting his handbook for Sunday School teachers in our hands and into the hands of all concerned with Christian Education.

Dr Douglas E Wingeier writes from many years of deep personal involvement in Christian Education at various levels and in many cultures. He was here in Singapore in the 60s and 70s teaching Christian Education at the Trinity Theological College (TTC), both in English and Mandarin. He is presently the Dean of the Doctor of Ministry Programme at Garrett Theological Seminary in Chicago. From July till November 1993 he was visiting lecturer at the TTC, Singapore, once again teaching Christian Education. He has travelled widely in South East Asia, Philippines, Taiwan, Korea and China.

All these years of dedicated ministry unto the Lord is now distilled and placed within these pages to help strengthen and promote Sunday School teaching. The rudiments of Sunday School teaching covered here - Who Teaches, Why Teach, Whom We Teach, What We Teach, How We Teach and Where We Teach - are irreducible fundamentals we should have a good grip on.

I'm sure both new aspiring Sunday School teachers as well as more experienced ones will be blessed from this and in turn be a blessing to the young and the young in the faith.

All to the Glory of God.

Rev Noel Goh
Chairman
Board of Christian Education (TRAC)
Methodist Church in Singapore
Singapore

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INTRODUCTION

Jenny is a recent university graduate who has just started a new job. She accepted Christ in secondary school and has been growing in her faith and sense of discipleship ever since. Now that she is free from classes and exams, she wants to find a place of service in the church where she can more fully use her talents and training. So she offers to teach Sunday school, though she does not know a lot about what this involves.

She asks her Sunday school superintendent to give her guidance in preparing for the teaching task. She is told that Sunday school teaching involves issues of motivation, preparation, personal character and dedication. She will need to learn about the aims, subject matter, and methods of Christian education. She will also need to become informed about the characteristics and needs of the pupils she will be teaching, how persons learn, and how to arrange and utilize the educational setting. And, she will need to commit herself to the teaching task, and enter into covenant with her class, her church, and her God to the end that the children, youth, or adults under her care may come to accept Christ, love God, and grow in the Christian faith and way.

This handbook is written to aid Jenny—and all her teaching colleagues in the Sunday school—to better understand and become equipped in all these aspects of the teaching task. It may be used for either individual or group study, or to provide guidance for a series of training sessions planned and offered by either the local church or the annual conference. The questions for thought and discussion at the end of each chapter are designed to foster further reflection and study on the part of both present and prospective teachers.

May this handbook help to provide you with the information, guidance, and encouragement to enable you to teach with competence and confidence, in the sure knowledge that the Lord will be with you, saying to you as to Moses, *"Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak"* (Exodus 4:12).

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WHO TEACHES?

A. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IS A SHARED ENDEAVOR

The aim of Christian teaching is to make disciples. Christ is present with us as we teach. All Christians are called to participate with God in the process of Christian teaching. Jesus' last words to his disciples were: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age"* (Matthew 28:19-20). The answer to the question, "who teaches?" then, is three-fold:

1. The teacher

The usual and obvious answer to this question is "the teacher". Most of this chapter will be devoted to discussing the motivation, characteristics, preparation, and training of the Sunday school teacher.

2. The Holy Spirit

But first we must recognize that in Christian education, perhaps unlike general education, it is the Holy Spirit who is the real teacher. We who lead the class merely assist the work of the Spirit in guiding the growth and learning of our pupils.

A pupil in our class learns that Jesus loves children. It is the Holy Spirit who makes possible this understanding; we only help by telling a story or sharing our own love with the child. Another pupil learns to forgive a fellow student who has hurt him. It is the

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Holy Spirit who enables the forgiveness to take place; we just create the setting in which persons are encouraged to be reconciled. Another pupil learns to understand the story of Moses and the Exodus as applying to his own liberation from sin and superstition. It is the Holy Spirit who brings this insight; we merely tell the story and draw the parallel.

In Christian education, then, the Holy Spirit is the teacher. We who teach in the Sunday school are the Spirit's helpers in the educational task.

3. The church

All Christians participate in the teaching process. We Sunday school teachers are not alone in our teaching responsibility, for it is really the whole church that teaches. Children, youth, and adults learn about the Christian faith and life through their total experience in the church. Whatever they see and encounter in the church is teaching them something. They learn from the way we sing, the way we worship, the way we conduct committee meetings, the way we act toward each other, and the way we treat them. They view church members as model Christians. So the behavior and life style of church members are teaching them what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to be the church.

A church member goes to market for another who is sick, and children learn that this is what a Christian does. Church members who disagree on how to remodel the building come to a compromise without a big argument, and children observe and learn the Christian attitude and way of

reconciliation. A Christian parent prays before meals and at bedtime, and children learn that Christians practise daily faithfulness in their relationship with God. Church members give sacrificially to help support a missionary, and children learn the Christian attitude of unselfish concern for the welfare of others, and observe the practice of faithful stewardship.

The whole church teaches what it means to be Christian. Pupils learn, not only in the classroom, but through all the experiences they have in the church. As Sunday school teachers, we participate in this teaching ministry of the church. We are called and appointed by God and the church to take special responsibility for teaching. We acknowledge that our calling is not to take charge of the teaching-learning process. We are to trust the Holy Spirit to teach and cause learning to take place. Our role is to assist the Spirit in this work. We also acknowledge that, though we are assigned to lead classes of children, youth, or adults to a greater understanding of and commitment to the Christian faith and life, we are only a part of the church's teaching ministry. The whole church teaches; we take special leadership within the church in accomplishing its teaching task.

What causes us to accept and carry out the challenge of Sunday school teaching? How may we be trained for the teaching task? How do we prepare ourselves for the weekly lesson? What characterizes a good Sunday school teacher? Let us look at each of these questions in turn.

B. WHAT MOTIVATES OUR TEACHING?

There are several reasons why we teach Sunday school.

1. We teach because we are grateful to God for all God has done for us and we want to offer ourselves in service in response. God has given us life. We want to give our lives for Him. God has given us the strength to work, the love of family and friends, and the ability to think, speak, and create. We want to use these gifts for God. God has sent Christ Jesus to give us salvation from self-centeredness and discouragement, and to offer us a new life of hope and purpose. We want to show our thanks for God's goodness by using our time, energy, and abilities to serve Christ in the Sunday school.
2. We teach because we want other persons to come to know Christ and to grow in the Christian life. We have found Christ as personal Savior. We want others to find Him too. We experience the joy of life in Christ. We want others to know this joy too. As we live daily with Him, in prayer, Bible study, and service, we are growing in grace and knowledge of the Christian way. We want those in our classes to experience the excitement of this same Christian growth. We teach Sunday school so that the children, youth, or adults in our classes may find salvation in Christ and grow in His grace and love.
3. We teach because we are called by the church to take up this responsibility. The church has faith in us to perform this job faithfully and well. They believe that we have the ability, gifts, and dedication to be

effective teachers. So, they have chosen us for this sacred task. *"And his gifts were that some should be...teachers, for the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12).* God has given us the gift of teaching, and the church has recognized this gift by appointing us as Sunday school teachers. When we joined the church we promised to serve God through the church. So when the church invites us to become Sunday school teachers, we accept the challenge willingly.

4. We teach because it is a means for our own growth. God has given us the talents for teaching. We grow only as we use them in His service. Like the faithful servants in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), we want to use our talents in the service of the Master so that He will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Only as we use our gifts will they be developed so that we become more capable and effective in our teaching. Only as we gain practice in telling stories, acting out dramas, teaching songs, leading discussions, and making things with our hands, will we become better and better at using these teaching methods. And in the process we develop abilities which may later be used in other avenues of leadership in church and community. We become more able persons and more useful to God through using our gifts in Sunday school teaching.
5. We teach because we gain personal satisfaction from serving God and seeing other persons learn and grow through our efforts. There is great reward in Sunday school teaching. We feel good about ourselves because we are doing something

constructive and lasting to serve God and the church. We learn much about the Bible and the Christian faith through preparing our lessons. We enjoy the personal relationships with our class members. And we are thrilled as we see them change and grow before our eyes! We are actually participating with God in guiding the growth of God's children! This is a rare privilege. We see the smile on a little child's face when we give her a hug out of Christian love. We see the flash of insight on an older child's face when he understands that Jesus' acceptance of the little man Zacchaeus is meant for him too. We rejoice when a young person whom we taught in Sunday school accepts Christ and joins the church. There is much personal joy and satisfaction in teaching Sunday school.

C. HOW ARE WE TRAINED?

The church which calls us to be teachers has an obligation to train us for the task. We ought not to be asked just to step into the classroom and take over a class without any preparation. There are several possible aspects to such training. It is not necessary for the church to provide us all of them, but at least one or more are essential. You can expect your church to do some of the following to train you to teach Sunday school.

1. Give you this book to read.

This handbook will describe the basic principles of Sunday school teaching. It will give you a foundation for the task. It is brief and simple, however, so you will need more training after reading it. You will want to get and read other, more advanced books about various aspects of Christian education. Ask your pastor to obtain them and loan them to you.

2. Offer a training course before you start teaching.

Probably there is a group of you who have been invited to teach. If so, your pastor, with the help of one or two more experienced teachers, can offer a training course for you. This should consist of four to six sessions, at least, each session for two hours. Depending on how easy it is for you to get to the church, this course could be held all in one week, one day a week, or one day a month. It should deal with all subjects in this handbook, but be applied to your local situation. It should include opportunity for you to discuss the questions raised, and to practise the various methods and approaches suggested.

3. Let you observe and then assist an experienced teacher.

Before taking a class by yourself it would be well for you to spend several Sundays watching a more experienced teacher at work. Before class, ask him how he prepared, what his aims for this session are, and what steps he plans to follow. Then, during the class, observe his methods, how well he achieves the aims and follows the plan, and how the pupils respond. After class, talk with him again. Share your observations and ask how he felt about the session, what he might have done differently, and how he will follow up next Sunday. Discuss with him the reactions of individual pupils. Because he was busy teaching, you may have noticed some things which he did not. Take a notebook with you to class so as to write down what you observe.

It is important to take care in choosing the teacher to observe. Just because a person may have taught a long time or is a day

school teacher does not mean she is a good Sunday school teacher. The style and methods of Sunday school teaching are quite different from those of day school. Ask your pastor to suggest the teacher for you to observe. You may want to observe a different one each Sunday to compare different approaches. Evaluate their teaching in light of what you learned in the training course or read in this book.

4. Assist and observe you in your first few teaching sessions.

If there is a pastor or supervisor or experienced teacher available, he could well be asked to help you get started. He could meet with you each week to help you prepare your lesson. He could come to class with you to observe your teaching. This might make you nervous at first, but because you know he is there to help you and out of concern that you succeed in your teaching, you will soon feel supported rather than anxious because of his presence. After class, you can discuss the session with him, getting his reaction to your teaching style, observations of pupil response, and suggestions for improvement the next week.

5. Provide periodic training sessions as you continue teaching.

Once a month or once a quarter your church can offer training sessions for all who teach in your Sunday school. The following emphases might be considered in such training: Bible study so we can understand better the faith we are teaching; demonstration and practice of new teaching methods; deeper psychological understanding of the nature and needs of our pupils; background information on the lesson materials for the

next period of time; time spent together in actual planning of these lessons; and prayer for your students and for God's guidance in your teaching. One aspect of your commitment to teaching Sunday school is to attend these training sessions when they are offered.

6. Send you for advanced training.

From time to time, a special teachers' training course may be offered by your church or a council of churches on a national or regional basis. Probably, not all the teachers in your local Sunday school will be able to attend. But your church should have money in its budget to send some teachers for such training each year. If you are a faithful teacher, and if you are willing, the chances are that before long your church will invite you to go.

D. HOW DO WE PREPARE?

There is more to teaching Sunday school than just appearing in the classroom on Sunday morning and telling a story or reading the lesson aloud to the class. We must prepare a lesson plan in advance. This preparation consists of the following steps:

1. Read the whole lesson book from beginning to end.

If you have printed lesson material, it is important to read both the teacher's and the pupil's books as soon as you get them. This helps you know the sequence of subjects you will be following for the next several weeks, and you can be thinking about them in odd moments of time, and gathering any materials you may need. If you do not have printed materials, it is equally important that

you plan a sequence of lessons. Pupils learn more and remember better if the lessons from week to week build on and reinforce one another. So, plan a series of lessons or Bible stories organized around a common theme, such as creation and the world of nature, Jesus' love and our need for forgiveness in human relationships, or the people of God in the Bible and the life and work of the church today.

2. In preparation for next Sunday, read the lesson for that day.

Read both the teacher's and pupil's books. This should be done early in the week, so you have time to think about it. If you do not have books, read the Bible passage you plan to use and begin thinking about how you will relate it to the daily life and needs of your pupils.

3. Write out a lesson plan. This should include the following elements:

a. Your aim

What do you hope to accomplish in this session?

b. Adaptation to the local situation and your particular class

If your lesson material is written and published for some other country or culture, how will you revise its emphases and illustrations to fit local customs and circumstances? And, how will you focus it directly on the needs, interests, and age level characteristics of your individual class or group?

c. A step-by-step program for what you plan to do in the class

Indicate how much time you will devote to telling the story or explaining the big idea

of the lesson, how much to discussion, to creative activities, to prayer or worship, to small groups, and to whatever else you plan to do. Arrange these steps in the order which will best lead your pupils to the kind of thought, feeling, or decision which you would like them to have at the end of the session.

d. The materials you will need

Make a list of the things you will need in this session—pupil's workbooks, Bibles, pencils, copybooks, blackboard and chalk, crayons and paper, materials for handwork, etc. Collect these materials during the week and be sure to arrive early enough on Sunday morning to have them all ready when the pupils get there.

4. Pray

Ask God to guide your preparation. Invite the Holy Spirit to do the teaching, and pray that you may effectively assist in the Spirit's work. Pray for each pupil in your class that God will guide his Christian growth.

5. Be flexible

During the session be sensitive to the response of your group and quick to adapt your plan to their need, interest, attention span, and level of understanding.

6. Evaluate

An important part of preparing for next week's session is evaluating last week's. Ask yourself: What was good about that session? What was wrong with it? How could I have done it better? What can I learn from last week so as to make this session better? How did the pupils respond and why? If you were fortunate

enough to have someone observe your class, be sure to ask her opinion as to how you might have done it better. From time to time ask your pupils for suggestions on how you might improve your teaching. Remember, for every hour you spend in class they are spending an hour also. It should be worth their while.

E. WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER?

When we accept the calling to be a Sunday school teacher, we want to be a good one. We are "*fellow workers for God*" (1 Cor. 3:9), and we want our work to be pleasing to God. What kind of teacher should we strive to be? A good teacher is one who:

1. Loves God and wants to serve Jesus.

We do not teach Sunday school to receive the praise of others or for any material reward. Rather, we teach because we have a loving relationship with God, and God's love for us makes us want to express love in return by serving other people. We know that, as modern-day disciples, Jesus calls us to follow Him and become fishers of persons (Matt. 4:19). He sends us to people to make disciples, baptize, and teach them "*to observe all that I have commanded you*" (Matt. 28:19, 20). We want to accept his invitation and fulfill his commission. So we teach Sunday school out of love for God and desire to be good disciples of Jesus Christ.

2. Loves people.

As good teachers, we have a genuine love for our students whether they be children, youth, or adults. We accept them whether they are rich or poor, beautiful or homely,

intelligent or slow, sick or healthy, clean or dirty, quiet or talkative, cooperative or naughty. We believe in them and their capacity to learn and grow. We trust their goodwill and desire to learn. We take an interest in their home situation, progress in school or work, and personal problems. We take time to visit them at home, pray for them, and help them when they are sick or in trouble. Love is not just a nice, warm feeling for someone in our hearts. It is concrete action showing our concern and desire to help another person, as Jesus taught us in the parable of the Good Samaritan (*Luke 10:29-37*). As good teachers we will show this kind of love for our students.

3. Is willing to learn.

No one ever knows enough about teaching. We all can continue to learn how to be better teachers. But we must be willing—willing to read books when they are available, willing to take training when it is offered, willing to learn from our mistakes and failures, willing to accept the suggestions of others, willing to learn from the reactions of students, willing to learn by observing other teachers, willing to discuss and plan with other teachers. The good teacher gives time and effort to learning how to be a better teacher.

4. Is a growing Christian.

Likewise, no one is ever a good enough Christian. When we compare ourselves with Jesus, we know that we still have much growing to do. We always need to become more faithful, more steadfast, more loving, more courageous to confront evil, more committed to His ministry of justice, liberation, and reconciliation for all people.

In order to grow to become more like Jesus, we regularly spend time in prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship with other Christians, and witness and service to people outside the church. As we engage in these activities, we grow in the Christian life and faith. Thus, as our experience is enriched, we have more to offer our students. We cannot continue to pour water from an empty vessel. As good teachers we will continue to re-fill our vessels through cultivating our own growth in Christian faith and living.

5. Is willing to spend time in preparation.

We have already described how to prepare to teach a lesson. This takes time and effort. Because we know that thorough preparation will make for an interesting class and a good result, we are willing to spend this time and effort. We know that our students are coming to Sunday school with high expectations. They are eager to learn, need the good news which Christ offers them, and expect us to be well prepared to help them learn and grow. We do not want to disappoint them. We do not want to destroy their faith in us, the church, or God. So, as good teachers, we take the time needed to make full and adequate preparation for each lesson.

6. Is willing to try new things.

The good teacher is not satisfied to teach the same way Sunday after Sunday. We want to try new methods and find new ways of making the lessons interesting and appealing to our students. Sometimes the new approaches we try will not work out as we had planned. We may feel embarrassed or discouraged. But we are willing to risk an occasional failure or disappointment, because

we know that we must keep trying to find new, fresh ways of enlivening our class sessions. Chapter Five of this handbook, on methods, will suggest a variety of ways of teaching. As good teachers, we will be willing to try these out in our classes, because we want to continue finding new and better ways of helping our students learn and grow in the Christian faith and life.

