LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL AS A VIABLE TOOL
FOR CHURCH GROWTH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A Thesis Project Submitted to
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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December 2007
LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

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The purpose of this project is to disprove the allegations by many pastors and
denominational leaders that Sunday School is no longer a viable tool for church growth.
This project will show that pastors who work the Sunday School will find that Sunday
School will work for them. The author of this project is pastor of one of the four
churches studied. Based on the history and growth of Sunday School in these churches,
interviews, and personal perspectives, this paper will describe lessons that were learned
and the principles that are effective for Sunday School growth.

Abstract length: 96 words.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my wife Rhonda. She is truly a gift from the Lord. She is my partner in life and in ministry. She is my best friend. She is my strongest supporter and most eager encourager. She is a wealth of wisdom and knowledge. I am a better person and Christian because of you. You make me look better than I really am. You are the love of my life. Thank you!
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Sunday School has come under fire. “The Sunday School is dead as a church growth tool in America today.” The author has heard comments similar to this one made at a number of conferences and meetings with pastors and church leaders in recent years. Many pastors and denominational leaders today are convinced that the Sunday School is no longer an effective method or program for reaching the lost for Jesus Christ and church membership. Many have drawn what the author believes to be an inaccurate and inappropriate conclusion, that the Sunday School is antiquated and irrelevant. Some feel it is no longer a viable means of ministry or worthy of church priority. Others claim that Sunday School was a giant in its heyday but it has become a non-effective program for the twenty-first century.

This swing of opinion concerning the Sunday School is not new; it became widely apparent in the mid 1990's. In 1996 Ken Hemphill wrote, “Some church growth writers are predicting the demise of the Sunday School. They have labeled it a dinosaur, a relic of the past age. Some contend that the Sunday School was an important growth tool of the past, but it is facing extinction as the church enters the twenty-first century.”¹ In his book, High Expectations, Thom Rainer quotes Don Cox, “Many church leaders have

helped perpetuate the myth for twenty or so years. The myth is that Sunday School is no longer effective evangelistically or as an assimilation tool.”

In an article entitled “Rumors of Sunday School Death Greatly Exaggerated,” Phil Stone, State Sunday School Director for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, writes, “In the 90’s Sunday School was declared dead; out of touch with the culture; no longer a viable ministry; doesn’t work any more.”

It is the author’s conviction that the Sunday School has not lost its effectiveness as a church growth tool. The author believes that the Sunday School is still a viable tool for the twenty-first century in reaching the lost for Jesus Christ and church membership. The author agrees with Dr. Lawrence Phipps, pastor of Vaughn Forest Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, “The largest vehicle most churches have for fulfilling the Great Commission is the Sunday School. The Sunday School has come under fire in recent years. Through the apathy and attacks, it still remains the best chance a plateaued church has to reach people, teach application, minister and make disciples. The Sunday School remains the strongest tool to keep a growing church on the move.”

Ken Hemphill put forward nine reasons why the Sunday School is the growth tool of the future.

1. **Sunday School provides a centralized and simplified strategy.** It is much easier to find the leadership for a single organization that can fulfill the threefold task of outreach, assimilation, and teaching than staffing three or more different

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organizations.

2. *Sunday School is familiar.* Most people who have any church background or experience have been involved in a Sunday School program of some kind.

3. *Sunday School is a solid foundation for innovation.* Innovation is always built on the foundation of fundamental principles. Sunday School can provide that foundation for your church. A strong Sunday School is not a deterrent to innovation, it is the foundation for innovation.

4. *Sunday School incorporates the six principles of church growth in one organization.* When Sunday School has a clear purpose statement and is managed correctly, it incorporates those principles that most church growth authors agree to be fundamental—the Process Principle, the New Unit Principle, the Leadership Principle, the Homogeneity Principle, the Receptivity Principle, and the Pyramid Principle.

5. *Sunday School is the natural companion to an exciting worship service.* If you have discovered that people in your community are more likely to come first to a celebrative worship service, the Sunday School still provides the best method for assimilating these newcomers so that they become attached to the family.

6. *Sunday School gets people involved in service.* The Sunday School provides many opportunities for people with differing gifts to be involved in ministry.

7. *Sunday School provides the small-group experience every Christian needs.*

8. *Sunday School is not tied to a single personality.* A church built on the small-group structure is founded on the solid rock of relationships, not on personalities or events.
9. **Sunday School has a proven track record.**

The problem with Sunday School today is not with the program itself, rather the problem is with the priority and the purpose that pastors and churches place on the Sunday School. Talmadge Johnson and Stan Toler agree, “The problem with non-evangelistic Sunday Schools is not the program itself; the problem is the failure to use the program as an intentional evangelistic tool.”

In terms of the purpose of Sunday School this author must agree with Ken Hemphill, “It is my conviction that the beginning of the so-called demise of Sunday School can be traced to a time when denominations and local churches failed to use Sunday School with evangelistic intentionality and purpose.” In other words, pastors and denominational leaders have moved away from the long stated purpose of Sunday School. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church and author of *The Purpose Driven Church,* adamantly argues that understanding purpose is crucial to a healthy church, and church health is crucial to church growth. The author contends that the reason for the decline of Sunday School over the years is loss of purpose.

**The Purpose of Sunday School -- A Brief History**

Robert Raikes (1735-1811) is traditionally credited as pioneering Sunday Schools in the 1780s in England. These Sunday Schools were developed for the purpose of

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7Hemphill, 4.

educating poor and orphaned children on Sundays, their one day off from factory work.

The purpose of Raikes’ Sunday School was to clean up, feed, and educate those children who could not attend school.

Raikes began his first Sunday school in 1780 in the kitchen of a private home in the slums of Gloucester. The first students were very poor, uneducated children who spent six days a week working in deplorable conditions. Raikes’ school then continued through the afternoon. A healthy dose of biblical instruction was given along with instruction in reading and writing. The goal was to change the inner character of these children and as a result, to make a positive impact on society. Within thirty years, the Sunday school in England spread to involve 400,000 students.9

John Wesley, evangelist and the founder of the Methodist movement, was one of the earliest proponents of Sunday School. Wesley stated, “I verily think these Sunday Schools are the noblest institutions which have been seen in Europe for some centuries, and will increase more and more. . . . It will be one of the great means of reviving religious thought throughout the nation.”10

According to Anne Boylan, in her book, Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880, the earliest American Sunday Schools were carbon copies of the British models. Over time, however, the British model gave way to a new type of Sunday School whose purpose was to reach children for Christ and to teach the Bible.11 Evangelism and doctrinal teaching became the priority of Sunday School in

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America. “The impact was so great that by 1880 the Sunday School had become the primary recruiting ground for church members.”\textsuperscript{12}

The value of the Sunday School as a key to reaching the lost for Jesus Christ and church membership was recognized by early Baptist leaders. In 1902 Dr. E.Y. Mullins wrote, “Already in many churches the Sunday School is the chief and almost only hope for church growth. But whether in the family church, or the church among the masses of the great city, or the country church, the Sunday School will remain the most hopeful field of evangelistic endeavor.”\textsuperscript{13}

“The most prolific North American Protestant group, the Southern Baptists, credits its growth not only to divinely empowered preaching built on evangelistic theology, but also to its system of Sunday School organization . . .”\textsuperscript{14} The Southern Baptist Convention became a leading entity in the Sunday School movement because of great Sunday School leaders such as J.M. Frost, Arthur Flake and J.N. Barnett. J.M. Frost, who was the first head of the Baptist Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote in 1911, “Everything which the church needs, whether for making it strong and mighty within, or powerful and projective in its influence upon the community – all is fostered and magnified in this school of the church.”\textsuperscript{15}

Arthur Flake was a true pioneer in the Sunday School movement. A successful businessman, Arthur Flake used his business savvy in his position as Sunday School

\textsuperscript{12}Hemphill, 94.

\textsuperscript{13}Quoted in J.N. Barnette, \textit{A Church Using its Sunday School} (Nashville: Convention Press, 1937, revised 1951), 5.


\textsuperscript{15}Barnette, 5.
superintendent at Winona Baptist Church in Winona, Mississippi. His Sunday School became so successful that it was recognized throughout the state of Mississippi. Flake was in heavy demand to speak in churches because pastors and church leaders wanted to hear what Flake was doing to make his Sunday School so successful. In 1920 Flake was invited to join the Sunday School Board for the purpose of establishing and developing the work of Sunday School administration. Flake developed what is known across denominational lines today as Flake’s Formula for Sunday School Growth. There are five indispensable components to Flake’s Formula.

1. Locate the Prospects
2. Enlarge the Organization (start new classes)
3. Recruit and Train the Workers
4. Provide the Space
5. Go after the People

Arthur Flake is also credited with developing the Sunday School Standard of Excellence and perfecting the six point record system for Southern Baptist Sunday Schools. Flake’s Sunday School standard of excellence can be seen in appendix A. In 1922 Arthur Flake stated, “The Sunday School is the church’s greatest soul-winning opportunity.” Flake went on to say, “The Sunday School is an outreaching agency; its business is to bring into its membership both those who are saved and those who are lost.”

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16 Taylor, 42-43.
18 Ibid.
J.N. Barnett may have been the strongest promoter of Sunday School evangelism. Just like Arthur Flake, he was a layman. Barnette served as superintendent of the Double Springs Baptist Church in Cleveland County, North Carolina. Under his leadership the Sunday School had grown from five to twelve classes by using curtains in a one room building. Barnette was eventually hired by the North Carolina Baptist Convention to promote Sunday School throughout the state. After serving six years in North Carolina, Barnette went to the Southern Baptist Convention Sunday School Board in 1927. In 1943 he became the secretary of the new Sunday School Department where he remained until he retired in 1957. J.N. Barnette stated, “The Sunday School does three major things which contribute to evangelism: First it reaches lost people; second, it teaches the Bible; third, it brings lost people into the preaching service.”

It seems very clear to the author that the early leaders of the Sunday School movement in America believed the purpose of the Sunday School was to reach the lost for Jesus Christ and church membership. It is the opinion of the author that somewhere along the way pastors and church denominational leaders have gotten away from the long standing purpose of the Sunday School. This resulted in spending less time and energy on building and organizing the Sunday School for the purpose of evangelism. If church leaders today can return to evangelism as the focal purpose, the Sunday School can return to its place as an effective evangelistic program for the twenty-first century.

Dr. Ken Hemphill agrees: “I believe that with a few adjustments aimed at modernization and contextualization, the Sunday School organization can be raised up

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20 Ibid.
from its growth malaise and take its place as the church growth tool of the twenty-first century.”

In an article entitled “Sunday School: Don’t write it off just yet,” Greg Pressley writes, “If we accept the conclusion that Sunday school no longer works and as a result we give up on it -- then it is certainly destined to die. ‘It is not that Sunday school no longer works, but it’s that we no longer work Sunday school,’ said Rev. Jack Eyestone. Church leaders should not perform some heroic effort to save Sunday school just to say that we saved it, but instead should be driven by a passionate desire for church growth, and evidence that Sunday school is vital to sustained church growth.”

**Statement of Purpose**

Bill Taylor writes, “During the latter part of the 19th century, the famous preacher and scholar Basil Manly lifted up the hearts of the leaders of his day by challenging them to embrace what he called “the great missionary to the future – the Sunday School.” This project will attempt to show that the “Sunday School is still the ‘great missionary to the future,’ poised to reenergize its strengths and to re-invent itself to be the most powerful force of the 21st century.” The purpose of this project is to show that the Sunday School, used for the right purpose, rightly prioritized in the church, well

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21 Hemphill, 2.

22 Greg Pressley is the senior pastor of First Church of the Nazarene in Spartanburg, S.C. He also serves as District Sunday School Chair person for the South Carolina District Church of the Nazarene. Pastor Pressley is leading the SC District in an extensive Sunday School Revitalization plan and has developed resources materials for each local church on the district. Some of those resources are available at www.spartanburgaz.org.


24 Taylor, 11.

25 Ibid., 14.
organized with workers properly trained, is still a vital tool for church growth in the twenty-first century. The author agrees with Dr. Harry Piland; “Rightly conceived, understood and utilized, the Sunday School is the church organized and functioning to reach out to people in the name of Christ, to enlist them in ongoing, life changing Bible study, to witness to them of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to lead them into a right relationship to the church.”

The Sunday School can be very effective today and for many years to come in reaching the lost for Jesus Christ and church membership. If church leaders today will work hard to develop and organize their Sunday School ministry for the purpose of evangelism, they will see sustained church growth through the Sunday School. The author believes that a rightly organized adult Sunday School class will include leaders for teaching, evangelism, prayer, ministry, and fellowship. A well organized adult Sunday School class will also have a class administrator for overseeing the work of the class. See Figure 1 on the next page. Note that the teacher is not the class Administrator. This allows for the teacher to spend his or her time on preparing the Bible lesson without the distractions that come with organizing a class to effectively fulfill its purposes.

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The author believes that the reason most Sunday Schools are not effective today is because pastors and church leaders have not taken the time and energy that is required to properly organize and train the leaders in their adult classes. “Pastors must realize that the issue is not that Sunday School is not working; rather, many pastors are not working Sunday School to be evangelistically effective.”\(^\text{27}\) This will be shown by pointing to several examples of growing churches today whose primary growth tool is the Sunday School. These are well organized, highly efficient, and well trained Sunday Schools. These churches include Vaughn Forest Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama; First Baptist Church of Gulf Shores, Alabama; Jubilee Baptist Church in Daphne, Alabama; and First Baptist Church of Foley, Alabama, which is the author’s church.

This project will examine the emphasis the pastors of these churches place on the Sunday School as the outreach arm of the church. To demonstrate that churches which adhere to the basic principles of Sunday School work, but change their methods for the

\(^{27}\text{Thom Rainer, } The Pastor: Key to a Vibrant, Growing Sunday School (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, 2007), 7.\)
twenty-first century, can grow, this study will analyze and evaluate the methods and organizational model of each Sunday School studied. Concluding the paper will be a detailed discussion of lessons learned from the study and recommendations of how other churches can apply these lessons to their Sunday Schools. When the study is presented and the recommendations are given, the purpose of the dissertation is complete.