7. Is faithful to be present every Sunday.

The good teacher is punctual and reliable. We only have an hour at the most for each Sunday school lesson. If we begin and close on time, and if we are present every Sunday, this means only 52 hours per year for the Christian education of the children, youth, or adults in our class. There are 168 hours of time in a single week. During the hours they are not in church, people are exposed to all kinds of secular influences. We therefore need every minute of time we can get for Christian teaching. Realizing this, as good teachers, we will arrive early for Sunday school every week, so as to be ready for our students when they come. And, except for unavoidable reasons like illness, we will be present every Sunday to teach our class. Because we expect our students to be dependable in their attendance, we will set a good example. They need the continuity of our teaching Sunday after Sunday. And if, for some good reason, we must be absent occasionally, we will be sure that a capable person is invited well in advance to substitute for us.

8. Knows the Bible and the Christian faith.

The good teacher knows enough about the Bible and the teachings of the church to be a

reliable guide to her students in increasing their knowledge and understanding. Of course, we may feel that we do not have enough knowledge when we first begin to teach. But the more we teach the more we learn. As we prepare our lessons week by week, as we read the Bible day by day, as we listen carefully to our pastor's sermons and Bible study classes, and as we attend training courses when they are offered, our knowledge of the Bible and Christian teaching will continue to grow and expand. The good teacher is able to help her students grow in their understanding of the Christian faith and life because she is a diligent Bible student herself. She can explain about such things as God's creation of the world, our separation from God because of sin, our reconciliation with God because of God's forgiving love expressed in Christ's death and resurrection, and our calling to live for Christ in faith, hope, and love. If we do not understand enough about these teachings to explain them to our students, we can ask our pastor to help us understand them better.

9. Knows his/her students, and is able to relate the Bible to their needs.

We must keep in mind that in Sunday school our primary goal is to teach persons, not subject matter. This is one difference between Sunday school and regular school. Our aim is not to teach the Bible, but to teach children, youth, or adults about the Bible. So, we want to know all we can about our students. What are they like? What are their needs? What do they do from day to day? What is their home situation like? How do they differ at the various stages of life? What are their interests? How do they learn best? We will try to find

answers to all these questions with reference to the particular persons in our class. Chapter Three of this handbook will be of some help in suggesting general characteristics for each age group. But we must strive to go beyond this in discovering what are the unique characteristics and needs of each person in our class. Only thus will we be able to apply the teachings of each lesson directly to our class in a way they can understand and learn from. The good teacher knows well each member of his class, and is a friend to them. He thereby knows which aspects of Christian teaching will be most helpful to them, and includes these in the lesson in ways which speak directly to their lives and problems.

10. Sets a good example.

The good teacher knows that we teach not just by words, but by our example. We not only talk about God's love and forgiveness; we demonstrate it in our relationships with our students and others. We do not only tell the story of the good Samaritan; we act it out in our daily lives by helping other people. We not only tell about how the prophets Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah spoke for God in condemning evil, unfaithfulness, injustice and calling God's people to repentance; we ourselves strive to speak for God in pointing out the wrongs in the world around us and working for improvement. We not only teach about how Jesus gave his life for the sake of others; we give our lives for others as well. Our students will listen to our words in the classroom. But they also will follow the example we set in our daily lives. We may be the best Christian they know. The good

teacher strives to make her life consistent with what she teaches in the classroom.

Perhaps the reading of these 10 characteristics of a good teacher has made you discouraged. "I can never live up to all of that," you may be thinking. We may feel the same way after reading the Ten Commandments (*Exodus* 20:1-17) or the Beatitudes (*Matthew* 5:2-12). You are right. It would be impossible to live up to all that is expected of us if we had to do it all by ourselves. We would be failures before we started. But we do not have to do it on our own! God's grace and strength are with us every step of the way. God helps us become much better persons than we ever could be if we had to do it by ourselves. When we slip or fail, God is there to forgive us and to encourage us to do better next time.

Sometimes God forgives and strengthens us in our private times of prayer. At other times, it is when we are at worship with the congregation that we feel Christ's comforting words of assurance, "*Lo, I am with you always...*" (*Matthew* 28:20). Sometimes, we gain new confidence from the support and encouragement of our fellow teachers who are facing the same struggles and trying to be faithful in the same task.

God sets high standards for our performance as Sunday school teachers. But, both directly and through the church, God gives us the ability, strength and grace to do the job we are called to do. The good teacher will often pray this prayer:

"May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

F. QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. How are you feeling about teaching after reading this chapter—excited, challenged, overwhelmed, intrigued, or what?
2. Think of a teacher who has been influential in your life. What were the qualities that made him effective? What can you learn about teaching by reflecting on her example?
3. What are the reasons for which you have accepted the invitation to teach? What motivates you to continue teaching?
4. What help do you want/need/expect from your church to equip and support you for the teaching task?
5. How does your current practice of preparation compare with that suggested in this chapter? On what points do you need to improve?
6. On each of the 10 characteristics of a good teacher, rate yourself on a scale of 1 (poor), 2 (fair), 3 (good), and 4 (excellent). What does your self-evaluation reveal about your strengths and areas of needed growth as a teacher?
7. Write or offer a brief prayer asking God to strengthen, guide, and assist you in becoming a more effective teacher.

CHAPTER TWO

WHY

DO WE TEACH?

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WHY DO WE TEACH?

What are we trying to accomplish in Christian education? What are our goals? Why do we come every Sunday to take our class? Why do we want our students to come? What do we hope will happen in their lives as a result of attending Sunday school?

It is important that we be clear about our goals for Sunday school teaching. Every Sunday we need to have in mind what we are trying to achieve. There are some broad, general aims which govern all our teaching. Within these we set specific objectives for each session. If you have printed materials, it is likely that they will suggest the objective for each lesson. But you will need to adapt it to the particular needs and level of understanding of your class.

In this chapter we will look at the general, overall aims of Christian education. Why do we teach Sunday school?

- A. We teach in order to lead persons into a fuller knowledge of and loving relationship with God. We want the children, youth, and adults in our classes to know God as the Creator of the universe, the loving, forgiving Parent, and the One who is with them every moment of their lives to give guidance, comfort, strength and challenge. We want them to understand how this God is revealed in the Bible, in the world of creation, and throughout the history of the church. We want them to experience God's personal revelation to them through the Bible, prayer, worship and Christian fellowship. Not only do we want them to know about God, but also to know God in a personal way. We want them to feel God's love

for them, and to learn to love God in return. And finally, we hope that they will commit themselves to obey and serve God throughout their lives.

In all our teaching we have in mind this goal of helping our students to know, love, and serve God. Whatever we do in the classroom is governed by this aim. Whenever we choose a story to tell, select a Bible passage, ask a question for discussion, draw a picture, or suggest an activity, our ultimate purpose is to lead persons closer to God. As we draw up our lesson plan, we ask the question, "How will each thing I plan to do in this session lead persons to God?" Sometimes our activities will contribute to this aim only indirectly; other times more directly. But if an activity does not move us and our class toward this goal at all, we had better replace it with something else.

B. We teach in order to lead persons to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

We want every member of our class to become a born again Christian. We want them to make a conscious decision to follow Jesus and put Him first in their lives. Before they are ready to do that, however, they need to learn about His life and teachings, and what He has meant to other people. We want them to know how He was born, what He taught His followers, how He helped, healed and forgave people, and how He died and was resurrected. We want them to understand what is meant when we call Him by names like Son of God, Son of Man, Savior, Lord and Redeemer. We want them to know about the wonderful change which had come into the lives of people like St. Paul, Mary Magdalene, Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, Susanna and John Wesley, John Sung, Saddhu Sundar Singh, Martin Luther

King, Jr. and Mother Teresa, when they accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord. We also want them to know what Jesus has done for us.

We recognize that for some people, becoming a Christian takes place in one big step. One day they are living selfish lives and do not care about Jesus at all. Then, something happens, they decide to accept Jesus, and their lives become remarkably different. For other people the change is more gradual. From the time we are small children we make little choices about whether or not to live the Jesus way: to tell the truth, to help another person, to pray, to attend church. These little decisions are shaping our character in a Christian way. One day, when we are older, we realize that we are followers of Jesus, and decide to join the church.

The aim of our teaching is to lead persons to make both the little choices and the big decision for Jesus. Small children will not yet fully understand what it means to be born again. But they will know that Jesus wants them to love, share, forgive, help, and do the right thing. We teach in order to help them live the Jesus way. When they reach youth or adulthood, we teach in order either to help them realize that they have been growing in the Christian way all along, or to help them make the big decision to follow Jesus.

All that we do in our teaching is aimed at leading persons to Jesus. As we prepare our lessons, we ask the question, "How will the stories I tell, games we play, pictures we draw, and questions we discuss, lead our class members closer to Jesus?" If anything we do in our classes leads people away from Jesus, we had better stop doing it.

C. We teach in order to help persons find a sense of belonging and an opportunity for service in the church.

We want our students to experience the church as a caring, worshipping, serving, witnessing fellowship. We want them to participate fully in all these aspects of the church's life. When they are ready, we want them to make a commitment to the church, and to become members. In order to do this, however, they need to learn about the history, life, and mission of the church. We want them to know about the life and work of the people of Israel in the Old Testament, and about how Jesus called and trained His disciples and how the early church got started in the New Testament. We want them to know about some of the leaders and events in the history of the church. We want them to know how the church became established in our country and what it is doing here now. We want them to understand that the church is a human institution with both assets and faults. But we also want them to know that the church is the people of God, and that God is working in and through the church to accomplish the divine purpose in the world.

The Sunday school is part of the church. When persons attend Sunday school they are participating in one aspect of the life of the church. We must ask the questions : Do persons in our classes experience the church as a caring, worshipping, serving, witnessing fellowship? By being in Sunday school do they feel a sense of belonging to the church? Do they have opportunity to serve others in and through our classes? All that we do in Sunday school will teach our students something about the life and work of the church. Will their experience in our classes lead them to love and serve the church

and want to give their lives to it? We want everything we do in our teaching to contribute to this aim.

D. We teach in order to help persons grow in the Christian life.

No matter whether the persons in our class are old or young, they have the capacity to grow. To decide to follow Christ is just one important step in the Christian life. But we are growing before we take this step, and we continue to grow afterwards. As Christians, we are growing all of our lives. We may stop growing physically when we reach adulthood, but we continue to grow spiritually if we are faithful Christians. One aim of our teaching is to guide persons in their growth.

We want them to grow in their relationship with God in Christ; so we teach them to pray and worship. We want them to grow in their understanding of God's will for their lives; so we teach them more and more of the Bible and Christian beliefs. We want them to grow in their practice of the Christian faith, so we give them opportunities to experience reconciliation, service and witness. We want them to grow in their commitment to Christ and the Christian way; so we challenge them to give more and more of themselves to Christ and Christian service.

We evaluate our teaching in terms of how well it contributes to this aim. Do persons in our class become better Christians through our teaching? Do they become gradually more faithful, more loving, more dedicated? Do they find more ways of helping others? Do they stand up against wrong more often? Do they tell others more about their faith? Do they give more leadership

in the church? Do they try harder to live the Jesus way at home, school, work, market, and play? We can observe the lives of our students, both in and out of class, and see for ourselves whether they are growing as a result of our teaching. Our aim is to help them grow. All that we do in Sunday school may be judged in terms of how well this is accomplished.

E. We teach in order to help persons understand and accept themselves as children of God.

We want persons in our classes to know that they are created by God, that Jesus loves them, and that they are of infinite worth. Regardless of who their parents are, how much money they have, the kind of house they live in, what kind of wrong they may have done, the kind of work they do, how much education they have, and how long they have been attending Sunday school and church, they are all children of God and equal in God's sight.

To help them understand this, we will tell them how Jesus invited the little children to come to Him (Mark 10:13-16). We will teach them that *"God made from one every nation of humans to live on all the face of the earth"* (Acts 17:26), and that *"there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:28). But even more important than telling, we will show them they are important by the way we treat them. When we take a personal interest in them, show concern for them, make friends with them, and help them with their problems, we are teaching by our behavior that they are children of God and have value in God's sight. When we accept them for who they are, they will come to believe that God accepts them, and then they will be able to accept themselves.

All that we do in the Sunday school must convey the message of God's love and acceptance. The way we arrange the room, the materials we use, the songs we sing, the way we talk with our students and the attitude we express—all must be saying, "We love you, God loves you, and you must love yourselves and each other." We can check how well we are achieving this aim by observing what our students feel and say about themselves and how they treat one another.

F. We teach in order to help persons appreciate and transform their world.

We want our students to know that the world they live in is God's world. We want them to appreciate its beauty and enjoy its benefits. We want them to understand that God created the world for our welfare and that all that God made was considered good (*Genesis 1*). We want them to be able to appreciate the beauty of a sunrise, understand what causes plants and animals to grow, enjoy the fun of a swim in the sea, and experience the wonder of seeing a butterfly emerge from a cocoon or a flower push out from the bud.

But at the same time we need to help them understand that the world as they know it is not the world as God created it or as God wants it to be. Much is happening in the world that does not please God or serve His purposes. There are floods and hurricanes which destroy homes and wash away the soil. There are crimes by which people kill each other, and pollution by which people destroy the good earth. There is poverty and illness caused by the greed, selfishness, and lack of concern of some people for their brothers and sisters. There is superstition and ignorance which cause people to live in fear and to fail to achieve the better way of life which is possible for them.

These things sometimes cause people to lose their faith in the world as God's world. There is sometimes so much suffering and hardship in the world that it is hard for them to see God at work in it. Yet God is there, and our aim in teaching is to help persons recognize God's presence and activity in the world around them; and not only to see God there, but to join in God's work to make the world a better place to live in. Our teaching must also help persons want to strive to work with God to transform the world into the kind of home for all people that God wants it to be. This means that we will tell them how Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons, and how He opposed the evil ways of those in His time, like the money changers in the Temple (*Mark 11:15-17*), who exploited the poor for their own gain. We will also teach them about prophets like Amos and Micah who spoke for God in criticizing those who robbed the poor to make themselves rich, and who called on them to repent and "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream (*Amos 5:24*). And we will tell them about modern-day prophets like Ms Lee Tae Young of Korea and Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who work with God to right these same kinds of wrongs and make the world a better place for the poor. And we will show them how development projects, perhaps in our own country or community, are doing this same work.

Not only do we want them to know about this work of transforming the world, but to join God and God's servants in it. All that we do in the Sunday school must help our students understand that the world they live in can and must be transformed, and to commit themselves to this essential work. Whether they are children, youth, or adults, there are things they can do now to

beautify their environment and make life better for themselves and others. And some of them may be led to offer their lives in a form of service like teaching, health care, or social service, which will contribute much to making life more full and meaningful for others. We teach in order to help them understand this need and possibility, and to give their time and energy in this transforming work.

G. We teach in order to enable persons to live in the Christian hope.

We want the persons we teach to be hopeful about the future. We want them to believe that God has a plan for their own future, and also for the future of the world. We want them to feel confident that as they follow God's leading through life, one step at a time, they will find a joy and purpose for their lives which will sustain and enrich them no matter what may be the outer circumstances. We want them to have an assurance of personal salvation and life after death. We want them to believe in the Kingdom of God, that God's will for the world will be achieved, and that the forces of evil and oppression will be brought under God's control. We want them to have this hope as the foundation of their lives.

To this end, we will teach them how the prophet Isaiah was sustained by this hope, when he said, *"They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isa. 40:31)*. We will tell them how this hope gave courage to the prophet Jeremiah, who predicted, *"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...; I will put my*

law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:31,33). We will tell them how Jesus taught the disciples to abide in this hope, when he said to them, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25,26), and "When I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3). And we will share with them the hope of the early church, as expressed in Rev. 21:5, "Behold, I make all things new."

We will also share with them our own hope for the future, and belief in life everlasting for ourselves, and God's purpose for the world, *"to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). We will let them know that we are living for Christ because we are confident that even though we do not know what the future holds, we know Who holds the future. We will exhibit this confidence in the way we go about our daily lives, and thereby show our students what it means to live in the Christian hope.*

All we do in the Sunday school is done out of this hope. We prepare our lessons and teach our classes because we believe that God will use our efforts to enrich lives and advance God's Reign. We are not easily discouraged, even though the conditions are difficult and it may seem that our students are not responding. For we know that we are sowing seed which God will one day cause to bear fruit, even though we may not be there to see it. We trust the Spirit of God to carry out the divine purpose and plan through us.

Here are seven reasons why we teach Sunday school, seven goals we are striving to reach each time we enter the classroom with our students. You will have other, specific objectives to add to these. But, as you prepare, as you teach, and as you evaluate, make sure that what you do contributes to these aims.

H. QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Are persons being led into a deeper knowledge and closer relationship with God through my teaching?
2. Are persons led to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord through my teaching?
3. Does my teaching help persons feel that they belong in and want to serve through the church?
4. Do persons grow in the Christian life as a result of my teaching?
5. Do persons come to understand and accept themselves as children of God through my teaching?
6. Are persons led to appreciate their world, and to commit themselves to work for its transformation, through my teaching?
7. Does my teaching help persons live in the Christian hope, both for themselves and for the world?
8. What other specific goals do I have for teaching in my class and/or church?
9. What can I do to make my teaching more effective in achieving each of these aims?

CHAPTER THREE

WHOM

DO WE TEACH?

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WHOM DO WE TEACH?

What do you teach? Most teachers, when asked this question, are likely to respond, "I teach fourth grade," or "I teach mathematics," or "I teach the Bible." It is understandable that we respond this way, for it is a common way of thinking. But one difference between Christian education and general education is that our response to such a question becomes, "I teach persons."