**Limitations**

The scope of this project will be limited in the following ways. First, while an effective evangelistic Sunday School is designed and organized to reach all ages, this project will be limited primarily to adult Sunday School. Second, while the “Rotation” model is a fairly new and widely promoted model for Sunday School, this area will not be discussed because it is a model primarily for children’s Sunday School. Third, by focusing on church growth through the Sunday School the author is not suggesting that the Cell Group or Small Group model is ineffective for church growth. Fourth, while the Cell Group and Small Group models may be mentioned in comparison to the Sunday School, the author will not do a detailed study of these models. The purpose of this paper is to show how the church can grow today through the Sunday School. Fifth, the author is not suggesting that Sunday School is defined solely by classes that meet on Sunday morning on the church campus.

**Biblical and Theological Basis for Project**

Church growth through the Sunday School has a strong theological basis. The biblical basis for this project must begin with a simple understanding of church growth as
seen in the Bible. The term church growth does not appear in the Bible, nevertheless, the Bible has a great deal to say about it. Jesus speaks to the growth of the church. The book of Acts gives evidence to the growth of the church. The Apostle Paul teaches that it is the nature of the church to grow.

Jesus speaks to the growth of the church: “…I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18).

Gates have always been seen as defensive protection. Jesus is saying that not even Hades can resist the church’s advances or growth. Here, Jesus seems to be encouraging His disciples that, despite attacks upon His church in any given place and time, the church will prevail and continue to grow.

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed Jesus again speaks concerning the unstoppable growth of the church. “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches” (Matthew 13:31-32). Jesus speaks of the fact that although the church will have a small beginning it will grow to massive size and significance.

When one reads the book of Acts it seems obvious that God has placed great emphasis on the growth of the church. Luke repeatedly reports of the continuing growth of the early church. Following are some of those passages:

1. Acts 2:41 “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

2. Acts 2:47 “praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

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28 All Scripture references taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.
3. Acts 4:4 “But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.”

4. Acts 5:14 “Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.”

5. Acts 9:31 “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”

6. Acts 14:27 “On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”

7. Acts 16:5 “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.”

The growing church we see in the book of Acts reminds us that it is possible for today’s churches to grow.

It is the nature of the church to grow. In Ephesians 4:16 the apostle Paul writes, “From him the whole body [the church], joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (author’s italics). The church is a living spiritual organism. It is the nature of a healthy organism to grow. Therefore it is the nature of a healthy church to grow. “As a spiritual organism a church must function in harmony with its nature. If its nature is to grow--and it is--all of its functions must be growth related and growth producing. To function in any other way would be to violate its nature and to corrupt its purpose.”

The first church in Jerusalem set a marvelous pattern and high level standard of growth. At times it seemed to have no purpose other than its outreach and evangelistic efforts. Its interests all appeared to be directed toward reaching people for Christ. Undoubtedly all of the early churches were growing churches.

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They understood that their mission was to bring more and more people to Christ and into membership in his body. These churches grew because it was their nature to grow. They grew because it was the very essence of their being. Growth was the creative force and the controlling factor in all that they did. Their total commitment to the purpose was the cause of their unique mark on Christian history.\textsuperscript{30}

**Biblical Basis of Sunday School**

Before discussing the biblical basis of the Sunday School, attention needs to be given to the major purposes of Sunday School. The major purposes of the Sunday School can then be seen in the passages that will be discussed.

Dr. Elmer Towns states that there are three aspects to the Sunday School in relationship to the church.

1. The Sunday School is the reaching arm of the church.
2. The Sunday School is the teaching arm of the church.
3. The Sunday School is the winning arm of the church.\textsuperscript{31}

In their book, *Breakthrough Sunday School Work*, Harry Piland and Ernest Adams list six tasks of the Sunday School:

1. Reach persons for Bible Study.
2. Teach the Bible.
3. Witness to persons about Christ and lead them into church membership.
4. Minister to persons in need.
5. Lead members to worship.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 37

\textsuperscript{31}Lecture of Dr. Elmer Towns, “Twenty-First Century Techniques & Tools for the Revitalization of the Church,” Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2004, author’s notes, Foley, AL.
6. Interpret and undergird the work of the church and the denomination.\textsuperscript{32}

In Daryl Heath’s book \textit{The Small Sunday School at Work}, Sunday School is described as “the church reaching and enrolling people in Bible study. It is the church teaching the Word of God and witnessing to persons who do not know Christ as Savior. It is the church helping persons minister in Christ’s name.”\textsuperscript{33}

Wes Haystead lists four purposes of the Sunday School in his book \textit{The 21st Century Sunday School}.

1. Win people to Christ.
2. Teach God’s Word.
3. Build supportive relationships.
4. Encourage Christians to service.\textsuperscript{34}

Based on the stated purposes above the purpose of the Sunday School can be summarized in four words: reach, teach, win, and minister. The Sunday School exists to \textit{reach} people for Bible study, to \textit{teach} them the Word of God, to \textit{win} them to Christ, and to get them to minister to one another.

The Biblical rationale for church growth through the Sunday School can be taken from several major passages. These passages include Deuteronomy 31:12 which traditionally is the verse most associated with Sunday School. Other major passages that need to be looked at are Matthew 28:18-20 (The Great Commission), Matthew 22:37-40 (the Great Commandment), Acts 2:42-47. As these major passages are reviewed, other


\textsuperscript{33}Daryl Heath, \textit{The Small Sunday School At Work} (Nashville, Convention Press, 1985), 8.

\textsuperscript{34}Haystead, pp 15-19.
passages will be referenced and examined that demonstrate how the Sunday School meets all the biblical requirements mentioned above.

The Sunday School Verse

A verse that is used a lot when discussing the Sunday School is Deuteronomy 31:12 “Assemble the people--men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns--so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law.” This verse speaks to the purposes and the organization of the Sunday School.

The verse begins by commanding, “Assemble the people…” Sunday School fulfills a biblical mandate by bringing people together for the purpose of Bible study. Dr. Elmer Towns describes Sunday School as “the reaching arm of the church.”35 He writes, “Sunday School has traditionally been a gathering arm of people, both saved and unsaved, who are brought for Christian instruction. The verse implies a central point of assembly. (The Greek word translated “church” means assembly.). Therefore, Sunday School is fulfilling a biblical mandate when people are brought together for instruction.”36 The first purpose of Sunday School is to reach out to all people and gather them together for the purpose of hearing and learning God’s holy Word. The ultimate goal, of course, is that they might come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

In the parable of the great banquet Jesus says, “Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my

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35Elmer L. Towns, How to Grow an Effective Sunday School (Lynchburg, VA: Church Growth Institute, 1987), 10

36Ibid., 11.
house may be filled” (Luke 14:23). The parable is referring to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God internally refers to the reign of God in a person’s heart. Externally the kingdom of God refers to a person becoming a part of the family of God. One of the purposes of Sunday School is to assemble people in small groups that they might hear and respond to God’s Word by receiving Jesus as Lord to reign in their lives thus becoming a part of the family of God.

The Sunday School is to reach all people. This is seen in Deuteronomy 31:12 in the phrase “men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns.” The primary purpose of Sunday School is to reach all people for Bible study. All people includes men and women, young and old, saved and unsaved, learned and unlearned, Anglo and non-Anglo, American and alien. Every person is significant in the eyes of God and therefore is significant to the Sunday School. This is important to remember because many churches emphasize children’s Sunday School to the neglect of adult Sunday School. Deuteronomy 31:12 seems to put men and women as a first priority, listing them before children. A well organized Sunday School will be effective in reaching all ages of people through weekly visitation, high attendance days, enrollment campaigns, and other special evangelistic events.

Deuteronomy 31:12 also speaks to the Sunday School as being “the teaching arm of the church.” This is seen in the phrase “so they can listen and learn . . .” A Sunday School teacher is to present the truths of God’s Word so that they can be heard and

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38 Ibid.
learned. The purpose of teaching is learning, therefore teaching has not been accomplished until learning has taken place.

This verse also speaks of the Sunday School as being “the winning arm of the church.” The purpose of reaching people for Bible study and teaching them the Word of God is to win them to the Lord. Deuteronomy 31:12 goes on to say that the people are to be taught “to fear the Lord your God.” “Fear the Lord” does not mean to be in dread of God. It means to show reverence, to sense a reverential fear; to stand in awe because of a holy fear. It means one should fear God because He is God: holy, righteous, and just. Thus “fear of the Lord” has been described as an Old Testament term of salvation.

The Great Commission

To understand the significance of Sunday School for church growth one must have an understanding of what Jesus has commissioned all believers to be doing. The Great Commission is to be the priority mission of every believer and every church. In the Great Commission Jesus commissioned His followers to be about reaching people for Christ and teaching them His Word. Jesus states in the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

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39Ibid., 12.

40Ibid.
Jesus issued the Great Commission to His disciples right before He ascended back to the Father. These words, however, were not meant just for those original eleven disciples. They were also meant for all of the following generations of believers to come until the end of the age. The basis for this statement is found in the last part of verse 20 “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (author’s italics). The author agrees with Dr. John Piper. In his book Let the Nations Be Glad, he writes,

The people referred to in the word ‘you’ cannot be limited to the apostles, because they died within one generation. The promise extends to the “end of the age,” that is, to the day of judgment at Christ’s second coming (cf. Matt. 13:39-40, 49). Jesus is speaking to the apostles as representatives of the church, which would endure to the end of the age. He is assuring the church of his abiding presence and help as long as the age lasts. This is significant because the promise of verse 20 is given to sustain and encourage the command to make disciples of all nations. Therefore, if the sustaining promise is expressed in terms that endure to the end of the age, we may rightly assume that the command to make disciples also endures to the end of the age.41

Until Jesus returns, God has called today’s church to a reaching ministry.

The phrase “therefore go” literally means “as you go.” It is from the Greek word poreuomai. Thus the imperative in these two verses is to “make disciples.” Making disciples is the primary assignment given to the church by Jesus Himself. Making disciples begins with reaching. The reaching aspect of the Great Commission is not only found in the Matthew chapter 28 passage. It is actually found in all four Gospels and in the book of Acts. Note the other passages below:

1. “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).
2. “…Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:47-48).
3. "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

41John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad (Grand Rapids. MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 160.
4. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

If “go” is the reaching aspect and “make disciples” is the winning aspect of the Great Commission, then “baptizing” is the assimilating aspect of the Great Commission. Sunday School is the outreach arm of the church to reach people for Jesus Christ and church membership.

There is one more part to the Great Commission: “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Reaching is the foundation of evangelism but evangelism involves more than just reaching. The verb translated “make disciples” commands a kind of evangelism that does not stop after someone makes a profession of faith. Making disciples also involves “baptizing them” and “teaching” them to obey everything Jesus commands. A holistic approach to evangelism involves teaching God’s Word so that a decision for Christ can be made by the hearer. Once a person has made a decision for Christ he or she needs to be taught to obey God’s Word.

Teaching obedience to all of Jesus’ commands forms the heart of disciple making. Evangelism must be holistic. If non-Christians are not hearing the gospel and not being challenged to make a decision for Christ, then the church has disobeyed one part of Jesus’ commission. If new converts are not faithfully and lovingly nurtured in the whole counsel of God’s revelation, then the church has disobeyed the other part. . . . There must be a balance between evangelistic proclamation and relevant exposition of all parts of God’s Word, including the more difficult material best reserved for the mature.

Sunday School is one of the best methods of providing this holistic approach to evangelism. The author believes that once unbelievers have been reached, the best way

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43 Ibid., 433.
for a church to teach new believers “to obey everything I have commanded you” is in a small group setting such as a Sunday School class.

The church is never more like Christ than when it places the teaching of God’s word as primary in the life of the church. The church should follow the example of the Lord. Note the verses below that speak to the teaching ministry of Jesus.

1. “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23).

2. “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching” (Matthew 7:28).

3. “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues…” (Matthew 9:35).

4. “Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed” (Matthew 13:54).

5. “Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching…” (Matthew 21:23).

6. “When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching” (Matthew 22:33).

7. “He taught them many things by parables…” (Mark 4:2).

8. “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things” (Mark 6:34).

9. “Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them” (Mark 10:1).

10. “He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat” (Luke 5:3).

11. "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret” (John 18:20).
Christ’s ministry of teaching is carried on in the early church. The book of Acts shows the priority that the early church placed on teaching God’s Word. “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42, author’s italics).

The aim of teaching is to lead new believers to grow to Christian maturity. Paul states this purpose of teaching in Ephesians 4:12-15.

To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, . . . we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (author’s italics).

This passage is discussed in more detail below. “The main function of Sunday School is to teach the Bible according to God’s methods. Through its classes, the dynamic gospel can make an impact on individuals, nurturing them to Christian maturity.”

The author contends that churches can experience significant and continual growth in the 21st century by placing great emphasis on Bible teaching through the Sunday School.

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

In this passage can be found six practices of the early church that can be related directly to the Sunday School today.

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44 Towns, How to Grow an Effective Sunday School, 9.
1. Teaching: The first practice is seen in verse 42, “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.” The teaching of God’s Word was obviously a priority for the early church. As stated above, teaching is a priority of the Sunday School.

2. Fellowship: The second practice can be found in verse 42, “and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread” and also in verse 46, “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.” Fellowship is from the Greek word “koinonia” which means a partnership, to participate, social intercourse, to communicate, communion. Churches that grow through the Sunday School strongly encourage new members to get involved in a Sunday School class because it is in this small group atmosphere that people develop real relationships. These relationships are developed through personal interactions and group sharing. Here they have the opportunity to get to know one another, thus building lasting relationships within the church that will keep them connected to the church. At First Baptist Church of Foley, the author’s church, one way that fellowship is encouraged is for each class to have a class function outside the class at least once per quarter.

3. Small Groups: The third practice can be found in verse 46, the early church “broke bread in their homes.” Because of the space restrictions, those meeting in homes would have been small in number. Sunday School is a small group plan.

4. Prayer: The fourth practice can be found in verse 42, “They devoted themselves . . . to prayer.” Sunday School also emphasizes prayer. Sunday School not only teaches prayer but it practices prayer. Each Sunday School class is to have a prayer

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45Spiros Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1984), s.v. “κοινωνία”
leader. The prayer leader takes prayer requests, shares these with the class, and then leads the class into a time of intercessory prayer.

5. Ministry: The fifth practice is found in verse 45, “Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.” The early believers practiced ministry by meeting the needs of one another. The Sunday School class is organized into smaller groups called “care groups” or “ministry teams.” A care group or ministry team is a grouping of people for the purpose of discovering and meeting the needs of class members.