In the Sunday school our concern is with teaching children, youth, or adults, rather than with subject matter. Of course, we do have a curriculum based on the Bible which we want our students to learn. This will be the subject of Chapter Four. But our primary concern is with the Christian growth of persons. The knowledge they acquire in Sunday school is only one aspect of this growth, and not the most important one at that.

So, if our aim is to guide the growth of persons, we must try to understand what they are like. We must make an effort to understand their needs, characteristics, problems, and life situation. These will be different for different age groups, areas, and communities.

This chapter will deal with an understanding of persons at various age levels, only in general terms. It will then be up to you to try to discover the unique needs and characteristics of the members of your class. For it is only as we understand our students as individuals that we are able to plan our lessons in such a way as to make them directly helpful to their particular problems and circumstances.

A. THE CHRISTIAN BELIEF ABOUT PERSONS

Before we look at the several age groups, let us first consider what the Christian faith teaches

about the nature of persons. For, as Christian teachers, we want to view and treat our students according to the Christian understanding of what human beings are like. Here is what the Bible teaches about human nature:

1. All persons are children of God.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). God is our loving heavenly Father, who cares about each person made in the divine image. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1). Made in God's image, we have the potential of being like God. "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

Each student in our classes was created individually by God, and so is unique and different from every other human being on earth. The miracle of human birth is something in which the mother, the father, and God cooperate together. Each human creature of God has a personality, with capacities for thought, feeling, goodness, love, freedom, and moral choice. God knows and loves each person individually, and wants each to experience God's love in a personal way. God wants each person to grow in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and to become the person God created them to be. Our task as teachers is to help our students know they are God's children, feel God's love, and learn to live in God's image as God created them to be.

2. All persons "have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

Although we are all created in the image of

God, we tend to disobey God and refuse to live according to the plan God has for us. Like Adam and Eve, we have eaten of the fruit of the tree which gives knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3). We choose to put ourselves ahead of God; we hurt our neighbours rather than helping them; we prefer personal gain and enjoyment ahead of loving fellowship with and service on behalf of God and other people. We are sinners because we have separated ourselves from God, others, and even our own best nature.

The students in our classes, though created in the image of God, very likely do not live that way. They, like us, tend to be self-centered, greedy, and disrespectful of others' worth, and to disregard God's plan for their lives. It is our task as Sunday school teachers to remind them of God's love and their potential for goodness, to confront them in their sinfulness, and to invite them to enter a new life in Christ.

3. All persons are capable of finding redemption in Christ Jesus.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1-2). God, by sending Christ Jesus to show us love and forgiveness through His life, death, and resurrection, has made it possible for us to overcome the sin which drags us down, and to be re-united with God. Though our lives may have been spoiled by our selfishness and disregard for God and others, we can become new persons through divine grace. *"Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).* We do not need to

continue living in sinful ways; if we give our hearts to Christ, and ask God to forgive and save us, we can have opened to us a whole new life.

Our students all have this possibility—to be redeemed by Christ and set on a path toward a new life. As their teachers, we have the privilege and responsibility of telling them about Christ's salvation and inviting them to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord.

4. All persons are called to serve Jesus.

Salvation, which provides forgiveness of sin and the joy of new life in Christ, is a wonderful experience. God offers it to us, not just for our private enjoyment, but so that we may be equipped to serve Christ and others. We are called to use the gifts God has given us *"for the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ"* (Eph. 4:12). Jesus calls us, as he did the disciples of old, to follow him and become fishers of men (Mark 1:17). He tells us, as he did them, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it"* (Mark 8:34-35). We are saved in order to serve. We are called to give our lives in Christ's service—to witness to others of God's love, to help others by acts of kindness, to fight against the evil forces around us, and to advance the cause of Christ's Kingdom and Christ's church.

All students in our classes are called to a life of service. Christ is asking them to give of their time and energy to do His will. No matter how young they may be, there are acts of service

they can perform—helping a sick or blind person with household chores, singing the songs of Jesus to cheer up an unfortunate neighbor, or inviting their friends to attend Sunday school with them. It is our task as teachers to provide them with opportunities for service through our classes. We can organize service projects, like visiting the sick or painting a classroom, and lead our class in performing them. We can help our students experience the joy of giving and serving, so that they will want to do it more often on their own. And we can help them understand that by serving others we serve God, and express our joy and thanksgiving for all that God has done for us.

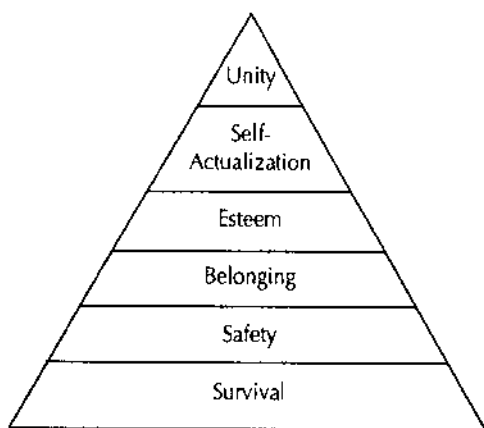
5. All persons have the hope of life abundant and everlasting.

Jesus said, *"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly"* (John 10:10). When we accept Christ as Savior and Lord, our life takes on a new quality of peace, purpose and richness. We have something to live for which gives us hope in the face of whatever circumstances life has for us. Even if our lot is illness, poverty, misfortune, or rejection by parents or friends, there is One who will always stand by us and give us the courage and strength to rise above these calamities. Even death cannot defeat us, for in his resurrection from the dead Christ gives us the hope of life beyond death. *"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive"* (1 Cor. 15:22). *"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?.... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 15:54-57). We need not fear death, for in Christ we are promised life after death.

All our students need this assurance of life abundant and life eternal. As their teachers we can manifest this hope by living a joyful, victorious life ourselves, and by demonstrating our confidence in the resurrection at times when death comes close to us, in the loss of a friend or loved one. We can also teach them to trust the promises of God, and to believe that, if they give their hearts and lives to Christ, God will give them the power to be victorious over all of life's problems and crises, even the final one of death.

B. WHAT NEEDS DO PERSONS HAVE?

Every human being has certain basic needs which must be met if he is to develop normally and have a full life. Psychologist Abraham Maslow has these arranged in the shape of a pyramid, in order to show which are most basic and must be met first.



1. The most basic need is for physical survival. The human body insists that enough food, clothing, and shelter are secured so that the person can survive, remain healthy, and develop normally. If these are not available, or one must struggle to get them, the person

will focus all of her energies on the survival need. None of the other needs higher up on the pyramid can be dealt with as long as one is preoccupied with getting enough food, drink, rest, or bodily comfort to survive. If our students are hungry, ill, tired, suffering, or struggling to get physical needs met, they will not be able to give their attention to the other needs which the Christian gospel can meet. So, as teachers and the church, we must devote our efforts to helping people find ways to get adequate food, rest, clothing, and shelter. We can teach them better methods of farming, nutrition, sanitation, health care, and domestic science. With their bodily needs thus better cared for, they will then be able to turn their attention to the mental, emotional, and spiritual needs higher up on the pyramid.

2. The next set of needs has to do with safety. Persons strive to find security, stability, protection, and freedom from fear and anxiety in their lives. They try to establish structure, order, and limits in their environment, so they can live in peace and have a relaxed, comfortable daily routine. They attempt so to organize their lives that they will not be unduly upset, startled, or frightened. Depending on what the external threats to this security may be, they may put locks on their doors, find a safe place to keep their worldly goods, establish regular times for meals and rest, set rules for the behavior of their children, or refuse the demands of other people which interfere with the stability or orderliness of their lives, or make them feel anxious or disturbed. Recognizing this need, we as Sunday school teachers will do all we can to help our students feel secure, and not make demands on them which cause them to become unduly frustrated or upset.

3. When the physical and safety needs of people are adequately taken care of, they next turn to the search for love, affection, and belonging. They want to feel loved, accepted, and cared for. If this need is not met by parents and other family, they feel the pain of rejection and loneliness, and turn to friends, neighbours, and others in general to find the affection they need. Because one of our aims in the Sunday school is to share the love of Jesus, we as teachers can give particular attention to meeting this need. Our relationships with students must express affection, concern, and acceptance, in order that they may feel the church to be a caring community to which they can and want to belong. We can make our class a warm Christian fellowship, in which persons can express their feelings, talk about their problems, be themselves, and feel that they are accepted for who they really are.
4. The next need up the pyramid is for a sense of self-esteem. Persons need to feel that they are capable of doing things, can achieve reasonable tasks and goals, and receive the appreciation and respect of others. They need to feel important and worthy, and to have other people pay attention to and recognize them for who they are and what they do. Our Sunday school students have this need, and we can do much to help meet it. We can give them projects both in and out of class which they can do with their hands and minds, and which will give them a sense of accomplishment and earn recognition of parents and friends. We can encourage them to express their opinions, ask questions, and make things with their hands in class. We can accept their questions, stimulate their curiosity, welcome their creativity, and praise their achievements. We can show that we

respect them as persons, appreciate their abilities, and believe in their capacity to understand and do things for themselves.

5. The fifth need is for self-actualization. When the other needs are being met, persons turn their attention to finding ways to fulfill the talents and potentialities which God has given them. They need to express and develop their gifts for singing, running, drawing, inventing, building, or relating to people with understanding and support. This self-expression leads to self-fulfillment and a sense of inner peace. If it is not met we tend to feel restless and dissatisfied. The Sunday school offers plenty of opportunity for persons to express and develop their gifts. In our teaching we can plan for times when our students can express their thoughts, feelings, and abilities. They can draw pictures, do handcrafts, use bodily skills, sing songs, write poems, tell stories, and practise physical skills in games and sports. In these ways we can help them find personal satisfaction through using and developing their God-given gifts.
6. Finally, persons need to find a sense of harmony with the universe and unity with God. Even when all the other needs are met, we still feel incomplete and discontented because, in the words of St. Augustine, "Thou has made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless 'til they find their rest in thee." We strive to understand why we were put on earth, to discover a sense of harmony with the world of nature, and to find peace in our hearts through a relationship of acceptance with God. One of our goals in Christian education, as discussed in Chapter Two, is to help our students find this sense of harmony in a relationship with God through

Christ. As teachers we will try to help them find peace with God through teaching them to pray, worship, and give their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ.

C. WHAT ARE CHILDREN LIKE?

Now we turn to a consideration of the characteristics of each of the three major age groups whom we teach in Sunday school—children, youth, and adults. Keep in mind that these are only general descriptions. You will need to study your own students in light of the characteristics described here, and determine for yourself whether these apply to them, and what additional or different traits or needs they have.

1. Children are curious.

For children every day is a new adventure. The world is all new to them, and there is much to learn and discover. They want to know what this is, why that is so, how this is done, and where that is. As they grow older their world expands, and there is always more for them to learn. They will venture farther from home, want to try new things, and ask lots of questions about the world around them. Of course, if adults force them to remain silent or refuse to answer their questions, and keep them confined to a fixed routine, their curiosity can be squelched. If this happens they may appear to be silent or submissive, and to lack any interest in discovering new things. But this is sad, for it means that some of the natural vitality of children has been driven out of them. As Sunday school teachers, we can try to bring this curiosity back by encouraging them to explore new things, ask questions, and think for themselves. We can introduce them to new experiences and ideas, and help them discover more of the world than they have thus far known.

2. Children think in concrete terms.

Abstract ideas like love, forgiveness, salvation, sin, God, and joy, have no meaning to children unless they can relate them to concrete things and actions. What is real to them are things like food, houses, toys, trees, chairs, beds, and animals. They can understand actions like walking, eating, playing, singing, and dancing. They can interpret a parent's frown to mean disapproval, the clapping of hands to mean happiness or excitement, and another's arms extended to embrace as a sign of forgiveness or acceptance. Our actions as teachers will communicate to them Christian meanings, when the words we use for the same meanings are still beyond comprehension. We need to be careful not to use abstract terms in teaching them, and to give examples, show pictures, or act out stories, so as to put our ideas into simple, concrete form. They relate best to stories and experiences of children their own age, and activities suited to their level of body coordination.

3. Children have a short attention span.

Children can be forced or taught to sit still for a long period of time, but they will not be able to listen and learn all that time. They will get restless, daydream, start playing with another child, or fall asleep. They need to have a variety of activities during a one-hour class session to keep their interest. They need to be able to move from singing time, to a brief story, to some handwork, to some conversation, to a time for games or playing with toys, and to a short prayer or worship experience. They can listen or participate in one activity for only a few minutes before their mind starts to wander and they lose interest. So, we need to prepare a lesson plan which takes this into account by

providing for several different activities during one class session. This way the children will maintain and continue their interest throughout the hour.

4. Children lack a developed sense of space and time.

They do not understand clearly where Palestine is in relation to their home, when Jesus lived as compared to when Moses lived or to the present day, or that the baby Jesus who was born at Christmas time is the same Jesus who died on Good Friday, just three or four months later in their calendar. They will understand all these things better when they become youth, when their minds are more developed. But while they are still children, there is no point in our trying to make them understand these matters of history and geography. It is sufficient just to tell them the Bible stories, and to let them know that they happened long ago and in another land. The use of maps, calendars, and time lines can wait until they are older.

5. Children develop in stages.

They get frustrated when expected to perform a task for which they are not yet capable. When very young, they can use their large muscles, but cannot be expected to write or work with small objects. They are impatient and when they see a thing which attracts them they want to touch and hold it. They cannot be expected to give or share, and do not know the meaning of being selfish or unselfish. When they have never held a pencil or learned to read or played with other children, we must be patient in showing them how, step by step. As they grow older, they will be able to do more, understand more, and cooperate better. But

we must be sensitive to their capabilities at each stage, and plan our lessons in such a way as to encourage them to use and develop the abilities they have, and not to frustrate them or make them feel inferior because they cannot yet do what we ask of them. We must also not do things for them which they are able to do for themselves.

6. Children can understand only some parts of the Bible.

The Bible is written by and for adults, and most of it is not appropriate for use with children. Some of the stories describe terrible things which might cause children to have unnecessary fears or bad dreams. Many passages, such as the Psalms and Paul's letters, use words and ideas which are beyond the comprehension of children. Much of the Bible is about religious experiences and moral choices for which children are not yet ready. So, we must choose with care the Bible stories and verses we use with children. We can be fairly sure a passage will be meaningful for children if it is a story about children, or if it uses words which the children in our classes know and use every day. Sometimes we can substitute a simpler word or idea for the one which is actually in the verse, in order to help children understand the meaning. Or, we can tell Bible stories in simple words, rather than reading them directly from the Bible.

Here are some Bible stories which children like and can understand: Moses in the bulrushes, the boy Samuel in the Temple, the friendship of David and Jonathan, Jesus and the children, the birth of Jesus, Jesus in the Temple at age 12, the boy who shared his loaves and fishes so Jesus could feed 5000

people, and Jesus' healing of Jairus' daughter. Bible verses which will be meaningful to children include the following:

"I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart" (Psalm 9:1);

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when [sisters and] brothers dwell in unity" (Psalm 133:1);

"Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins" (Matt. 6:11, 12);

"[Jesus] had compassion on them and healed the sick" (Matt. 14:14);

"You shall love the Lord your God..., you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39);

"Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right" (1 Cor. 13:4-6); and

"God is love" (1 John 4:8).

7. Children love and learn from stories about people like them.

We know much about daily life in Bible times on which we can base imaginative stories about children who might have been on the journey with Moses and Miriam in the wilderness, lived in the kingdom of David and Solomon, returned from exile with Ezra and Nehemiah, lived in Nazareth while Jesus was growing up, and scattered palm branches at Jesus' feet when He entered Jerusalem. To tell those stories through the eyes of children helps

them experience them in the here and now as events involving people with whom they can identify. Similarly, stories about children in other lands and cultures help them appreciate the worldwide Christian community and see their place in it and their responsibility to help children less fortunate than they. Children have active imaginations, and can also be encouraged to make up stories and either act them out or draw pictures about them, which help them make the connection between Biblical and historical figures and Christian ways of thinking and acting and their own everyday lives.

D. WHAT ARE YOUTH LIKE?

1. Youth are beginning to think abstractly.

With the help of education, young people can use symbols and ideas in their thought and conversation. They can work arithmetic problems in their heads without having to count on their fingers. They know the meaning behind symbols like the flag, the cross, and the Kingdom of God. They have had enough experience to understand and use words like loyalty, friendship, courage, and dedication. They no longer accept things at their face value, or on the authority of a parent or teacher. Instead, they raise questions, express doubts, demand proof, and like to discuss and debate. They can reason for themselves about matters of right and wrong, and need to be given freedom to make some of their own choices. In our classes we can stimulate their thinking by raising questions rather than giving answers. We can introduce them to new words and concepts, such as grace and redemption, and help them understand their meaning by relating them to familiar experiences in their daily lives. Rather than keeping at a child's level by

requiring them to listen, accept, memorize, and recite our teachings, we can stimulate them to discuss, question, and develop their ability for abstract thinking.

2. Youth like to follow heroes and imitate models.

Young people tend to admire and imitate popular figures in the world of sports, entertainment, or some other field which they like and appreciate. They choose a hero or heroine, and dress like they do, sing their songs, use their language, adopt their thoughts, and pattern their lives after them. This tendency can apply in the field of religion too. They may very well take a liking to a teacher, pastor, or admired church member and model their lives after such a person. Hopefully, they will find Jesus to be a person they would like to imitate. But it is more likely that they will form an attachment to us first, and then through us come to love and follow Jesus. Knowing this tendency of youth, we must take care to set a good example for them, so that when they model their lives after ours they will be moving in the right direction. As their teachers and leaders, we hope that they will be able to see Jesus in us, and through admiring us will be led to follow Him.

3. Youth are discovering and forming their identity.

Young people are beginning to separate themselves from the guidance and protection of their parents, and to learn to stand on their own. They want to discover who they are as persons in their own right. They still need the assurance that their parents care for them, but they know that the time is fast approaching when they must take responsibility for their own lives, and they are eager to become more independent. Sometimes, if parents try to

maintain their control too tightly for too long, they will find their young people rebelling against their authority out of their need to assert themselves and discover who they are as distinguished from their parents.