6. Worship: The sixth practice of the early church is found in verse 46. “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.” The Bible states in Acts 5:12 that “all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.” Solomon’s Colonnade was “the raised outmost part of Herod’s Temple with columns that went all the way around the outer court.”

The practice of worship can also be seen in verse 27 where the early church is pictured “praising God.” “The early church was busy about experiencing the joy of the Lord and they were also involved in praising Him for His goodness. The church was experiencing the presence and favor of the Lord because they were obeying the Lord’s command to make disciples, and they were experiencing the promise, ‘and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’ (Matt. 28:20).”

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One of the purposes of Sunday School is to lead people to worship. Sunday School has an advantage over Small Groups at this point because worship and Sunday School usually meet on the same property and the worship time usually immediately precedes or follows the Sunday School time. Child care is also provided on the same property making attending Sunday School and worship back to back much more convenient than for those involved in Small Groups.

**Other Passages**

2 Chron. 17:7-9--“In the third year of [Jehoshaphat’s] reign he sent his officials . . . to teach in the towns of Judah. . . . They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the Lord; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people.” “These were traveling Bible schools, taught by the finest teachers in the land.”

Nehemiah 8:8--“They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.” The Bible teachers here not only read the Word of God but taught it “making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand.” A purpose of Sunday School is to clearly teach God’s Word so that the learners can apply it to their lives.

Ephesians 4:12-15--“To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in

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48Taylor, 21 Truths, Traditions, and Trends, 25.
their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” This passage speaks to the ministry and the maturity of the Believer.

**Ministry:** A purpose of Sunday School is “to prepare God’s people for works of service” (v 12). This is done by teaching about ministry and spiritual gifts, and then providing opportunities for Sunday School members to be involved in a ministry. A well organized Sunday School will have most of its adult members involved in a ministry where they are spiritually gifted to serve in a Sunday School class. Ministry opportunities in the adult Sunday School class include serving as a teacher, prayer leader, care group leader, fellowship leader, class administrator, greeter, host/hostess, and more.

**Maturity:** A purpose of Sunday School is to teach God’s Word to God’s people “so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature . . .” (verses 12-13). “When a Christian reaches full maturity, he is complete or whole. Every part of his life is integrated around Christ. In personality, this involves knowledge, skills, attitude, and habits. In Bible knowledge, this involves a foundational knowledge of every doctrine and a basic introduction to Scripture.”

49 This is a purpose of Sunday School. The aim of Sunday School teaching is to teach God’s Word so that believers know and understand the Bible and the doctrines of the faith so that they might not be “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Eph 4:14). The purpose is to lead believers to “grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Eph 4:15).

Paul makes the same point in Colossians 1:28, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.” A key to this verse is the word “everyone.” Every believer is to be taught for the purpose of presenting him or her perfect or mature in Christ. Sunday School classes are organized so that the focus is on the individual. This cannot be done in large groups but is easily done in small group settings such as an adult Sunday School class.

Jesus had the masses around Him. He also brought a smaller group of twelve believers around Himself for the purpose of equipping them for the ministry.

In summary, these passages demonstrate that the purposes of the Sunday School have their basis in Scripture.

God’s clear intention to reach in loving redemption is a common thread that is woven in Old and New Testament alike. . . . Reaching people is the heart of Christ’s mission to His church. Reaching people characterizes a spiritually vital church. However, we have done only part of what God intends when we enroll persons in Bible study. Outreach is the beginning point. We reach in order to teach, witness, minister, love, and care.  

Exodus 18:17-21--

Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people--men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain--and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.”

Moses was trying to lead and administer an entire nation by himself. He was attempting to do all the administrative work alone. He was trying to meet the needs of a whole nation by himself. He was failing as an administrator and his health was failing as

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50Harry Piland and Ernest Adams, Breakthrough Sunday School Work, 12.
well. Jethro informed Moses that he should teach the people the Word of God and then select godly leaders and place them over smaller more manageable groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Moses followed the advice of Jethro so that the needs of the people could be met.

Sunday School is the greatest asset a pastor has today for effectively managing and leading his church to fulfill the Great Commission. The work of the church is too great today for a pastor to handle by himself. Ken Hemphill states, “Every growing church must find some method for breaking down ministry responsibility and supervision into manageable portions. Without an adequate organizational plan, the growing church will first stagnate and then begin to decline.”

Sunday School has been found by thousands of pastors to be the most effective means of adequately breaking down the work of the church into manageable portions.

According to Scripture, the five purposes of the church are evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship. How can a pastor make sure that all of these purposes are effectively being carried out? The purposes of the church are also the purposes of the Sunday School. Based on the passages analyzed in this study an effective Sunday School should be organized around the following biblical mandates:

1. Evangelism
2. Discipleship
3. Fellowship
4. Prayer
5. Worship

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51 Ken Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur*, 69.
The 21st century pastor can make sure that the five purposes of the church are being effectively carried out by organizing them through the Sunday School. The Sunday School is the church organized.

**Review of the Literature**

The amount of sources for Sunday School is fairly large. Much that is written about Sunday School, however, deals with Sunday School for children. This shrinks the bibliographic resources considerably for the purpose of this project. However, the author found a number of resources that were very helpful to this study.

One excellent book is Ken Hemphill’s *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur*. Hemphill has been a leader in the Southern Baptist Convention for many years and is a leading authority on church growth. He served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Virginia from 1981 to 1992. During his tenure he used Sunday School as the primary church growth tool and grew that church from a membership of less than 1000 to almost 7000. Hemphill gives six reasons for the decline of Sunday School in America and then discusses nine reasons why Sunday School can be an effective church growth tool for the twenty-first century. He argues that Sunday Schools with a Great Commission mindset can be an effective church growth tool today and he shows how to organize the Sunday School around the Great Commission. This book is a must read for any pastor desiring to revitalize his Sunday School.

Along this same lines is an excellent book by Talmadge Johnson and Stan Toler entitled *Rediscovering the Sunday School*. At the time of the writing of this book Talmadge Johnson was the general director of Sunday School Ministries for the
International Church of the Nazarene. Today he is the General Superintendent emeritus of the Church of the Nazarene. Stan Toler serves as the Senior Pastor of Trinity Church of the Nazarene in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Toler conducts national seminars on strategic planning, leadership, and outreach. *Rediscovering the Sunday School* teaches the reader how to:

- View Sunday School as a new paradigm
- Stay focused on the Word
- Evangelize through Sunday School ministries
- Organize the Sunday School via multiple options
- Use fellowship as a tool to reach new people
- Promote the Sunday School with new methods
- Use current facilities for growth
- Place a new emphasis on teaching basic Christian beliefs.

*Rediscovering the Sunday School* reminds the reader of the basic principles of traditional Sunday School and then creatively illustrates new ways of organizing, staffing, promoting, teaching, and providing space for Sunday School for the 21st century.

Arthur Flake’s book, *Building a Standard Sunday School*, is foundational to this study. This book, first published in 1922, was the foundation of the Southern Baptist program leading to more than seventy-five straight years of growth using the Sunday School as a tool for church growth. While serving as Director of the Department of Sunday School Administration at the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Flake developed and standardized a method for Sunday School work known today as “Flake's Formula for Sunday School Growth.” Around Flake’s formula the Sunday School Board developed a ten step *Standard of Excellence* for which churches could aim in the building of their Sunday Schools. Flake’s book is a detailed description
of how to build a Sunday School around this Standard of Excellence. This project will show that those churches which follow the basic premise of Flake’s formula can have Sunday Schools which are very effective for church growth.

Harry M. Piland authored several books that were beneficial to the author for this project. In 1978 Piland, minister of education and associate to the pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, succeeded A.V. Washburn as Director of the Sunday School Division at Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Before going to the Sunday School Board (known today as LifeWay), he served for 25 years in local churches as minister of education. Piland is extremely knowledgeable in Sunday School work. Not only has he personally built a number of successful and growing Sunday Schools he has helped others to do so through his books, conferences, and seminars. Books which he authored or co-authored used in this project include Growing and Winning through the Sunday School, Evangelism through the Sunday School, and Breakthrough Sunday School Work. Combining Arthur Flake’s formula with J.N. Barnette’s emphasis on evangelism, Piland developed nine basics of Sunday School growth that he encouraged churches to practice.

1. Make a commitment to reach people.
2. Identify and enroll people.
4. Enlist workers.
5. Train workers.
6. Provide space, equipment, and materials.
7. Teach the Bible to win the lost and develop the saved.
8. Conduct weekly workers’ meetings.
9. Conduct weekly evangelistic and ministry visitation.

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52 The Standard of Excellence can be seen in appendix A.
53 Harry M. Piland and Arthur Burcham, Evangelism through the Sunday School, 49.
All of Piland’s books emphasize Sunday Schools to put to use these basic nine practices. Another extremely helpful book is authored by Thom Rainer entitled *High Expectations*. Before becoming the President of LifeWay Christian Resources, Rainer was the dean of the Billy Graham School of Mission, Evangelism and Church Growth at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. *High Expectations* is the result of an extensive research project including more than 300 churches. Rainer shows that churches that have high expectations of their membership see their members rise to the occasion and become dramatically more involved than churches that do not have high expectations. The big surprise of this book is how much attention is given to Sunday School. Rainer’s study shows that churches which are highly effective in evangelism and assimilation place a high priority on Sunday School.

Another book that has taken the traditional organization of Sunday School and given it a 21st century look is *Growing Sunday School Teams: A 5 Step Practical Guide to Growing the Church Through the Sunday School*. This book, coauthored by Lawrence Phipps and Daniel Edmonds, is the result of putting to use the practices and principles discussed in the book. TEAMS is an acronym for Teach, Evangelize, Administate, Minister, and Serve. The purpose of this book is to teach an adult Sunday School class how to organize the class using the TEAMS approach.

Lawrence Phipps is the founding pastor of Vaughn Forest Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama and has organized his Sunday School using the TEAMS

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54 LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention is one of the world’s largest providers of Christian products and services. The company also owns 131 LifeWay Christian Stores throughout the United States, as well as two of the largest Christian conference centers in the country.

55 Vaughn Forest Baptist Church was started on February 6, 1994. Dr. Phipps was called as the churches first, and to date only pastor. The phenomenal growth of this church through its Sunday School will be discussed in detail in chapter three.
approach. His TEAMS approach to Sunday School has proven to be so successful that it is now endorsed and taught at the Alabama Baptist State Convention level to churches all over Alabama. Phipps has also written a number of articles about growing the church through the Sunday School.

Daniel Edmonds is Director of the Office of Sunday School for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. His ministry through Sunday School leadership in Alabama is being recognized by people throughout the Southern Baptist Convention. Edmonds is also a member of Vaughn Forest Baptist Church. The author has recently instituted the TEAMS approach in his Sunday School at First Baptist Church of Foley, Alabama and is finding it to be very effective. TEAMS is basically taking an old product (the traditional Southern Baptist adult Sunday School class organization) and repackaging it to give it a new and fresh look.

Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Church* is also an extremely helpful book in understanding the need for an effective church growth strategy. A purpose driven church strategically moves people from non-believers to mature believers through an intentional process of evangelism and discipleship. This is illustrated using a baseball diamond path around which church members are encouraged to move, with the idea being that a higher level of maturity is attained as one moves around each base. This is not to claim that one has reached spiritual perfection once he has reached home base. It is to show progression in the disciple’s spiritual growth. Sunday School is basically the church organized to move people strategically and with intentionality from being unbelievers to being mature believers.
Another extremely helpful author is Mr. Sunday School himself, Elmer Towns. Towns is recognized as one of the nation’s leading authorities in Sunday School work and growth. He has authored more than 50 books on the subject of Sunday School. *How to Grow an Effective Sunday School* addresses the biblical philosophy behind the Sunday School ministry, and then develops the practical aspects which are imperative to any successful program:

- The Laws of Sunday School Growth
- Organization and Administration
- Recruiting and Training Competent Teachers
- Selecting the Best Curriculum for Your Church
- Setting and Reaching Goals

*What Every Pastor Should Know about Sunday School*, coauthored by Towns and Stan Toler, is a motivational book for pastors on how Sunday School can bring new life and growth to their churches. Towns and Toler show how Sunday School properly organized and worked can help churches reach the lost, boost Bible knowledge, disciple all ages, meet people’s needs, produce leaders, and provide role models. In *154 Steps to Revitalize Your Sunday School and Keep Your Church Growing*, Towns encourages pastors to return to traditional laws of Sunday School growth. He outlines 154 basic principles for a vital and growing Sunday School. These 154 principles include a number of new and creative ways for doing Sunday School work and reaching people for Bible study and Christ.

Another book of great importance for this topic is Bill L. Taylor’s *21 Truths, Traditions, & Trends: Propelling the Sunday School into the 21st Century*. At the time of the writing of this book Bill Taylor was the Director of the Bible Teaching-Reaching...

\[56\] Dr. Elmer L. Towns, *How To Grow an Effective Sunday School*, back cover.
Division of the Baptist Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. In this book Taylor traces Southern Baptist Sunday School traditions and points out some significant emerging trends that pastors will need to know in order to fulfill the Great Commission in the 21st century. He strongly encourages pastors and church leaders to place a renewed emphasis on excellence in leadership training, Bible teaching, and outreach.

**Statement of Methodology**

Chapter one covers the Biblical and Theological basis for the project. Chapter two will discuss the state of the Sunday School in America today. Chapters three through six will look at four Alabama churches who have achieved growth primarily through the Sunday School in the past 6 years. These churches include Vaughn Forest Baptist Church of Montgomery, Jubilee Baptist Church of Daphne, First Baptist Church of Gulf Shores, and First Baptist Church of Foley, which is the author’s church. Chapter seven will discuss lessons learned from studying the Sunday Schools of these churches and make recommendations to help churches revitalize their Sunday Schools for church growth in the 21st century.