Youth are also looking at themselves to discover what abilities and potentialities they have. They are asking questions like: How physically attractive am I? What can I do well? How normal am I? How can I come to terms with my defects and shortcomings? What kind of person do I want to become? What gifts has God given me and how can I develop and use them?

As their Sunday school teachers, we can play an important role in helping youth form their identity. Because they need to establish themselves as persons independent of their parents, they are looking for other adults whom they can trust, to whom they can tell their problems, and who will support them in their first efforts to take responsibility for themselves. We can affirm their worth, show confidence in their abilities, accept them with their shortcomings and their rebellion, and give them responsibilities so they can learn to stand on their own feet.

4. Youth like to belong to groups.

Although they are striving to become independent from their parents, young people still need the support of others. So, they turn to other young people to find companionship, understanding, and models and guidelines for their behavior. They would rather be out with their friends than stay at home with their parents. They desperately need to feel accepted

by those their own age, and will conform to their expectations and ways of doing things in order to win this acceptance. In order to belong to a group or clique, they will dress as their friends dress, adopt their typical ways of speech, go to the same places and do the same things, even when this means violating their parents' standards and risking their parents' disapproval. This means that they are forming their identity and determining their ways of thinking and acting for a long time to come.

The youth Sunday school class or church youth group can provide this sense of belonging and acceptance for young people. As teachers, pastors, or youth leaders, we can see to it that the church offers a kind of "home away from home" for youth. We can help them find friendship, understanding, and support among a group of Christian friends. Here their need for acceptance will have positive rather than negative effects, for the ways of thinking and behaving which they adopt from their friends will be wholesome and Christian.

5. Youth need to learn cooperation and mutual trust.

In much of their experience in life up to this point, young people will have learned a competitive attitude and approach to others. In their family, if there was not enough food or money to go around, it was the quicker and more aggressive child who got the most. In school, especially at examination time, they studied hard in order to get a higher grade and rank in class than their fellow students. In sports, they have been rewarded for being able to run faster or score more goals than others. At home, their parents have praised

those who work harder and get more done, while scolding or punishing those who lag behind.

It is important for young people to feel that they have abilities, can accomplish things, and are worthy of the praise of others, for this is the basis of self-esteem. But it is equally important that they learn to trust, help, share with, and work together with others. In the church we can emphasize cooperative rather than competitive activities, in order to counteract the prevailing emphasis on competition in our society. In our classes and youth groups, we can propose projects which require cooperation, and utilize the varying abilities of all in achieving a common goal. We can encourage youth to plan together, to share their talents and resources with others, to show appreciation for each other's gifts, and to confide their problems and concerns to one another.

6. Youth have a growing interest in the opposite sex.

As their bodies develop, they become fascinated with the physical features of boys and girls, and are eager to learn about sexuality. They find themselves attracted to members of the opposite sex. Whereas at an earlier age they tended to associate mostly with friends of their own sex, now they will seek friends of the opposite sex, first in groups and later on in pairs. When boys and girls have frequent association with each other, their sexual urges are stimulated and they will want to experience physical contact. Parents and other adults may try to forbid or restrict this, but because of their curiosity, strong sexual drives, and

sometimes budding love for one another, young people will usually find ways of expressing some degree of physical intimacy.

The church cannot ignore this need and characteristic of young people. We must teach them the physical facts about sexuality, along with an emphasis on the Biblical teaching that sex is wholesome and good, but that sexual intercourse is to be reserved for the loving relationship of marriage. We can teach Christian attitudes toward sex, such as respect for other persons, the body as temple of the Holy Spirit, and a balance between the spiritual and physical aspects of boy-girl relationships. We can also provide wholesome, supervised opportunities for boys and girls to be together in various church activities, in which they can learn to appreciate one another for personal and intellectual qualities, as well as physical, and learn to relate to each other as whole persons and not just as bodies.

7. Youth are planning and deciding for the future.

Youth is a time for hopes and dreams. Their whole life lies before them and they must plan what to do with it. Depending on how much schooling is available to them, they are deciding how and where to go to get the education they want. What level of education will they strive for? What skills will they try to develop? What career track will they choose? How can they have a better life? How can they come to terms with the limitations of their situation and find joy and purpose in the life that lies ahead of them? Whom will they marry and where will they live? All these questions and more are buzzing around in young people's heads and they are wondering how and when they will all get settled.

Such decisions are more wisely made in consultation with others, and we as youth leaders and Sunday school teachers must be willing to spend time with our young people helping them think through their options and plan for the future. We must be careful, however, not to tell them what to do, for this will undermine their growing sense of independence and responsibility. Rather, we must listen as they talk out their hopes and plans, help them sort out the pros and cons of the various possibilities, and show our confidence in them to make and pursue their own decisions. We can also assure them of the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit as they move into the future, and encourage them to pray and seek God's will for their plans and decisions.

E. WHAT ARE ADULTS LIKE?

1. Adults are developing too.

Often we think of adults as being "grown up", no longer needing or wanting to change. But such a view unnecessarily limits the potential of adults to grow and become more like the persons God created them to be. Just because one stops growing bigger and taller does not mean that one has no further possibilities for gaining new knowledge, developing new skills, deepening one's understandings, or changing the direction of one's life. The decision to become a Christian, perhaps the most radical change that can take place in any one's life, can happen at any age. As one grows older, one takes on new responsibilities and meets new situations, such as marriage, parenthood, and work. Each of these requires the adult to grow, develop, and change. And, if one remains faithful in the Christian life, one finds

that the Holy Spirit is constantly guiding one into a new and deeper experience with God.

When we realize this need of adults to continue to grow, we know that Sunday school classes for adults are essential. Depending on the needs of the adults in your congregation, your church may wish to provide learning opportunities in such areas as agriculture, nutrition, health care, family planning, Christian parenting, accounting, community organization, caregiving, witnessing, church leadership training, Bible study, or Christian doctrine. It is the task of the church to provide resources to enable persons to develop in the image of God, whenever these are not available from another source, and whether they deal with the betterment of life in the physical, mental, social, or spiritual realm.

2. Adults find it harder to change.

Having emphasized that adults can continue to grow and change, we hasten to point out that adults have built up resistance to change, as well. They have already learned to think and do things a certain way, and they feel secure and comfortable with these patterns. It is difficult for them to change, because these habits already have developed deep memory traces in the brain, and to try things another way will require replacing these with new ones. Also, their habits may be based on the customs and traditions of their parents and ancestors, in whom they place great trust, whereas they may still have doubts about those leaders who are trying to teach them new ways. As teachers and leaders we must be sensitive to the need for security which motivates resistance to change, and respect

the right of adults to remain as they are if they wish. We must not expect them to accept new ideas too quickly or easily, and we must not try to force them to change.

As Christians, however, we worship a God who said, *"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"* (Isa. 43:18-19). We are called to follow the example of Abraham, who *"by faith...went out, not knowing where he was to go"* (Heb. 11:8). We hear Jesus saying to us, *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:62). As His disciples, we must be willing to change ourselves in order to become more like Him. And it is our task to be agents of change, working to enable other persons to change and grow, and to transform conditions in our world so that God's Kingdom may come and God's will be done, *"on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matt. 6:10). We follow in the footsteps of the disciples who *"turned the world upside down"* (Acts 17:6). Adults will be encouraged and empowered to change when they are led to feel secure in relationships of confidence and trust. Only as persons change can they become better and their situation in life be improved.

3. Adults have experience and wisdom, which can be a resource for the learning of others. Adults have already lived awhile, and have ideas and skills which they can teach others. Also, they can base new learning on the experience they have already acquired. When teaching adults, we know they already have some foundation on which we can base

the new thoughts or ways of doing things we want to help them learn. They already know how to work the soil, or work with figures, or prepare food, or sing hymns, or run a meeting, or reach a group decision. We can start with the abilities and insights they already have, and lead them from these to understand, accept, and practise some new ways related to them.

Also, we can ask them to contribute their wisdom and skill to the teaching of the young. If they know how to make chairs, they can be asked to make some new chairs for the school or Sunday school. If they know how to sing in harmony, we can invite them to teach songs to the children. They can use their ability to prepare food in making snacks for a Vacation Bible School. They can contribute their experience and skill in cooperative work projects such as building a new room onto the church or mission ventures like evangelizing a new neighborhood. And some with ability or interest in teaching, may be recruited and trained as Sunday school teachers.

4. Adult learning is motivated by need.

Unlike children, who can learn much in school at the suggestion and under the guidance of a teacher, adults learn best when prompted by a sense of need. When faced by a problem they look for a solution, and in the process learn what they need to in order to overcome the difficulty. If they are sick, they want to learn how to get well. If discouraged, they are ready to discover new hope. When a conflict develops, they are open to learning ways of resolving it. When life seems pointless or the future dark, they are ready to listen to a Gospel which offers a sense of purpose and direction.

Knowing this about adult learning, we can take care to plan our teaching to be directly related to the problems and difficulties they are facing. Both the Biblical teaching we offer and the practical training we provide must be designed to meet the needs which adults are feeling, whether spiritual, social, or emotional. This is the way Jesus taught. He was sensitive to the various needs of different people, and varied his approach to them so as to speak meaningfully to their need. He healed the bodies of some, and forgave the sins of others. He angrily denounced the sins of the scribes and Pharisees, because they needed to be confronted. But *"when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"* (Matt. 9:36). He talked philosophy with Nicodemus, laid heavy demands on the rich young ruler, and went home to supper with Zacchaeus. He taught His disciples to *"be wise as serpents and harmless as doves"* (Matt. 10:16).

As His followers, we need to learn from Him how to be sensitive to the needs of our students, and to adapt our teaching so as to speak to their problems and provide them with resources to overcome them.

In this chapter we have described the teachings of the Christian faith about the nature and potential of persons. We have discussed the insights of psychology about basic human needs and what this says about our approach as teachers. And, we have looked at the general characteristics of children, youth, and adults, and the implications of these for our teaching. It now remains for you to try to understand your students in the light of these principles. But keep in mind that each person in

your class is unique, and needs to be understood and related to as an individual. If God knows when each sparrow falls to the ground (*Matt. 10:29*), we can at least try to know and care for each person in our class as a unique person created by God.

F. QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean for persons to be created in the image of God? List the attributes of God mentioned in the Bible. To what extent do you and other persons you know reflect these qualities in their lives?
2. Why do people sin? What is the solution for sinful behavior?
3. Which of the basic human needs described in this chapter most strongly motivate your behavior and/or the behavior of the students in your class(es)?
4. How well do the characteristics of children, youth, or adults mentioned in this chapter fit the students in your class? Which are most prominent? Which need special attention for further cultivation?
5. How would your approach to teaching be changed if you were to focus more intentionally on the needs, characteristics, and interests of the persons in your class(es)?

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT

DO WE TEACH ABOUT?

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WHAT DO WE TEACH ABOUT?

We have been stressing that we teach persons, not subject matter. Our primary concern is the Christian growth of children, youth, and adults. This growth, or learning, takes place at several levels.

A. LEVELS OF LEARNING

1. Knowledge.

The acquiring of knowledge about the Bible and the Christian faith and life is one, but only one, aspect of this growth. We want them to learn what the Bible says, what Christians believe, what it means to be Christian, and what is involved in belonging to our particular denomination and congregation. But we are not satisfied with mere rote memorization of these things, as in a catechism class, or in preparation for a school examination.

2. Understanding.

We want persons not only to know, but to understand the meaning of what they learn. It is important to memorize: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). But we also need to help persons understand that this means that God cared enough about us to come to earth in human form in order to show us this love. And when evil people resented his kindness and concern for the poor, and defiance of authority, and put Christ to death God demonstrated the extent of the divine mercy and compassion through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Those who accept and try to express in their lives this kind of self-giving love, are given by God a new quality of life which can never die.

It is important to know the story of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt. But we must also help persons understand that this is a story of the way God helps oppressed people become liberated from the causes of their oppression and find a new life of freedom and abundance.

It is important to know that Protestants believe in the priesthood of all believers. But it is also necessary for us as Sunday school teachers to help persons understand that this means that they have direct access to God in prayer and worship, and need not go through priest or pastor; and also that they are all ministers of God, and have a responsibility to serve God and lead others to Christ. They cannot simply leave this to the pastor and evangelist.

3. The third level of learning is in attitudes. We want persons not only to gain knowledge and understanding, but to develop attitudes toward what they learn. We want them to reject sin and injustice, affirm love and liberation, and adopt an open, seeking attitude, rather than a fearful, suspicious one, toward things they do not yet understand. From the story of Joseph and his brothers we want them to learn an attitude of forgiveness and reconciliation. From learning the Ten Commandments, we hope they will acquire attitudes of love and appreciation for the goodness of God, and respect for the worth and rights of their fellow human beings. From our teaching about the Christian life, we hope they will develop a feeling of love and acceptance among family and friends, and a wholesome sense of responsibility, and a respect for the dignity and worth of all persons.

4. A fourth level of learning about which we are concerned in Christian education is commitment. Not only do we want persons to know, understand, and feel positively about the Christian faith and life; we want them to commit themselves to it and to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We want them to give themselves to Christ, and to a life of love, liberation, prayer, respect, and reconciliation. Through our teaching about God we want them to open their hearts to the Spirit and accept God's love and forgiveness. In teaching about Jesus we want them to offer their lives in service to him. As we teach about the church we hope we are laying a foundation upon which people will make a decision to unite with the church and participate in its ministry.
5. Fifth, learning must take place at the behavioral level. We want our students to become Christian not only in their thoughts, feelings, and decisions, but also in the way they live their lives. We want them to learn to act in a loving, responsible, and courageous way. In their relationships with family, friends, neighbours, and strangers, we hope they will behave in a Christlike way. We expect that the Bible verses and stories they learn, the attitudes of respect and reconciliation they acquire, and the commitments to Christ and the church they make will have a strong influence on the way they behave day by day.
6. Finally, learning involves Christian growth. We expect that our students in the Sunday school will not only gain knowledge and understanding, develop attitudes and commitments, but grow up into "*mature manhood, into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph. 4:13). There are no

diplomas or graduations in the Sunday school which signify that we have finished learning. Learning and growth carry on all throughout life. Sunday school is not limited to children and perhaps youth, for adults still need every bit as much to continue to "*grow in grace and knowledge*" (II Peter 3:18).

There is always more to know about the Bible. Some scholars spend their entire lives studying the Bible as a full-time occupation. Who are we to say we know the Bible and can stop learning about it? There is always more to understand about the Christian faith. Even St. Paul, who wrote about half the New Testament, said, "*we now see through a glass darkly*" (I Cor. 13:12). Who are we to say we understand our faith? There is always need for our attitudes toward God, other persons, work, the world of nature, material things, and ourselves, to become more wholesome and Christlike. We tend to hurt other people, to demean ourselves, to pollute the environment, and to neglect our worship and service to God. Who are we to say we do not need to develop more Christian attitudes? There is always room for deepening our commitments. We need to give ourselves more fully and wholeheartedly to God, Christ, and the church. Our behavior continually stands in need of improvement. We can always grow in making our actions more consistent with the faith we profess.

Learning is growth. We are constantly in the process of becoming "*new creatures in Christ Jesus*" (II Cor. 5:17). And our Sunday school teaching aims to help this growth take place. We want to help children grow physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually, so that they may know God at their level of understanding,

and be prepared for the time when they are ready to make a decision for Jesus Christ. We want to help youth and adults to grow in all these ways too, both before and after they make this decision. The Sunday school is a nurturing community in which Christian growth takes place.

B. WE TEACH ABOUT THE BIBLE

It should now be clear that Sunday school teaching is concerned with persons learning at six levels—knowledge, understanding, attitudes, commitments, behavior, and continuing growth. So, when we teach about the Bible, the Christian faith, and the Christian life, we are trying to help persons learn at all these levels. We now turn to a consideration of the first of these three areas of subject matter, keeping in mind that our teaching must take all six levels into account.

The Bible is the primary foundation of Christian teaching. It is the record of God's self-disclosure to humanity, before, during, and after the time of God's revelation through the earthly life of Jesus Christ. But it is not just a story out of the long ago, for God's revelation to us through the Bible continues today. It is our task as Sunday school teachers to help our students become familiar with the Bible, not simply so that they will know its stories and teachings, but so that God can speak to them through it and thereby provide guidance and meaning for their lives. God's message for us in the Bible is expressed in several different forms.

1. First there are stories. Because God is active in human life and experience, God's Word often comes to us through the stories of real life experiences of real people in the Bible. The Bible story is especially helpful to small

children, because it holds their interest and puts God's message in concrete form. But it can be equally meaningful to youth and adults. We may see ourselves in the clumsy enthusiasm of a Peter, or the devotedness of a Mary, and be reminded by Jesus' word to them to try harder to put first things first. The story of Jesus and the children will delight small children with the assurance of Jesus' love for them, and at the same time confront us as adults with the importance and worth of children. The faithfulness of Daniel and his friends, in the face of opposition and persecution from the king, points out to us the importance of our remaining faithful to God in spite of opposition from whatever source. In the story of Jacob and Esau, we may see ourselves in either the clever self-serving behavior of Jacob or the rash, stupid gullibility of Esau. But in either case we are encouraged by the way God confronted Jacob and wrestled with him, changing both his name and his nature, so that he was able to see the face of God in the face of his brother, and seek reconciliation with his brother. We find ourselves in Bible stories, and God speaks to us out of them because they are about people just like us.