**Summary**

The Sunday School has been under fire in recent years as a program that is no longer usable as a viable church growth tool. Yet, the Sunday School has solid Scriptural support and a firm historical foundation. Sunday School from its very early days in America has been about reaching people for Christ and church membership. Pastors and
church leaders who understand the true purpose of Sunday School and work hard to properly organize the Sunday School to fulfill that purpose will find that the Sunday School is still a strong and effective tool for sustained church growth in America today. The study that follows is illustrative of how the Sunday School can be used to effectively reach people for Christ and church membership in the 21st century.
CHAPTER 2

THE STATE OF SUNDAY SCHOOL IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

Introduction

Although this paper deals with Sunday School on a larger scope than just the Southern Baptist Convention, this chapter will concern itself primarily though not entirely on Southern Baptist Sunday School growth. The Southern Baptist Convention collects two major types of Sunday School information from its congregations. These two measures are 1. Total Sunday School Enrollment and 2. Sunday School Average Attendance.

Findings

Total Sunday School Enrollment

Figure 2 (on the next page) graphically presents Total Sunday School Enrollment from 1950 to 2006 in the Southern Baptist Convention.

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1Statistics and information for the graphs for this chapter were provided by J. Clifford Tharp of the Strategic Technologies Department of LifeWay Christian Resources, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, October 11, 2007 and were also compiled from the Annuals of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Annuals are prepared and printed by the Executive Committee of the SBC for the annual Southern Baptist Convention meeting. Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 901 Commerce Street, Nashville, TN 37203. See Appendix B.
Figure 2 shows that Sunday School total enrollment saw strong growth from 1950 to 1965 and then begin to experience a decline from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies. Since the mid-seventies the total enrollment has rebounded, experiencing a slight but steady increase. Figure 2 also shows that there was a slight decline from 2000 to 2005. 2006 showed a return to growth but not to the 2000 level. The Southern Baptist Convention set a goal to have 8.5 million people enrolled in Sunday School by 1985. It was called the “8.5 By 85” campaign. As seen in Figure 2, twenty-one years after 1985, the goal has still not been reached.

Figure 3 (on the next page) presents the annual percent change in total enrollment and shows that in the early and mid 1990s the percent changes have been hovering around zero or below, while taking a slight turn upward as the new millennium approached. There was, however, a nearly two percent drop from 2004 to 2005, with a
return to a minimal positive increase in 2006. According to Cliffard Tharp in a paper written for LifeWay Christian Resources in July of 2005, “many issues may impact this, one of them being the way Bible study is being conducted. With the rise of small groups/cell groups, it is possible that Bible study is taking place, but it is either not being counted or not being counted under Sunday School. This factor alone could impact the trends.”

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Sunday School Average Attendance

Figure 4 (on the next page) shows Sunday School average attendance from 1972 to 2006. Sunday School average attendance was not collected by the Southern Baptist Convention in the years prior to 1972.

Figure 4 shows that Sunday School average attendance basically remained steady, just under the four million mark, until 2001, when for the first time average attendance surpassed the four million mark. This graph shows that while Sunday School growth is slow; it is not dead. This seems to contradict the argument that Sunday School is no longer an effective tool or program for reaching people for Christ. These figures show that people still can be reached through an effective Sunday School ministry.

Figure 5 (on the next page) presents Sunday School average attendance as a percent of total Sunday School enrollment from 1972 until 2006.
In numeric terms Sunday School average attendance generally has a slight positive trend over the entire time-period (See Appendix B). However, Figure 5 reveals that Sunday School average attendance, as a percent of total enrollment, reached its highpoint in 1975 and declined until 1994. Since then the trend has been basically an upward one with Sunday School average attendance breaking 50% of Sunday School enrollment in 2002 and subsequent years. According to Tharp, several factors could be at work impacting this percentage and trend. A major one could be the “Open Enrollment Strategy” that was being taught and strongly emphasized by denominational Sunday School leaders during the 1990s. The open enrollment strategy is to enroll persons in Sunday School anywhere and at any time as long as they agree to be enrolled. Churches

3Ibid.
that practice open enrollment usually will find that their Sunday School attendance numbers will go up but the percentage of attendance to enrollment will go down.

Sunday School Total Enrollment and Resident Membership

Figure 6 (on the next page) presents Sunday School total enrollment as a percentage of resident membership from 1950 to 2006. The graph reveals that in the mid 1950s through the early 1960s Sunday School enrollment exceeded resident membership. Sunday School during this time period was indeed the front door to the church and was an evangelistically strong organization. That Sunday School enrollment should exceed resident membership has been taught from the very early days of Sunday School. In 1937 J.N Barnette argued:

The first test of a Sunday school is the test of numbers. A church should measure its work in reaching people by the number who ought to be in the Sunday school.

If a church does not have more in regular attendance in its Sunday school than there are resident church members, it is evident that the Sunday school is not as large as it should be or as large as it could be made. All of the resident church members should be enrolled in the Sunday school. Counting the Cradle Roll, Nursery, Beginner, and Primary groups, and those from the Junior age up who are not church members, it is evident that there should be many more in Sunday school than there are resident church members.\(^4\)

Since 1964 the percentage has had a fairly constant decline, falling below 70% in 2006. One reason for this decline may be that many churches have gone to a dual program utilizing both Small Groups and Sunday School.\(^5\) As stated above, with Sunday School


\(^5\)Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia and Day Spring Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama are good examples of churches that are using both the Small Groups and Sunday School strategies.
enrollment, those who are members of a Small Group may not be listed on the Sunday School enrollment.

Fig. 6. Sunday School Total Enrollment as Percentage of Resident Membership, 1950-2006.

Sunday School Age-group Enrollments

In his report to LifeWay in July of 2005 Tharp writes,

Examination of age group segments of the total enrollment reveals some interesting findings. Since 1980 the enrollment trends for three of the age-groups are down (Preschool, Children, and Youth). The Adult area is the only segment with an increase over the time period. [Figure 7 (on the next page)] presents the various age groups as a percent of their corresponding US White Population. One interesting finding is how stable the Sunday School age-group enrollments are as a percent of their corresponding US White Population. The changes in the percents vary little over the 25-year period presented. The Children’s age-group is the group that has changed the most. A second interesting factor is the penetration of the various age segments. It appears that Southern Baptists have
done the worse job of penetrating the Adult age-group. . . . This may support the belief that Sunday School is seen as an activity for children.\textsuperscript{6}

According to the \textit{2007 Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention}, while many churches continue to view Sunday School strategically as the second step in a discipleship process that begins with worship, Sunday School attendance as a percentage of reported worship attendance has steadily declined.\textsuperscript{8} In 2005, the ratio was 68.5 percent, compared to 85.5 percent in 1991, when worship attendance was first reported on the Annual Church Profile.\textsuperscript{9} Figure 8 (on the next page) shows Annual Church Profile

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{7}Graph provided by J. Clifford Tharp.

\textsuperscript{8}Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, \textit{Annual of the 2007 Southern Baptist Convention}. (Nashville: Executive Committee, Southern Baptist Convention, 2007), 153-154.

\textsuperscript{9}The Annual Church Profile (ACP for short) is a process of collecting data from Southern Baptist Churches. Some of the information collected and compiled includes: church leadership, membership, Sunday School, Baptisms, Discipleship, Financial Information, Vacation Bible School, and Missions.
numbers from 1994 to 2006 noting this steady decline in the ratio of Sunday School attendance versus worship attendance.

![Percentage of SS Attendance to Worship Attendance](image)

**Fig. 8. Percentage of Sunday School Attendance to Worship Attendance.**

**Observations**

Several quick observations can be made from the numbers and graphs above.