2. Another avenue through which God speaks is Bible verses. Often a Bible verse will contain in a few words an important Christian truth, put in a way which is easy to remember. Of course, we must be careful not to take Bible verses in isolation from the context in which they are placed, or from the whole framework of Biblical teaching. Many Christians are led astray into accepting false doctrine by assuming that "if it's in the Bible it must be true", without bothering to test the surface meaning of a particular verse against the main body of

Biblical teaching. For example, the verse, God "*chose us in him before the foundation of the world....He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ*" (Eph. 1:4-5), seems to imply that God chooses some to be saved and some to be lost. This has led some Christians to believe that they were the chosen ones, and everyone else was going to hell. What such persons fail to notice is that later on in this same passage the writer speaks of God's "*plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth*" (Eph. 1:10). The apparent meaning of a single verse, however much it may appeal to us, must therefore be tested against the basic teaching of the passage and book in which it is found, and of the Bible as a whole.

If we do this carefully, however, we will find many Bible verses which do express basic Biblical truths. These are good to have our students memorize week-by-week, so that they will gradually build up in their minds a set of Bible verses which will summarize for them some of the main beliefs of the Christian faith. When we do this, of course, it is important to spend time explaining what all the words in the verse mean, and relating the message of the verse to their daily experience. This way the verse, in addition to being a set of words which they can recite to demonstrate their Bible knowledge, will become a resource to nurture their growth in faith.

Keep in mind also that there are only a few selected verses which are suitable for small children to learn, because most verses in the Bible contain words which children are not yet able to understand. Examples of such verses are: Jesus said, "*Let the children come*

to me" (Mark 10:14); "The heavens are telling the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1); "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10); and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). It is better to hold other familiar verses which are more difficult to understand, such as *John* 3:16, *Rom* 5:1, *II Cor.* 5:17-18, and *Gal.* 3:28, until we have students old enough to understand and relate them to their lives.

3. Another approach to Bible study is to look at passages which deal with a particular subject or theme. The same cautions and guidelines which were discussed above should be observed here as well. Passages should be selected with a view to the capacity of our students to understand them. And the interpretation we make must be checked against the central message of the book and the principal teachings of the Bible as a whole. Examples of passages which lend themselves well to this kind of study are the love chapter (*I Cor.* 13), the Beatitudes (*Matthew* 5-7), the explanation of the new birth by Jesus to Nicodemus (*John* 3:1-8), Isaiah's visit to the temple which provides a pattern for worship (*Isaiah* 6:1-8), and *Psalms* 8, 23, and 46.
4. If our students are older youth or adults, a fruitful way of leading them in Bible study is to examine a whole book of the Bible. This involves trying to learn as much as we can about who wrote the book, why it was written, who the first readers were, what the problems or questions it is intended to answer were, and what its major emphases or teachings are. It may also be useful to try to outline the book, so we can help our students follow the line of argument of the author. First, we must study the book carefully ourselves—with the help of

a reliable commentary if possible—and try to discover as much as we can about the above matters and the meaning of each paragraph and verse. Then we lead our class through the book, a paragraph or section at a time, asking them what they think it means before we share with them our interpretations. Some helpful questions to ask in this kind of Bible study are the following:

—What do you think the author is trying to say? Put the main idea of this verse or passage into your own words.

—To what problem or situation in our own lives and society does this passage speak?

—What is God trying to say to me/us through this passage?

—How would my life have to change if I were really to try to live according to this message?

—How would I try to explain the message of this book to a friend who has never read it?

Here are some books of the Bible which are good to study in this way: Genesis, Exodus, Job, Amos, and Jeremiah in the Old Testament; Mark, Acts, Galatians, Philippians, and I John in the New Testament.

5. Another helpful way of studying the Bible is to look at the images which Jesus and others use to convey Christian truths. Small children and others who do not read well, may tend to think in pictures and respond better to images than to words. Here is a short list of Biblical images and what they represent. See if you can think of some others to add to this list.

- a. The pillars of cloud and fire in the desert represent God's leadership of the people of Israel through difficult and dangerous situations.
- b. The two tablets of stone represent the Ten Commandments, or God's will for how people should live.
- c. The plumb line of Amos represents God's justice against which will be measured people's obedience to God's law.
- d. The light of the world stands both for Jesus and how he lightens up our lives and for our responsibility to witness and live for him.
- e. The mustard seed speaks of how our faith starts small but grows and spreads.
- f. The dove represents peace.
- g. The cross speaks of the crucifixion of Jesus out of his great love for us.
- h. The tongues of flame come out of the story of Pentecost and suggest the great power which comes to us when we are inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- i. Jesus used the image of new wine in old wineskins to speak about how the gospel makes us new persons and therefore requires new patterns of life to contain and express the new spirit and attitudes which he brings into our hearts.
- j. The family or household of God describes the relationship of mutual love and service which should characterize the church of Jesus Christ.

These and other Biblical images give us another set of windows through which to understand God's revelation to us in the Bible. We can draw them on paper or the blackboard and let our students respond to them at the feeling level, rather than relying on words as we do in most of our teaching.

6. Still another approach to the Bible is to study the lives of the people of the Bible. Characters like Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph, Moses and Miriam, Deborah and Samson, David, Jeremiah, Ruth, Peter, Stephen, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and many others, all were real people with real problems, whose lives were touched by God. As we read about them we realize how much we are like them, how much we need to experience the touch of God as they did, and how willing God is to reach into our lives and guide and heal us as He did them. We can find ourselves in the Bible by discovering how much we have in common with people like Zacchaeus, Job, Esther, or the man lying by the pool of Bethesda.
7. Finally, we can study the major themes of the Bible. This will involve tracing a key idea through the Bible to discover how God has led people's growth in understanding the divine will for them. Such Biblical themes as creation, sin and forgiveness, the covenant people of God, God's action in history, the suffering servant, stewardship, and God's concern for justice and liberation of the poor, may be studied in this way. Because these and other themes are found throughout the Bible, they may be considered central to the Biblical message. As such, we need to try to understand how they develop from the beginning to the end of the Bible. Once we have done this, we can test our interpretation of other verses or passages in terms of how consistent they are with these basic emphases.

Whatever approach to Bible study we take with our students, it is essential that we engage in it prayerfully. When we ask God to reveal

to us the message in the Bible, and remain open to listen to what He is saying to us, we can be sure that the Spirit will guide our understanding and growth as we read the Word of God. We will find our minds enlightened, our lives judged and challenged, and our hearts inspired as we study the Bible.

C. WE TEACH ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

We want our students to learn the basic teachings of the Christian faith. These are perhaps best summarized in the Apostles' Creed, which has been used by Christians since the early centuries to affirm their faith. At some point in Sunday school, perhaps when children become 12 or 13 years of age, we will want to help them memorize this important Creed. But we must at the same time help them understand its meaning. Let us look briefly at each part of the Creed, and discuss what these historic words mean for us in our day.

1. We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

This summarizes our belief that God is a loving parent who accepts, forgives, and cares about us. God is like the good shepherd who searches for the one lost sheep. He is like the good father who welcomes back with open arms the prodigal son. God knows when even one sparrow falls, and cares very much about what we do and what happens to us. But this same God is the all-powerful Creator of the universe, who has made the sun, moon, and stars, the mountains and seas, and the trees and animals, and has created every human being in the divine image. God also has the power to shape events in history in ways which accomplish the divine purpose. But God willingly restrains this power in order to allow persons to be free to choose voluntarily to

follow God's will and way. Of course, this means that we are free to choose to disobey and follow our own selfish fancies as well, which is why there is so much sin and suffering in the world.

2. And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

We believe that this loving, all-powerful God showed love for us by coming to earth in human form. This was Jesus of Nazareth, who was the Messiah (Christ is the Greek word for Messiah, or anointed one) for whom the Jews had been looking for centuries. Although fully a human being, Jesus embodied God's forgiving love, healing power, and profound understanding in a special way which has caused us to think of him as the Son of God and to worship and follow him as our Lord and Savior. We celebrate His birth at Christmas time, when we are reminded of His full humanness by the fact that He was born to a humble peasant mother in a hillside hut in the presence of donkeys, cows, and sheep, with His first worshippers simple shepherds from the countryside. At the same time the bright star, angel chorus, and visit of the wise men remind us that His was a special birth of a special person, the Spirit of God Himself come to earth in the form of a carpenter's son.

We further believe that when this boy grew up He revealed to us what God is like through His life of compassion, His teaching about the Reign of God, and His ministry of healing, forgiving, and confronting the rich and powerful of His time who were exploiting the poor, abusing their power, and corrupting the

worship of God to serve their own ends. This brought Him into disfavor with the religious and political authorities, who caused Him to be crucified as a common criminal. Because He lived for God and other persons, we believe that He gave His life to us too, and that His death shows the lengths to which God is prepared to go to save us from our lives of sin, selfishness, and despair.

3. The third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

We remember Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection during the Holy Week and Easter season each year. We feel sad, penitent, grateful, and then glad, as we think first of how cruel human beings can be to each other, even to One who loves us so much, then of our own sin and unfaithfulness, and then of how God in Christ forgives us and promises us life abundant and eternal through His victory over death. We believe that the risen Christ reigns over all creation, and that earthly history is moving toward a climax in which His power and authority will be revealed to all people, with those who have disregarded Him in this life to be judged, and those who have sought to be faithful to Him rewarded.

4. We believe in the Holy Spirit.

The God who created the universe, and who has become known to us in Jesus Christ, does not leave us alone. God's Spirit is present with us constantly, offering us guidance, judgment, comfort, and strength. We refer to this activity of God in our hearts and lives as the Holy Spirit.

5. The holy catholic church.

When Jesus left the earth He commissioned the disciples, and the church which they established, to carry on the work of preaching, teaching, healing, and ministering to the needs of all people. This church has now spread all over the world. The word "catholic" does not refer just to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the Body of Christ wherever it is seeking to be faithful to Christ's mission and ministry. The church is holy, not because there is anything mysterious or magical about it, but only because it is called and commissioned (which is what "sanctified" means) to do God's work in the world.

6. The communion of saints.

The word "saints" is used in the New Testament to refer, not to a few special people who live holy lives and are to be revered above other human beings, but to the people of God, the Christian congregation. Thus, Christians are all saints in this sense, and in the church we have a deep and meaningful fellowship with each other. Because we love God, are forgiven in Christ, and are engaged together in His ministry of witness and service to others, we have a special relationship to one another which is rich and rewarding, and a demanding mission to make Christ known and followed throughout the world.

7. The forgiveness of sins.

As human beings we recognize that we tend to be proud and self-centered, to be callous to the needs and hurts of others, to be disobedient to God, and thus to fall short of what God intends us to be. However, in Christ we know that we are accepted and loved, and that God forgives us of our sinfulness, and gives us

search for truth than that we agree with one another on a single interpretation of truth. Jesus said, *"By this all persons will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:35).

Our aim as Sunday school teachers is both to help our students understand the doctrines of the church as historically taught, and at the same time to enable them to think, question, and discover for themselves the truth of God which they can affirm as the foundation for their lives. For Christian faith is not a body of belief to be passed on woodenly from one generation to the next. Rather, it is a living, growing commitment in the lives of individuals, which is made out of an active search for meaning and purpose. Our role as teachers is to help our students engage in this search, find this meaning, and make this commitment.

D. WE TEACH ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, he replied, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets"* (Matt. 22:37-40). Although brief and requiring interpretation for the specific circumstances of our everyday lives, this statement forms a foundation for our teaching about the Christian life. For of equal importance with helping our students in their search for and understanding of Christian belief, is the need to help them understand and practise daily Christian discipleship. This involves an effort to be faithful and responsible in our relationships with God, other people, and ourselves.

strength to become new persons who are empowered by grace to live faithful lives devoted to Christ's service in meeting the needs of those about us.

8. The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. We believe that the life we begin in the Spirit when we accept divine forgiveness and start living for Christ, will never end. As Christ was raised from the dead, so will be all who put their trust in Him and seek to love and serve Him faithfully. The loving fellowship which we enjoy with God and God's people in this life will continue after death and through all eternity. We further believe that it is God's purpose and plan to find a way to re-unite the whole creation in Christ in the fullness of time.

Although the above represents a statement of faith to which many generations of Christians in many countries and denominations have subscribed, there are bound to be differing interpretations of these words and phrases. Because our backgrounds and experiences differ, we inevitably understand things differently. You or some of your students may disagree with the way some of these beliefs have been explained in these pages. The important thing for us as teachers to remember is that this is all right. In fact, we want to encourage our students to think for themselves whether they agree with us or not. The response which God wants from us is not blind, submissive acceptance of the views of religious authorities, but rather a thoughtful, probing quest for deeper understanding. Jesus most often taught by raising questions which caused His hearers to re-examine their assumptions, rather than by giving stock answers for them dutifully to accept. It is more important that we accept and support one another in our

1. Our relationship with God.

The Christian life is grounded in our response to God's redeeming (forgiving and accepting) love for us. We love because God first loved us. Although God's love for us is steadfast and enduring, it requires continuing effort on our part to cultivate our relationship with God. We need to develop and maintain a regular practice of prayer, Bible study, and participation in the worship and fellowship of the church. As Sunday school teachers, we need to help our students understand the importance of personal devotions and corporate worship. We further must help them find resources, discover devotional methods, and understand the purpose and process of worship, so that they may continue to grow in their spiritual lives. And also they will need our support and guidance in developing and maintaining the habits and practices of regular prayer and worship. A careful study of *Matthew 6:1-18* will provide helpful guidelines for a faithful, growing prayer life. *Isaiah 6:1-8* offers a basis for understanding a sound and balanced approach to worship, involving the adoration of God, confession of sin, acceptance of forgiveness, call to service, and response in dedication to faithful life and witness. We can help our students grow in their relationship with God by studying with them these passages, and such other scriptures and devotional helps as are available and helpful in nurturing their spiritual lives.

2. Our relationship with other persons.

The second aspect of Christian life is our love and concern for other persons. *"If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"* (*1 John 4:11*). The Christian is called to love everyone—stranger as well as family member,

those who treat us badly as well as fellow Christians, and those of other social classes as well as those of our own. Christian love is not just a warm, friendly feeling for one another. Rather, it involves us in active service on behalf of the welfare of others. Jesus as the suffering servant, washing the disciples' feet or healing the lame and blind, is our example. He announced his ministry with the words, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"* (Luke 4:18-19). To faithfully live the Christian life means that we will make such action a priority for us as well.

In the Christian life, we seek to be honest in all our dealings with people, to tell the truth, be fair and just, and share our food, clothing, and money with those in need. It means that we will stand for the right and the good, even when other people ridicule and persecute us for it. It means that we will work to right the wrongs of a society which imprisons people unjustly, keeps people in poverty and bondage, and allows people to suffer and die unnecessarily from illness, malnutrition, or polluted air and water. It means that we will give our time, money, and energy that people's lives may be more joyful and whole—visiting the sick, providing food, medicine, and education, or simply offering a listening ear and an understanding heart when another is frightened or discouraged. It means that every action we take will be considered in the light of how it will affect other people, and out

of concern that their loads be lightened, their road made easier, and their spirits lifted, by the way we live our lives.

As Sunday school teachers we will teach such a loving, faithful Christian life both by our words in the classroom and our example in everyday life.

3. Our attitude toward ourselves.

Finally, the Christian life is one in which we learn to respect ourselves, develop our abilities, acknowledge our limitations, care for our bodies, and dedicate our gifts and energies to God's glory and human welfare. As children of God and persons for whom Christ died, we know that we are precious in God's sight, and hence do not degrade or humiliate ourselves. Instead, we are grateful to God for giving us strong bodies, alert minds, and perhaps special talents for speaking or writing, singing or painting, building or carving, or understanding and caring for other people. With thanksgiving for these gifts of God, we offer to develop them by getting whatever practice and training are available, and then using them in God's service.

At the same time, we recognize that we are not perfect. We are not as intelligent as someone else, not as artistic or musical as other people, not as patient or unselfish or dependable as others may be. And, too, we know that we are sinful creatures, not living up to the image of God in which we are created, not being the kind of persons God intends us to be. We may not have as much money as the rich, as much education as the cultured, as much talent as the famous, or as

much grace as the saintly. But we are who we are, and God accepts and loves us as we are. And God also wants us to love and accept ourselves for who we are. Only as we do so will we become free from the false humility or low self-esteem which prevents us from fulfilling the plan God has for us.

Our task as Sunday school teachers is to treat our students with the same attitudes of trust, respect, and appreciation which we want them to develop for themselves. We will tell them of God's love and acceptance, point out and encourage the development of their abilities, affirm their worth as persons, accept their shortcomings, help them learn proper health care and nutrition, and encourage them to offer themselves *"as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship"* (Rom 12:1).

Hopefully, the Sunday school lesson material we use will offer a balanced emphasis on all the points of Christian teaching discussed in this chapter. But whether it does or not, we as teachers must make sure that we teach about the Bible, the Christian faith, and the Christian life in roughly equal proportions. And we must likewise take care that our teaching helps students not only acquire knowledge in these areas, but also develop Christian understanding, form Christian attitudes, make Christian commitments, develop habits of Christian behavior, and grow in Christian grace.

E. QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Take one or more of the Bible stories, verses, passages, images, or themes mentioned in this chapter and explore the aspects of knowledge,

understanding, attitude, commitment, behavior, and growth that you would want your students to learn.

2. Select a book of the Bible and look up and answer the questions about it suggested in section B-4 of this chapter.
3. Examine and evaluate your lesson materials in terms of how well they foster learning at each of the levels of knowledge, understanding, attitudes, commitment, behavior, and ongoing growth.
4. Think of your class in the light of how well they respond to and learn from Bible stories, verses, passages, books, images, characters, and themes. Which do you need to emphasize in your future teaching?
5. How do you respond to the above interpretation of each part of the Apostles' Creed? How would you explain them differently?
6. Which aspects of the Christian life need particular emphasis in your class? Which aspects do you tend to stress?

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW

DO WE TEACH?

CHAPTER FIVE.

HOW DO WE TEACH?

In enabling our students to learn we can use a variety of methods. In preparing our lesson plans, we must repeatedly ask: what methods should we use which are most suitable to the age group we are teaching, and which are most likely to help them learn what we hope they will learn? In order to determine how to teach, we must first try to understand how persons learn. For, unless we use teaching methods which really help persons learn, our teaching will be in vain.

A. WAYS PERSONS LEARN

1. Persons learn by repetition.

There are some things which are best learned by doing or saying them over and over until they become part of us. Small children learn to walk by using their muscles and limbs over and over until they are able to put one foot before the other. They keep on practising until able to walk quickly and surely. We learn to ride a bicycle by practising over and over until we have mastered it. We memorize a Bible verse by saying it over and over until we can repeat it at a moment's notice. We learn the words of a song by singing them repeatedly until they are fixed in our minds. Sometimes in school we prepare for a lesson or examination by repeating the facts we are supposed to know until we can readily recall them. (Unfortunately, however, in this case, once the examination is over we tend to forget them very rapidly.)

Repetition is useful primarily for learning mechanical skills and for memorizing facts and knowledge. As such, it has only a limited

use in the Sunday school, for we are concerned not simply with the acquisition of knowledge, like filling a jug with water, but rather with understandings, attitudes, values, commitments, behavior change, and growth of the whole person, as discussed in Chapter Four. However, memorizing is a useful method for learning songs and Bible verses, so long as it is used together with other methods which enable our students to understand and practise in their lives what they are learning.

2. Persons learn through conditioning.

We tend to respond positively to those things which bring us pleasure, and negatively to those which bring us pain. When we are rewarded for an action we tend to repeat it, while when we are punished we try to avoid that behavior in the future. Children learn what is right and what is wrong in terms of whether their parents approve or disapprove of what they do. We are conditioned to think, act, and feel in certain ways by the praise or blame we receive from parents, teachers, and leaders in our community. When we are rewarded for helping our parents, or singing in harmony, or reciting a Bible verse, or attending school regularly, we tend to adopt these behaviors as part of our way of living. When we are punished or scolded for talking out of turn, or being lazy, or wearing dirty clothes, we try to avoid doing these things anymore in order to escape the unpleasantness that goes with them.

Psychologists have discovered that some forms of conditioning are more effective than others. For one thing, reward is more effective than punishment in encouraging learning. Persons tend to react negatively to the one who punishes

or condemns them. Their feelings of anger, fear, and resentment, cause them to resist their suggestions and refuse to accept their ideas. This blocks learning, and makes the person who scolds and punishes an ineffective teacher. Conditioning methods which make learners feel happy and good about themselves are more effective in helping persons learn.

Among rewards, the ones which work best are those which grow out of the learning experience itself. These are to be preferred over rewards which are brought to the experience from the outside. For example, to stick stars on a chart, or give candy or prizes to Sunday school children, for regular attendance, memorizing Bible verses, or bringing a friend, is to give a reward and may well encourage the desired behavior. But the rewards are not directly related to the learnings we want them to acquire. As a result, when we stop giving such rewards they may stop coming or memorizing. And what they will learn from such a practice is that competition is Christian and that the church is the place to go to, to get a hand-out. A far better reward is to make the Sunday school class so interesting that they will want to come of their own accord. If Sunday school is a place where they feel loved and accepted, where they experience the excitement of new discoveries, and where they have happy times together with other Christians, they will learn that the church is this kind of community, and will be conditioned to want to participate in it for what it means to them personally.

Conditioning is best used as a teaching method to help persons develop the habits and attitudes of Christian living. We can help our students learn the practices of regular church attendance,

faithful stewardship of time and money, daily devotions, and helpfulness to others, by letting them experience the joy and satisfaction of these ways of living.

3. Persons learn through association.

We learn by relating the unfamiliar to things we already know. We associate new facts and ideas with experiences or knowledge which is already a part of us. It is very difficult for us to learn things which seem to have no connection to our present lives or what we already know and are comfortable with.

So, it is important for us as teachers to find and point out the connection between what we are trying to teach and the life experiences and present knowledge of our students. We must help them associate the lives and events of people in Bible times with what they do and the situations they encounter in their everyday lives. The experience of Isaac meeting Rebecca at the well, and of Jesus talking with the woman at the well, can be related to their experience of going shopping. They can be helped to see the parallels between Jesus' feeding the hungry, healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, and casting out demons, and the physical and spiritual needs of their own people and their responsibility to help them. They perhaps can understand the similarity between the hostility in Bible times between Hebrew and Canaanite, Jew and Gentile, or Jew and Samaritan, and some of the racial or class prejudice which has caused bitterness and unhappiness among their own people. And by the same token, they can hear the Biblical plea for understanding, reconciliation, and brotherhood speaking to their own situation as well as to those of long ago.

Our students will learn about the Bible, the Christian faith, and the Christian life, only to the extent they are able to associate these things with what they already know and are familiar with in their own life experience. Each year that they attend Sunday school, they will have more background and knowledge to build on. For this reason it is important for the church to adopt a planned sequence, year by year, in our Sunday school lessons, and for each teacher to know what the others are teaching. In this way, as each teacher builds on the foundation laid in previous years, and associates new ideas with old knowledge, the students are led to grow in broadened experience and deepened understanding.

4. Persons learn through identification.

Another way we learn is by imitating the example of those we admire and respect. We tend to identify with people who are close to us, or appealing to us, and try to be like them. We incorporate aspects of their personality—their ways of thinking, believing, and acting—into our own identity and way of life. When we are small, we imitate our parents, grandparents, and other older persons living in our home. As we grow older and our world expands, we look to teachers, community leaders, or older youth, as models to follow. When we become young people, we change our focus and begin to identify with and imitate the behavior of those our own age. For those who participate in the church, the example of pastors, teachers, lay leaders, and older youth becomes an important avenue for learning to practise the Christian life.

One of our most important roles as Sunday school teachers is to set a Christlike example

of faith, hope, and love, for our students to follow. It is also important that we introduce them to Jesus Christ in such a way that they will come to love and admire Him and want to be like Him. When we realize that our students are wanting to identify with and imitate us, it makes us want to try very hard to be good models. We want to break down the distance which often exists between teachers and students, so they will feel free to approach us, view us as their true friends, and get to know us as real persons. We want to be available to them, so they can share with us their inner thoughts and feelings, and discuss their problems with us. We try to embody in our lives the qualities we want them to develop—qualities of *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Gal. 5:22-23). And, we want to deepen and cultivate our relationship with God, in order that these “fruits of the Spirit” may grow and manifest themselves in us.

5. Persons learn by doing.

There is no substitute for just trying things out as a means of learning. The process of trial-and-error and try-and-succeed is essential to lasting learning and growth. We cannot learn for our students; nor can we make them learn. They must learn for themselves, and to do so we must give them the chance to explore, experiment, and try things out on their own. We can provide our guidance, suggestions, and support, but they will learn best if they are free to face, think through, and solve problems for themselves.

In the Sunday school, they will learn to draw by drawing for themselves, not by us drawing pictures on the blackboard for them to look at

or copy, or by us outlining pictures for them to color in. And in that process they will discover and develop their own artistic talents. Similarly, they will develop their reading ability by reading for themselves, rather than having us read to them or tell them what is in the book. They will learn about God's handiwork in the world of nature by going with us for a walk in a garden, much better than by hearing us talk about it or even reading about it in a book. They will learn about Christian discipleship by being given the chance to express it in their group, through visiting the sick, engaging in a service project, or making wall hangings to brighten the homes of the poor. They will learn to pray by praying, to sing by singing, and to plan and lead their own worship and discussion by participating with us in preparing for and leading in these experiences. They will learn to make wise decisions by being given responsibility to choose for themselves. And they will learn cooperation, teamwork, and compromise through struggling together to work out their plans and projects in a spirit of Christian concern and fellowship.

6. Persons learn through discovery.

We cannot give our students an insight; they must find it for themselves. They learn by facing and asking questions much better than through being given answers. If our students have not had their curiosity blunted, and if they have been encouraged to inquire rather than simply accept the views of others, they will pick up clues and see new connections on their own, and have the joy of discovering things for themselves. Such learnings will be prized and remembered because they are their own! They will enjoy and be stimulated by the experience of figuring something out or

thinking it through for themselves, either individually or in a group discussion.

We can help our students learn through discovery by planning classroom experiences which allow them to think and do for themselves. We can bring materials and let them make a Palestinian house, create a puppet play, or germinate a seed. We can pose a problem, such as how our group can help those in need, or why God lets things like floods and hurricanes happen, and let them think out solutions and answers for themselves, finding guidance in the Bible by searching for it. We can adopt a teaching style of asking questions to provoke thought and discussion, rather than giving answers and telling them what to think.

There is an art to asking questions which stimulate learning by discovery, and as Sunday school teachers we must learn to do it well. There are several ways of asking questions; some encourage discovery and some do not. Here are some different types of questions:

a. Recitation questions.

These are questions over material which the students are supposed to have studied. We expect them to give answers from the book—not their own answers. This type of question helps students to remember and repeat what they have read or heard. But it does not help them understand, think, or discover things for themselves. Examples of recitation questions are: What hill did Paul preach on in Athens? What did Jesus say to Zacchaeus up in the tree? Who was Moses' brother? Which disciples were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration?

b. Guessing questions.

Sometimes we have a point in mind which we want to get across, but we do not want to say it ourselves. We want to get our students to say it instead. So, they have to guess what is in our minds, and each time they give the wrong answer, we say "no", and ask another student to try to guess. This has the effect of causing our students to try to figure out what we are thinking, but it does not encourage them to think for themselves. In fact, it teaches them to value the ideas and opinions of the teacher above their own. Examples of guessing questions are: Which verse in this chapter contains the key idea of the whole chapter? Why did Paul write the letter to the Galatians? Who was the most important figure in the history of the Protestant Church? Why is it wrong to work on a Sunday?

c. Yes and no questions.

Was David Saul's son? Was Hosea married? Was Babylon a city in the Holy Land? Did Paul go to Rome? These are questions which our students can answer with either a "yes" or a "no". They serve to test their Bible knowledge, but do not stimulate them to think about the meaning behind their answers.

d. Questions which imply judgment.

Sometimes we use questions as a way of showing approval or disapproval of our students. Why were you late to Sunday school? Why is it that some students always learn their memory verse and others never do? Why were you whispering when you should have been listening? Which class members have done the most to help our

class win the attendance contest? Such questions have the effect of separating the class into the good and the bad students, causing some to feel rejected and others superior. Neither feeling is appropriately Christian, and neither contributes to a receptive learning attitude. A better approach in such situations would be to involve the whole class in facing the problem together by asking something like: What can we do to start our class on time? or help all members to learn the memory verse? or have a quiet classroom so we can all hear and participate?

e. Rhetorical questions.

Sometimes we ask questions in the midst of a talk when we do not really expect an answer, or intend to provide the answer ourselves, or assume that everyone in the class will give the answer we intend. We might ask, "How many of you want to learn more about the Bible?" expecting every hand to go up. We would be shocked and taken aback if anyone replied, "No." Or, "Did Jesus know from the beginning that He would be crucified?" Such a question is actually a very good discussion starter, as it could be argued either way. But if we intend to go right on and say, "Yes, of course," and then quote a Bible verse to prove it, we are using it as a rhetorical question and spoiling its possibilities for encouraging thought and discussion.

f. Questions which are too easy or too hard.

We need to be sensitive to the level of understanding of the group we teach, and prepare our questions so they will neither be insulted by their being too easy, nor be confused and bewildered by their being too

difficult. For example, for some classes questions like, "Who were Jesus' parents?" or "How many disciples did Jesus have?" would be too simple even to merit a reply. For perhaps the same classes, however, questions like, what is meant by justification by faith? or does God ordain some to be saved and others to be lost? would be difficult to comprehend and therefore impossible to discuss.

g. Questions which imply a certain answer.

This type of question does not encourage our students to think, but only to come up with the response we want them to make. We might ask, "Don't you think that all the denominations should cooperate better together?" or "You don't really believe in heaven and hell as physical places do you?" or "Shouldn't Christians forgive their enemies as Jesus said they should?" Faced with such questions, our students have no real choice but to respond as we suggest. Even if they have a different opinion, they would hesitate to suggest it. Far from stimulating thought and discussion, such questions only induce a passive, and probably superficial, conformity to the views of the teacher.

h. Problem-posing questions.

The kind of question which encourages thought, growth, and responsibility is the kind which encourages the group to wrestle with a real issue. Why did Jesus choose to be baptized? How can we apply the parable of the good Samaritan today? Why is there so much suffering in the world? What is a Christian marriage? What does God's

liberation of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt have to do with our situation today? As teachers, we need not have complete answers to such questions, but can participate with the group in discussing them. We can help them feel that their responses are worthwhile and valued, and encourage them to go on thinking about such issues after the class session is over. It is this latter type of question which best encourages learning by discovery, for it trusts the students to explore an issue for themselves and to be responsible for their own learning. With smaller children, learning by discovery can be encouraged by asking them what they can observe and learn from such experiences as playing together, watching things grow, making a small Palestinian house, or composing a simple prayer.

B. APPROACHES TO LEARNING AND TEACHING

There are four basic ways by which persons learn—through listening, seeing, vicarious experience, and direct experience. The four corresponding categories of teaching method are telling, showing, identifying, and doing. Psychologists tell us that we learn and remember about 10% of what we hear, 30% of what we both hear and see, 60% of what we experience vicariously, and 90% of what we experience directly. This suggests that if we want our teaching to be effective, we will try not to rely on telling and showing any more than necessary, and will provide our students with as much opportunity for direct involvement in learning by doing as possible. Let us look at each of these approaches and see what the range of methods available to us in our teaching is.

1. Listening—telling.

Teacher talks, students listen. This is probably our most common method of teaching, but it is the least effective. There are some things, though, which may be best taught by telling. When we use a telling method, it is best to use one of the other methods along with it. What are some telling methods?

a. The lecture.

We prepare an outline of a particular subject and explain it systematically. We might give a lecture on such subjects as evidence for the existence of God, children and their parents, or the origins of our denominations. Any of the chapters in this book could be developed into a lecture.

b. The exposition.

We study a passage of Scripture and interpret its meaning verse by verse. At the end we suggest ways of applying it to our life and situation today.

c. The sermon.

This usually involves some explanation, interpretation, and application, but unlike the lecture and exposition, is given in a worship service and involves a challenge to better, more faithful Christian living.

d. The story.

We tell a story, either true or imaginary. It may be taken from the Bible, contemporary life, our own experience, or the everyday lives of our class members. It is better if we do not use the story to point out a moral, but leave it to the imagination and intelligence of our students to discover and apply it for themselves.

e. Giving instructions.

The telling method is also used in instructing people on how to do something. In teaching a person how to swim, how to ride a bicycle, how to prepare a worship service, or how to make a mural, considerable telling must be done. We would probably also want to do some showing, though, as it is hard for persons to visualize how to perform one of these activities simply on the basis of our spoken instructions. Can you imagine jumping into the water and trying to swim, for example, having only had a verbal description of how to go about it?

2. Seeing—showing.

Teacher shows, students watch. We could do much more of this in the Sunday school. All of the telling methods could be made more vivid if we were to illustrate them with the use of pictures, maps, diagrams, charts, demonstrations, flannelgraphs, slides, videos, and overhead transparencies. Students will have a much clearer idea of what we are talking about if we can show them a map of Paul's missionary journeys, or draw a diagram on the board of our church organization, or show a picture of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday, or demonstrate how to make a banner to decorate our church or classroom with Christian symbols or Bible verses.

3. Vicarious experience—identifying.

Although direct experience is the most effective teaching method, there are many experiences which it is impossible for our students to have. The barriers of time, lack of money, distance, language, and culture, stand

in the way of our seeing the same sights, doing the same things, or having the same experiences as people in Bible times or in other lands. However, we want our students to be able to identify with some of these people and to understand how they are both similar to and different from them. To do this, there are a number of methods which enable us to enter vicariously into the experience of others and thereby to come to understand and relate to them better, and to apply the good things from their lives to our own.

a. The story.

The story has value not only for entertainment or to embody a truth, but to make vivid the lives and characteristics of other people. If we can tell a story in such a way as to make Joseph and his brothers, or Hosea and Gomer, or David and Jonathan, or Jesus and Zacchaeus come to life, then our students will see them as persons with problems and qualities just like they have, and learn from them how to live better lives themselves. The story helps them to identify with others, come to appreciate them, and learn from them.

b. Dramatization.

Plays and skits serve better to enable persons to identify with the experience of others, for they are not just telling or hearing about it, but acting it out themselves. Whether the drama is a formal one, written, memorized, and produced, or whether it is informal, impromptu, and done by and for the class alone, it has the advantage of allowing the students to enter into the lives of other persons, and to experience life through other eyes. For

them to dramatize the story of the prodigal son, or the call of the disciples, or the Jerusalem Council (*Acts 15*), or Ruth and Naomi, or of a great Christian leader like Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa, Sophia Blackmore in Singapore, Sir Thomas More in England, or William and Evangeline Booth of the Salvation Army, will be a profound and moving experience. They will identify with some Bible characters or Christians in other lands, times, or denominations, and will take some of their qualities into their own lives and personalities.

c. Puppets.

Sometimes, instead of having our students act out stories themselves, we can have them make puppets and have the puppets dramatize the stories. Puppets can be easily made from paper bags, scraps of cloth, or simply drawn on stiff paper and attached to sticks. A puppet stage can be made from a cardboard box or school bench placed on a desk or table, with a curtain made from a piece of cloth, dress or shirt. A few students hide behind the curtain, hold the puppets in their hand, move them about on the small stage and speak their parts, while the rest of the students watch. Small children love to portray simple Bible stories like Jesus and the children, the healing of the blind man, or the boy Samuel, by this method, and thereby enter into and identify with the experiences of these Bible people.

d. Simulations and role plays.

A simulation game or role play is a contrived experience, played out in the

classroom, which is organized to be as much as possible like a real life experience. These are fun to do, which is why they are called games. But they also enable students to understand the problems others face, practise doing things they would otherwise have no chance to do, and learn to put themselves into other people's shoes. The technique is to set them a problem and let them work out and act out their own solution. For example, we might ask them to pretend they are a church council and decide on the priorities for next year's budget; or to act out how they would treat a newcomer to their class or youth group; or to be the representatives of several denominations planning a joint evangelistic campaign, or a group working through religious or ethnic differences in the community.

e. Witnessing.

Sometimes the testimony of one person about an important, life-changing experience she has had will be so engaging that those who hear it will be deeply affected. As the witness describes her experience, the listeners will be caught up in it to the point of feeling it to be their own. They identify with the witness, and have her experience vicariously. From time to time we can invite persons from church or community into our classes to bear witness to their faith and share their experience, in order that our students may see life through the eyes of others.

f. Sharing life experiences.

We can also encourage our students to share their problems and experiences with

one another. If they have quarrels with brothers and sisters, feel their parents are unfair or do not understand them, or have conflicts or problems at school, these may be shared and discussed in class. In this way, they will feel that the church and God care about them and their everyday problems, they will discover that their class members have similar problems, they will gain strength and support from each other, and they will learn how better to cope with their problems through hearing how others have handled them.

4. Direct experience—doing.

The more direct involvement our students can have in learning activities, the more permanent learning they will acquire, for they will learn by doing.

a. Doing with their hands.

Activities like drawing, painting, molding clay, and making things, make it possible for our students both to learn manual and creative skills and at the same time to learn about their world and objects in it by touching and exploring.

b. Doing with their bodies.

Activities like dancing, playing, and moving about, which allow children to use their whole bodies, permit learning through all the five senses—sight, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling. It also recognizes that learning takes place through using one's body to interact with the environment. In this kind of learning, children develop muscle coordination, a sense of rhythm, and an appreciation for their bodies and their abilities.

c. Doing with their minds.

Sunday school activities which involve students in thinking, discussing, and problem-solving, are direct experiences which develop the mind. Discussion questions such as those described above give students a chance to face, work through, and resolve real issues, both individually and in the group. This helps them develop the skills for thinking and decision-making which are basic to creative living and will make them leaders in school, church, and community.

d. Doing with the whole person.

The best learning experience of all is living in the Christian community. This involves full use of body, mind, and spirit, in learning how to live as Christians with other people. Games, sports, picnics, outings, retreats, and camps provide excellent opportunities for this kind of learning through living together with other Christians. When we give our class or group the chance to make decisions about their activities, to plan their programs, to share leadership with us, and to engage in service projects, they are involving their whole person in learning how to live as Christians. In such activities, they will learn how to share by sharing, how to give by giving, how to forgive by forgiving, how to serve by serving, and how to lead by leading.

C. HOW TO DECIDE ON WHAT METHODS TO USE

In this chapter we have described a variety of methods for use in Sunday school teaching. You may be wondering, however, how to know which methods are best to use in your class.

Here are some guidelines to help you in choosing your teaching methods. As you prepare your lesson, ask yourself the following questions about the methods you propose to use.

1. Is the method consistent with the aims of Christian education, as described in Chapter Two? Does it contribute to leading persons to know God and accept Christ? Does it help them find belonging in the church and grow in the Christian life? Does it enable them to accept themselves and appreciate and transform their world? Does it contribute to living in the Christian hope? The method need not contribute to all of these aims, but it should aid at least one of them, and should not be an obstacle to any. For example, some types of competition, if they cause some students to feel inferior or inadequate, and hence unable to accept themselves, are questionable methods for us in the church. An attendance contest which gives prizes, thus teaching that the Christian life is one of earning rewards, may block an understanding of the grace of God, and thereby prevent growth in the Christian life.
2. Does the method contribute to the objectives and theme of the particular unit and lesson we are now teaching? There are some methods which may be consistent with the general aims of Christian education, but are not helpful for the teaching of a particular subject or lesson. For example, story-telling is very appropriate for a unit on Old Testament heroes, but might not be useful at all for a lesson on using our gifts. Making a diorama (a three-dimensional picture inside a cardboard box) of Jesus feeding the 5000 is a good method for a lesson on the compassion of Jesus, but would

not contribute much to one on the spread of the early church. We need to choose methods which enable our students to acquire the knowledge, understandings, attitudes, and behavior which are being emphasized in the lesson at hand.

3. Is the method appropriate to the age group we are teaching? If it is too difficult for our class, they will not be able to do it, and either they will become very frustrated or else we will have to do it for them. If it is too easy for them, they will feel insulted, refuse to participate, and lose respect for us and the lesson we are trying to teach. For instance, if we try to get small children to discuss abstract concepts like repentance and forgiveness, they will be lost and unable to participate. Or, if we propose finger-painting (making designs with our fingers on slippery paper with a messy paint made from starch and water) to a class of teenagers, they may resent being asked to do an activity which is designed for small children.
4. Is it related to the life situation of our students? For them to participate willingly, or better enthusiastically, in a teaching-learning activity, persons must be able to see how it will help them in their everyday lives. If it offers them pleasure, understanding, or resources for coping with life, they will welcome the opportunity to join in it. Small children may tolerate mere "busy work" for a while, but the older our students are the more they will want their learning activities to contribute directly to meeting their needs, solving their problems, or enabling them to cope with life. Even for children, a story or talk about a Biblical event of long ago which

contains no application for today, will only entertain and will not help them grow in the attitudes and habits necessary for Christian living. And youth and adults will be even less interested in discussing a Bible passage or participating in a service project which promises no useful result in bettering the lives of themselves or others.

5. Do I as teacher feel confident in using this method? If I have never used it before, I should practise it on my own before trying it out with the class. Or, I could ask someone who is more experienced with it to come to my class and help with it the first time. If I do not feel that I can use the method effectively, it is probably better to wait a few weeks until I have had more practice and feel more confident. However, students do appreciate the effort we make to experiment with new methods, so we had better be willing to take some risks, even though some methods may not work out just as we have planned. If we are too timid about trying new things, we will never gain the courage to use any new methods, and our students will become bored and unresponsive. But, of course, we should avoid using a method which is beyond our competence. For example, if we have never had any experience with drama, flannelgraph, or map-making, we had better get some instruction or training ourselves before trying to use these methods with our students.
6. Is it appropriate to the physical setting of my class? Some methods require space which may not be available in your setting. If your class meets in the same room with other classes, some methods may cause too much commotion and be distracting to others.

Drawing or painting may be difficult without tables or lapboards. A dramatization or some games would require space to move about. Painting would require the availability of water. Sometimes, with some effort and consultation with other teachers, arrangements can be made to use the method you want on a particular Sunday. But there are some methods which you will probably not be able to use at all because your setting does not allow for it.

7. Are the necessary supplies and materials available? It may take some effort to secure the resources you need to use a particular method. You will need to give some advance thought and preparation to this. If you cannot get a projector and screen, you of course will not be able to use an overhead or slides. But, if you do not have a map of Palestine, you may be able to draw one on the board or on a piece of newsprint, or even on the floor with chalk. If you are resourceful, you will find that many throwaway materials can be substituted for the more expensive supplies suggested in your resource book. Cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls, buttons, cloth scraps, flowers, stones, and other common objects will be surprisingly helpful in using teaching methods of the showing and direct experience varieties.

If we want to make our teaching more interesting, and to help our students learn more readily, we will make the effort to increase the variety of teaching methods we can use effectively. This will involve some experimentation, risk, and willingness to spend extra time and effort in preparation. However, the results in the response, participation, and growth of our students will be well worth it.

D. QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Think about your own most significant learning experiences, both formal and informal, and ask which approach to learning played the most significant part in each of them—learning through repetition, conditioning, association, identification, doing, or discovery.
2. Reflect on your style of teaching in terms of which of these six avenues of learning you typically tend to depend on.
3. How can you expand your approaches to teaching so as to make it possible for your students to learn through more of these avenues?
4. Which of the eight types of questions do you most typically use? Which do you need to learn to use better and more often?
5. Does your teaching depend most on the listening—telling, seeing—showing, vicarious experience—identifying, or direct experience—doing approach? Which of these do you need to develop in order to improve your overall teaching effectiveness?
6. Which of the methods in each of these categories would you like to learn to make better use of? How can you get training and experience in using these?
7. Take your lesson for next Sunday and apply to it the seven questions for deciding what methods to use. Then select from the lists of methods in this chapter some new ones to use next Sunday which you have never used before, and incorporate them into your lesson plan.

CHAPTER SIX

WHERE

DO WE TEACH?

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The location of our teaching is called the learning environment. It has several different aspects, and can be made use of in a variety of ways to help learning take place.

A. APPROACHES TO THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. We learn much from our environment. Our surroundings, both physical and social, are continually teaching us about life and the world. The person who said that "we must interrupt our education to go to school" was referring to the fact that we are continually learning from the world around us. We observe the behavior of our parents and others, and conclude that the way they act is the way we ought to act. We see the change of seasons, hear the sound of the birds and the wind, touch the earth with our feet and many different substances with our hands, breathe in the smell of different flowers, shrubs, and animals, and taste a variety of foods. Television programs beamed into our homes shape our appetites and attitudes—from a very early age—without us even being aware of it. As we grow older, we move farther and farther away from home and become exposed to new objects, experiences, and ideas which contribute to our learning. We learn how to buy and sell, what is appropriate to do and say in various situations, and the different expectations of men and women, adults and children, workers and merchants. Our world is just one big learning opportunity. Our environment teaches.

Much of this learning takes place without effort or intention. No one is trying to teach us, and we have not set out to learn. We simply absorb these things through our five senses and by living with other people. However, there are times, whether formal or informal, when our parents or other adults set out to instruct us in certain facts or behaviors which they think we ought to know. And of course, when we go to school, we enter an environment which is supposedly designed to help us learn. However, when these things taught in school separate us from our natural environment, and either fail to equip us for more effective living in our surroundings or else turn us against it and make us want to leave it, then one must question the validity and usefulness of this type of education.

2. In the Sunday school we must make use of the natural learning environment as much as possible. Since on the average we have only one hour a week for structured teaching about the Bible and the Christian faith and life, this leaves 167 other hours in which our students are learning in other contexts. Hence, we must try to instill in them a sensitivity to the activity of God in the world around them, and an ability to relate Biblical truths to their everyday experience. We can help to develop in them an eagerness to learn and a desire for Christian growth which will enable them to experience God in ordinary everyday experience, and to try to practise Christian attitudes and habits in all their relationships. We can thus use the everyday environment of our students to help them develop their capacities and become more aware of Christian truths all around them.

3. Thirdly, not only must we recognize that the environment teaches and make use of it for Christian purposes, but we must also give attention to preparing the particular environment in which we teach. We will likely teach in either a church or a schoolroom, and may also have available the yard around these buildings. In preparing our lessons, we can give thought to how we can most effectively make use of these surroundings to contribute to our teaching aims. For example, for lessons on God's creation or love for neighbor, we can take our class on a walk through the nearby streets to observe God's handiwork or human relationships first hand. In our classroom itself, we arrange the benches or chairs, and make use of such pictures, natural objects, or writing and reading materials as are available, in such a way as to best reinforce the learnings we want our students to achieve.
4. Fourthly, we must adapt our teaching to the environment in which we live and work. We must recognize that the background, experience, and vocabulary may differ from place to place and from group to group in our country. Whether our students' parents are professionals, civil servants, laborers, or merchants, whether or not they have both parents at home, their level of education and the type of school they attend, how much they already know about the world beyond their community—these and other factors in our environment must be considered in our teaching.
5. Finally, the words and illustrations we use must be taken from the life experience of our students, and we must relate new ideas or

descriptions from the Bible to these experiences. We can help them see parallels between their own environment and the Biblical world, such as the relation between the parable of the rich man and Lazarus and their own economic situation, the similarity between their own family relationships and the rivalry between Joseph and his brothers, and the parallel between Daniel's faithfulness to God in the face of persecution and their own need to be faithful to Christ in the midst of hardship or temptation. We can make use of words like bread, light, work, water, love, and spirit, which speak of common elements in their everyday experience, and at the same time have important Biblical meanings. We can also make frequent references to Biblical images, persons, and stories with which they can readily identify. Examples would be Jesus' invitation to the disciples to follow him, the houses built on sand and rock, the call of Paul to people in Ephesus and Corinth to leave idolatry to worship Christ, the light under a bushel, and the parable of the lost sheep.

Let us now look briefly at each aspect of our environment to see how we can make use of it to contribute to our teaching aims.

B. THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical world is the world God is creating. *"The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork"* (Psalm 19:1). God uses the rain and sunshine and nutrients in the soil to make things grow. He causes the flowers to bloom, the trees to bear fruit, and babies—both animal and human—to be born. *"He has made everything beautiful in its time"* (Eccles. 3:11). We can help our students to

see the change of seasons, the human life cycle, and the miracle of human birth and the growth and healing of the body all as part of God's plan. It is not enough just to tell about these things, but we can also have them plant seeds and watch them grow, bring flowers to beautify the church or classroom, draw pictures of the sea and sky, and share their experiences with birth, growth, and death in class conversations. The Christmas story will help them appreciate God's part in human birth, and parables like the mustard seed, the wheat and the tares, and the sheep and the goats, will point up parallels between the world of nature and human experience.

In our classroom conversations with children, we can use sentences or clauses like "thank God for seeds that grow", "thank you, God, for daytime in which we work and play, and for nighttime in which we rest", and "when we are sick, O God, help us to care for each other and to get well".

Of course, we must also help our students face and understand aspects of the physical world which are not pleasant or beautiful. We can explain that God's plan is for all His people to be healthy and happy, but that sometimes human beings have upset God's plan by what they have done to the world. We can point out how floods and erosion are caused when we cut down the trees which hold in the topsoil; or, how sickness and malnutrition result when we do not observe His natural laws of sanitation, balanced diet, and care of plants and animals. We can further explain how human sin (which began with the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden) and human exploitation (which began with Cain's taking advantage of Abel) cause much suffering and hardship in the world. And we can show how God calls servants like Moses, Miriam,

Amos, Esther, black scientist George Washington Carver, and Rev Ms Cho Hwa Soon of Korea, to protest against human injustice and work for the healing and betterment of human life.

The natural environment is an important part of our students' world. We need to help them appreciate, understand and feel at home in it. We can help them to see God's creative processes at work in the world, and to work with God on overcoming natural problems and making the world a happier, healthier, more beautiful home for all God's people.

C. THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

God is also the creator of all human beings. This makes all people brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of one divine parent. God wants us to live together in peace, harmony, justice, and community, but unfortunately, again because of human sin and selfishness, we often experience quarrels, cheating, unfairness, and even brutality. Our students need both to understand and come to terms with the social world the way it is, and also to learn ways of changing it to make it more like the shalom vision of the Old Testament and the realm of God which Jesus talks about.

They will learn the ordinary patterns of human interaction through their everyday experience in home and community. They will learn how parents relate to children, boys to girls, buyers to sellers, neighbors to neighbors, and those higher on the social scale to the lower. And they will tend to imitate these patterns in their own behavior.

But the standards and values of the Christian life do not always conform to the social expectations and cultural patterns of our particular

environment. Jesus taught us to love one another, to forgive, to share, to practise justice, to give our extra cloak to a neighbor in need, and to treat all persons regardless of social status with equal concern and respect. We need to help our students see the differences between the way people treat each other in their social milieu, and Biblical standards of conduct. And we need to model for them in our church community, and in the way we relate to them, a Christian style of human interaction.

We can also make use of aspects of our social environment as teaching-learning opportunities. We can ask our students to share experiences they have in home, school, and neighborhood, and compare them with Biblical stories like the friendship of David and Jonathan, the loving relationship between teacher Eli and student Samuel, the love and concern of Mary and Joseph for the boy Jesus, the judgment of Isaiah and other prophets against the injustice and dishonesty practised by the rich against the poor (see *Isaiah* 5, for example), and Paul's criticism of the greed and idolatry of the Ephesians (see *Acts* 19).

We can help them discover the factors which make for happiness and harmony in human relationships, and to learn to practise these and avoid those which cause misery and discord. We can help them understand and appreciate people who are different from them—adults, boys or girls, people of other ethnic groups or religious traditions, and people of other colours and countries. We can encourage them to want to move beyond their own social circle and get to know other kinds of people. When there is opportunity, we can invite these varied kinds of people into our classes so our students can meet and talk with them face to face.

The human environment is also an important part of our students' world, and God's world. They need the resources of the Christian faith to help them learn to cope with it and work to transform it into the Reign of God. Unless we help them bring the teachings of the Bible into relationship with the patterns of life of their community, so they can see the contrasts and learn a new way of life, the Bible will remain a book of long ago and far away, and conditions in their community will remain unchanged.

D. THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

The family is a part of the human environment, to be sure. But because it exerts such a crucial influence on the life and growth of the child, it deserves special mention here. A child tends to think as the parents think, and act as the parents act. The child feels secure in the world to the extent that he feels the love and care of parents. The child develops such qualities of character as initiative, dependability, curiosity, honesty, and concern for others, to the extent that these are encouraged and modeled in the home. The way parents and children, brothers and sisters, and other family members interact with each other will shape the way the child relates to others outside the home.

If the beliefs and ways of living which we teach in the Sunday school are in conflict with those taught in the home, it will be difficult for our students to accept and adopt Christian ways. The influence of the family through the week will tend to counteract and undermine what we attempt to communicate on Sunday. This is not inevitable, however, for, as stressed earlier, the Holy Spirit continues to work in their hearts and lives 24 hours a day, seven days a week. God can bring about remarkable changes in attitude

and behavior, even when the conditions in home and community seem completely against it.

But the strong impact of family on the life and mind of the child points up the importance of our trying to work together with the home as much as possible in the Christian education of children and youth. We can have a parents' class in the Sunday school to help them understand ways and means of guiding the Christian growth of their children. We can hold a parents' meeting once every one or two months to show them the Sunday school materials, explain the theme and purpose of the coming lessons, and show them ways in which they can support what we are doing on Sunday by emphasizing the same things at home through the week. We can visit the homes of our students periodically, so we can see and understand their family circumstances and adapt our teaching to speak to the needs and problems thus revealed. Such visits will also point up special needs in some families with which the pastor or the resources of the church as a whole might help.

Further, we can show the importance of and standards for family life in the Bible and Christian faith. We can help our students understand the sacredness of Christian marriage, the beauty of the sexual relationship within marriage, and the way God planned for children to be born into homes where parents love each other and care for their children. Biblical examples like the care of the mother for the baby Moses, the love of Hosea for his wife Gomer, the forgiving acceptance of the loving father for the prodigal son, and the way Timothy was raised in the faith by his mother and grandmother, are very helpful in teaching these Christian patterns of family life.

But we must at the same time try to model a Christian marriage and family life ourselves, so that our students may observe how persons treat and relate to one another in a Christian home.

The family is the basic agent in the Christian nurture of children. The home and church need to work very closely together if our education of children and youth in the Christian faith and way is to be effective and lasting in its impact on their lives.

E. THE CHURCH ENVIRONMENT

Our teaching takes place within the church, understood both as the physical building and as the community of people who worship God and follow Jesus Christ. We need to give our attention to making both the building and the congregation as supportive as possible of the aims of Christian education.

You may be fortunate enough to have a classroom either in the church or in a nearby school, or perhaps a room in the home of the preacher, teacher, or a neighboring church member. Such an arrangement is to be preferred, as it allows you to work with your class alone, using some of the methods suggested in Chapter Five, without interruption or disturbance from other classes. Explore all the possibilities in your situation to try to put each class in a different room or area, in order to keep distractions to a minimum. We will discuss classroom arrangement in the next section.

The classes should be divided according to age. In most Sunday schools there should be at least four classes—one for adults, one for youth, one for school age children who can read, and one for pre-school children and the younger school children who cannot yet read. In larger Sunday

schools, more classes are needed, divided into age groups such as pre-school, ages 6-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-19, younger adult, and older adult. As a rule there should not be more than 10-15 students in a class. Even smaller classes of 6-8 students are preferable, as this allows you to give them more individual attention and permits everyone to participate in the learning activities. If you can get enough space and teachers, you could divide the students into classes of two-year spans, or even a single year.

If all you have available is your church sanctuary, which must also be used for congregational worship the same morning, you are more limited in what you can do to prepare an inviting environment for children. But there are still many possibilities other than simply sitting your students in a pew facing you and talking to them for the whole class period. When the weather is good, some classes can go out in the yard and sit under a tree for part or all of the period. You can move the pews or benches so that two face each other, or four make a square, in order that your class may be arranged as a group rather than in one or more straight lines. You can have movable room dividers built (either sheets of wood on stand or cloth curtains hung from beams), to reduce the distractions of sight and sound from other classes. You can make lap boards so your students will have something to write and draw on.

Furthermore, your Sunday school can begin collecting a set of teaching pictures, illustrating both Bible stories and the everyday life of your students, which can be put or held up during Sunday school, and then taken down and stored in a safe place afterwards. You can be sure the floor is swept clean for Sunday school, and that

the church building is neat and tidy. If the pews or benches are too high for small children's feet to reach the floor, you know they will be uncomfortable, and can plan for a variety of activities so they will not need to remain in this position for the whole period. For example, they could take a walk, play a game, improvise a dance to the tune of a simple chorus, or kneel on the floor and use the bench as a desk to draw or write on. Also, straw mats can be used so they can sit or play on the floor.

If the practice in your congregation is for the children to remain for church after Sunday school, they do not need another adult-oriented worship service during the Sunday school hour. Instead, you could have the youth and adult classes meet for the whole hour in study session, so they will have more time for discussion. Then, with the children who remain, you could have a brief worship experience, using Scripture, songs, and prayers at the level children can understand and enter into. You could even ask the older children to help in leading the worship, perhaps having the several classes take turns in planning and leading the opening or closing worship Sunday by Sunday. Actually, for pre-school children an informal or even spontaneous worship experience is more appropriate than for them to participate in the formal worship with the older children. If they can have a separate classroom or meeting place, it would be better for them to go there for the whole hour and not join in the worship with the other children. With them, you can then have brief prayers and simple songs.

Wherever your class meets, you can try to make the physical surroundings as attractive and appealing to children as possible. If the church appears to them as a pleasant, enjoyable place,

they will be eager to return every Sunday, and their first impressions of the church as warm and inviting will be lasting ones. The reverse is also true, of course. If they find the church and their meeting place to be drab, dirty, or unpleasant, they will not be anxious to return and their first impression of the church will be unfavorable. So, it is very helpful if we can bring fresh flowers, dust the benches, hang pictures or banners, put up curtains, and in other ways beautify the house of God.

But the church environment is not just a building. It is people as well. Our students are learning about the Christian life and faith from the impressions they get of people in the church. If adult church members are warm and friendly to children, the children will feel that the church is a happy place where they are welcomed and appreciated. If, on the other hand, children are ignored, their classes are disturbed by the loud talking of adults who come early for service, or they are given the least desirable space to meet in, they will feel that the church is not an inviting place and that it is for adults and not for them. If there are squabbles, dishonesty, or irresponsibility among the adults, this will shape children's notions of how Christians live together. However, if they see adults enjoying each other, caring for one another, and willingly engaging in the life and work of the church, they will learn that the church is a body of people who are committed to loving one another and serving the needs of the world.

As Sunday school teachers, we may need to remind our fellow church members now and then that the children are observing their behavior and acquiring from them ideas, attitudes, and behaviors which will shape the church of the

future. The whole church teaches. This means that all members have the responsibility to order their lives and relationships, and to express positive attitudes toward children, so that what children learn about the church and the Christian life from watching them will be consistent with what we teach from the Bible in our classes.

Another aspect of the church environment is the variety of educational activities, programs, and groups other than Sunday school. We must not make the mistake of thinking that the only Christian education taking place in the church is in the Sunday school. The worship services, especially the sermons, have significant educational value, in teaching the congregation the meaning of worship and its relationship to their daily lives. The youth fellowship, Boys Brigade, and Girls Brigade, provide young people with additional opportunities to learn through Bible study, discussion, and service projects. Bible study groups enable adults to continue their Christian growth by regular, systematic exposure to the Scriptures.

Also, a Vacation Bible School could be held every day for one or two weeks during the school vacation, to provide children and youth with an intensive learning experience—including handwork, drama, music, and games, as well as study and worship. Choir practice, if attention is given to interpreting the meaning of the songs and anthems learned, can also be an educational experience for the members. Even the meetings of the church council and committees can contribute to the learning of the members, especially if they are opened with a time of Bible study, sharing, and devotion in order to lay a Christian foundation for considering and deciding on the issues at hand. We can do much to

enhance the learning opportunities in our church environment if we will just give our attention to preparing well for these and other activities.

The church is the learning environment in which we teach Sunday school and carry out other Christian education endeavors. We must do our best to make the building, the people, and all activities supportive of what we are trying to teach.

F. THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Much of what has been said above about the church applies also to the classroom. If your class meets in a school classroom, you will find that its arrangement is not very suitable for Sunday school teaching. A different style of teaching requires a different room arrangement. Hopefully, you will be able to get permission to re-arrange the room for Sunday, with the understanding that you will put it back the way you found it for regular classes the next day. If you can convince the other church members of the importance of Christian education, perhaps you can get some of them to help with moving the furniture, or even to do it for you.

It is most desirable to have your students sitting in a circle, so they can face and talk to each other. This reduces your temptation to do all the talking, and encourages them to raise questions and discuss with each other. Be sure to erase everything from the board, so as to remove distractions and reminders of school, and to put on it questions, Bible verses, maps, or drawings, having to do with the theme of your lesson.

Do not sit at the teacher's desk or stand at the front of the room as a day school teacher does. Instead sit with them in the circle, to demonstrate

your attitude of respect and acceptance of them, except when it is necessary to stand to write on the board or point to a picture or map. Bring your own pictures or other objects related to the lesson, and then take them down and store them in a Sunday school cabinet in the church during the week. If the room is big enough, you can arrange it so you can use one part for the telling and showing part of the lesson, and then move to the other part for the learning activities. Here, the desks and chairs can be pushed to the side of the room so that the center space is free for your students to move about in games or dances. Or, the desks may be pushed together to form a table, at which children can do drawing, coloring, painting, or making things from clay or other materials.

Always keep in mind that the room teaches. The way you arrange it will say something about your attitude toward children, the Christian life, and the educational process. Make sure that what the room is communicating is supportive of, rather than contradictory to, what you are saying in your Sunday school lesson.

G. THE SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS

Finally, a very significant aspect of the teaching-learning environment is the materials we use in our classes. These consist of the Bible, the songbook, the lesson notes for teachers and students, and any supplementary materials which we can gather for use.

We have already spoken in Chapter Four about the Bible as a basis for our teaching. Since the Bible is written by and for adults, we must take care in our selection of Bible stories and passages, so that they may be appropriate to the level of the children's understanding and experience. But

every lesson must be based in the Bible, and be consistent with the major themes of Biblical faith. We often can take Biblical images, ideas, or stories, and translate them into language our children can grasp.

Sometimes, if we are not using printed materials, we tend to come back to the same few Bible verses and stories over and over again because these are the ones we know and love the best. This is unfortunate, however, for it needlessly limits the Bible knowledge which our students can acquire. For this reason, it is far better to use lesson materials which provide a more balanced and comprehensive coverage of the Bible. If these are not available, however, you perhaps can enlist the aid of your pastor or someone else who knows the Bible well, in order that your students will be introduced to the whole range of Biblical teaching.

Many of the hymns and choruses available to us were also written by and for adults. This means that many of their words and theological ideas are beyond the comprehension of children. And sometimes the tunes are difficult for them to sing. Therefore, we need to select songs from the hymnbook for use in Sunday school which are appropriate to the level of understanding, religious experience, and musical ability of the youngest children in our group. The guideline must always be the youngest children, for while the older ones can understand and enjoy the songs for younger ones, the younger children are lost when asked to join in singing songs meant for youth and adults. This, incidentally, is another good reason for separating pre-school children, school-age children, youth and adults for their worship experiences. When introducing a new song, we

Christian education a priority item in your budget in order to make both teachers' and students' books available for everyone in your Sunday school.

If the lesson materials you are using do not meet all the standards suggested in this paragraph, you may want to communicate with those who produced them about what you believe to be their shortcomings. They will be anxious to get your suggestions, based on actual, regular use of the materials, for they are as committed as you are to excellence in Sunday school teaching, and will want to do all in their power to see that you have the finest possible materials for your use.

Because the lesson materials are produced for a wide variety of churches in different settings, however, you will need to adapt and supplement them with ideas, methods, and local materials which make your lessons more suitable to your particular class. If the materials are published in another country or culture, you will need to take special pains to adapt them to local customs, values, attitudes, and lifestyles. Such things as pictures of Bible people, maps of Bible lands, a flannelgraph to tell Bible stories, a flip chart with a series of pictures from which you can tell several stories, a board with chalk or markers, lap boards for students to draw or write on, pencils and crayons, clay, paper, and scissors are useful aids to creative teaching. If some of these are not available to you, you can use your imagination in making use of local materials to make your teaching more interesting. For example, you can draw a map of Palestine on the board or on the floor to point out the location of various places and events in the Bible. You can make use of such things as crayons and paper, scissors, cardboard, construction paper, puppets, and

must take care to explain the words and religious meanings so children can sing them with comprehension. Be sure to use examples and images out of their everyday experience in interpreting the songs, so that as they sing it later they will see the relationship between what they are singing and their daily lives.

The printed materials are your sure guide to effective, relevant teaching. When prepared by your denomination or coming from another reliable source within your country, they can be trusted to provide sound interpretation of the Bible and Christian doctrine, interesting illustrations out of the life experience of the age group they are written for, and teaching-learning activities appropriate for your students. Over the years, they will introduce your students to a balanced, comprehensive series of Bible stories and teachings which will gradually help them to understand and appreciate the full Biblical message, and to practise it in their lives. They will also provide a resource for teaching and learning about the history and work of the church here and abroad, and about the major emphases, leaders, and projects of your particular denomination.

When used regularly Sunday after Sunday, and year after year, these materials will provide a sequence to the teaching of your Sunday school, so that what the students learn this year will be based on last year's foundation, and get them ready for what is coming next year. Hopefully, they will also be printed in an attractive, readable format, and be available at a cost which your church can afford to pay. Of course, good materials will cost something to produce, which means your church must be prepared to make

modeling clay to illustrate your stories, play games, or make objects for the students to take home.

We have seen how important the environment is in influencing learning. We must recognize the impact which it is having on the minds and lives of our students. We further can make use of various aspects of it to reinforce our teaching. We must give attention to preparing the particular environment in which we teach—the church and classroom—so that it will support the message we seek to get across. And we must be ready to adapt our lesson themes and teaching approaches to the specific background and life situation in which we are working. In these ways we can make our surroundings work for us in the teaching task to help us accomplish the aims of Christian education.

H. QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What are your Sunday school pupils learning from your environment? Which of these learnings support Christian values and beliefs and which undermine them?
2. What can you do to help your students become more discriminating about evaluating the influences of their environment in terms of Christian values and beliefs?
3. How can you make the learning environment in which you teach more supportive of your teaching aims?
4. What aspects of your environment—natural, human, home, church, and classroom—could you be making better use of in your teaching?

5. How do you evaluate the lesson materials you are currently using in the light of the criteria mentioned in section G of this chapter?
6. How might you better adapt your materials to the characteristics and needs of your particular culture, setting, and class or group?

APPENDIX A

A TEACHERS' COVENANT

(As a means of fostering the commitment of Sunday school teachers, and demonstrating the support of the congregation to the task of Christian education, the following covenant may be used. It should, of course, be modified to suit your particular congregation.)

In recognition of the fact that teaching is a God-given call to serve Christ and the Church, an expression of Christian discipleship, and an opportunity to use the gifts of the Spirit to nurture the growth of children, youth, and adults in the Christian faith and life, we, the undersigned, do hereby enter into solemn covenant together to engage wholeheartedly in the sacred ministry of Christian education in the Church in the following ways:

On behalf of our congregation, we make the following commitments to support our Christian education program and our Sunday school teachers:

- regularly undergird them in prayer;
- maintain an effective Sunday school organization;
- provide sound and adequate curriculum materials, and a library of supplementary resources and teaching aids;
- maintain classrooms suitably furnished for each age group;
- provide adequate supplies and well-maintained equipment;
- provide meaningful worship experiences for both students and teachers;
- plan for maintaining and increasing enrollment through systematic efforts at recruitment, record-keeping, and follow-up;

- provide regular training opportunities, and/or funds to send teachers to training courses sponsored by the Conference or other agency;
- maintain an ongoing program of teacher enlistment; make available substitute teachers in case of emergency or for needed time away;
- provide suitable recognition of teachers on an annual basis.

Signed

Pastor

Sunday School Superintendent

Chairperson, Education Committee

As a Sunday school teacher I pledge myself to be faithful to the teaching task to which I have been called in the following ways:

- regular prayer for wisdom and guidance, for each student in my class, and for God's blessing on my teaching ministry;
- regular study of the Scriptures as foundation for my teaching;
- regular Sunday worship with the congregation, encouraging my students in proper participation and behavior;
- careful preparation for each Sunday session;
- regular attendance at Sunday school, being present well in advance; and making the necessary arrangements with my superintendent or associate in case of unavoidable absences;
- faithful teaching of the established curriculum, with only such modifications as the needs and

abilities of the class require;

- taking a personal interest in each student, following up on absentees, keeping in close touch with their homes;
- participation in planning meetings and training sessions;
- leading an exemplary life, both in public and in private, worthy of the sacred trust given to me.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Signed _____, Teacher

APPENDIX B

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY OF THIS HANDBOOK

Here are some possible ways for using this handbook:

1. Invite a qualified resource person, either from your congregation or outside, to lead your Sunday school teachers in a series of six training sessions to study the book—one session devoted to each chapter.
2. Engage your teachers in a series of study sessions, with the teachers themselves taking turns leading the discussion, chapter by chapter.
3. Prepare for each session by looking up the Scripture references and thinking through and writing out your answers to the questions for thought and discussion. Then share your reflections on these Scriptures and questions in the actual sessions.
4. Try out some of the suggested teaching-learning approaches and methods in the training sessions, so teachers can experience them for themselves in a safe environment, and gain confidence for using them in their own classes.
5. Bring in cases or instances from actual classroom situations to illustrate the themes and issues raised in each chapter. Discuss how to adapt or modify the suggestions in the handbook to your particular circumstances.

6. Try out the suggestions in each chapter, and report back at the following session how things went. Give feedback and support to one another in order to encourage improved teaching.
7. Include both experienced teachers, and prospective, new, or apprentice teachers in the training class for mutual enrichment and encouragement.
8. If the group is large, divide into smaller groups for discussion, according to the age levels of their students—e.g., one group each for teachers of pre-school, elementary, secondary, and adults.
9. For one or more sessions of the study class, ask a panel representing teachers of each age level to prepare ahead of time and discuss together before the rest of the group their varied perspectives on the ideas in the chapter and the issues and implications they raise for their teaching.
10. As individuals, keep a journal of reflections on both your reading of the handbook and your teaching experience in the classroom, raising issues for discussion with other teachers and noting ideas to be tried out in your teaching.
11. Conduct the training sessions in the context of worship, thanking God for the call and challenge of Christian teaching, acknowledging our shortcomings and needs, and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit for an improved Christian education program in your congregation.

12. If a training class or study group is not feasible in your setting, give copies of the book to both present and prospective teachers, setting a time to get back with them to discuss their questions and reactions individually.



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