1. Sunday School total enrollment experienced a leveling off in the 1990s.
2. Total Sunday School enrollment has decreased in relation to resident membership.
3. Adults appear to be the age-segment with the greatest potential for growth.
4. Sunday School attendance has experienced a steady decrease in relationship to worship attendance.

The graphs and figures show that Sunday School enrollment began to plateau from 1960 through the 1970s. In the 1970s and 1980s Sunday School saw another spurt of growth, though relatively small compared to previous decades. Sunday School basically plateaued in the 1990s seeing only minimal growth compared to the growth of
previous years. Sunday School grew by just a little less than 177,000 in the 1990s. This plateau of Sunday School enrollment in the 1990s led many church and denominational leaders to believe that Sunday School has seen its best days and is no longer a viable program for the twenty-first century for church growth.

From 2000 to 2006 Sunday School enrollment declined by 69,753. “In 2003, the Southern Baptist Convention experienced a net gain of less than 20,000 in increased enrollment in Sunday School. It took two churches to enroll one person in Sunday School.”

From 2003 to 2004 Sunday School enrollment saw an even smaller gain of just 12,554. It took more than three Southern Baptist Churches to enroll one person in Sunday School.

Looking at the numbers alone would cause one to agree with many who say that Sunday School is no longer a viable tool for church growth in the twenty-first century. One must go beyond the simple statistics, however, to assess the reason for the leveling off of Sunday School enrollment.

**Assessment**

In 2004 Thom Bower wrote an excellent article for *The Clergy Journal* entitled “Who Should Be Doing What? A Social-Critical View of Sunday School, Family, and Christian Education.” In this article he listed several major reasons for the decline of

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11 In 2004 the Southern Baptist Convention was made up of 43,465 churches. See Appendix B.

Sunday School in America. The author wants to point out the two major reasons that Bower argues.

The first reason for the decline in Sunday School is the inability of the Sunday School to adapt to a changing culture.

This first assessment begins with the contention that Sunday school was viable within a very specific team of cultural relationships, namely late nineteenth-century, rural, Protestant North America. In this setting, school, church, family, governance, and economics all worked together for the same purposes - civic responsibility, stable families, and a general sense of goodwill. When the social climate changed, other institutions changed: most families are no longer nuclear, most children do not walk to school, most government representatives no longer live down the street. Meanwhile, with very minor exceptions, most Sunday school models duplicate the Sunday schools of the late nineteenth century. The cultural conflation that once supported Sunday school no longer exists, and no social institution can stand alone.\textsuperscript{13}

The second reason for the decline of Sunday School, according to Bower, is Sunday School has forgotten its purpose. Bower argues that each institution plays distinctive roles, and that each in its particular way contributes to the whole. Sunday School has a particular role to play in the church, thus churches today should re-evaluate the role of Sunday School “so that it can function within its boundaries with legitimacy and strength, while not having to assume responsibility for learning tasks designated to other parts of the church.”\textsuperscript{14}

Bower argues that the Sunday School program in many churches is floundering because it is moving beyond the boundaries of its purpose. The author has found this assessment to be true. He has talked with pastors whose Sunday School hour is being used not only for Bible teaching, but for committee meetings, mission organization

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
meetings, choir practice, and more. Bible teaching, in these churches, had been relegated to a lower priority.

What is the solution? Bower gives several “game plans” to return Sunday School to its former glory days. Bower argues first of all that Sunday School needs to be given higher priority today than it is being given. He states, “Sunday School has shown itself to be a viable force in shaping persons and shaping the culture. Its strength is already proven and needs to be reclaimed. Sunday School now needs to be given higher priority – that it may return to its former potency.”

Bower also argues that “Sunday School needs to adapt to the new culture. Accordingly, teachers have been integrating new media (video, the Internet, digital cameras) into lesson plans as a way to use expressions familiar to learners.” The good news is that more and more churches are making cultural adaptations to their Sunday School to reach, teach, and minister to more people.

One way that Sunday Schools are doing this is by offering specific needs Bible study classes. With the surge in the number of divorces and blended families in America today, many churches are offering Sunday School classes for divorcees and blended family couples. Another way that churches are attempting to change to meet the need of modern culture is bringing technology into the Sunday School classroom. Neil MacQueen, a Presbyterian minister and founder of Sunday School Software Ministries, states, “Hundreds of churches across the country are now using computers on a weekly

15Ibid.

16Ibid.
basis in Sunday Schools, and the number is growing rapidly.”\textsuperscript{17} He goes on to say that computers are attracting kids back to Sunday School which in return is increasing the number of young families on the Sunday School rolls.\textsuperscript{18}

Churches are also offering Sunday School at different times and places than just 9:45am on Sunday morning on the church campus. The author has talked with pastors whose churches have successful Sunday School classes meeting on weeknights at the church. Other churches have Sunday School classes that meet in church members’ homes or at a restaurant on Sunday morning.

\textbf{Future and Trends of Sunday School}

If the Sunday School is a program that is no longer effective, or is doomed to extinction, as some argue, the question must be asked “Why do the majority of protestant churches still have a Sunday School ministry today?” According to a Barna Research Group study, 19 out of 20 protestant churches (95\%) still offer a Sunday School ministry. George Barna states, “While churches are often divided along denominational, theological, and methodological lines, the research points out that Sunday School remains one of the most widely embraced ministry programs.”\textsuperscript{19} The same study also shows that over 300,000 churches offer some type of “systematic religious instruction in a classroom

\textsuperscript{17} Neil MacQueen "Computers in Sunday School," \textit{The Clergy Journal}, 1 August 2001; [journal online]; available from \url{http://www.proquest.com}; Internet; accessed 29 September 2007.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

setting” with nearly 45 million adults and more than 22 million children attending each week.

Sunday School is not only found in almost every church in America today, but it is still rated as one of the most effective evangelistic tools in America today. In his study which resulted in his book *Effective Evangelistic Churches*, Thom Rainer found that the most effective evangelistic churches in the Southern Baptist Convention ranked Sunday School as a major factor in their evangelistic effectiveness. In fact, Sunday School ranked only third behind preaching and prayer in its evangelistic effectiveness. Rainer goes on to state, “Nearly 90 percent of the churches in the follow-up interviews identified Sunday School as their most effective assimilation tool.”

Three years later Rainer came to the same conclusion in his book *High Expectations*. “The research is clear if not overwhelming. Sunday School is the most effective assimilation methodology in evangelistic churches today.”

While some predict the demise of Sunday School, most do not. Because of the findings stated above, most pastors and denominational leaders believe that Sunday School will never be erased from the page of church programs. Allan Taylor is Minister of Education at First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia where he has served since 1995. He is a strong advocate of Sunday School and leads one of the strongest Sunday Schools in America. Allan Taylor believes that Sunday School has a great future ahead of it for four reasons.

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22 Under Allan Taylor’s leadership the Sunday School attendance at First Baptist Church,
1. Statistics show that most people want to come to a church campus to attend the small group known as Sunday School.
2. Sunday School helps a church stay “small” while it is growing larger and does this in the intimate, relational way people want and need.
3. Sunday School and its three main tasks of reaching people, teaching people and ministering to people provide a strategy for accomplishing the vision that Christ gave in The Great Commission.
4. People are looking for a meaningful group to join, not just another social group that has little or no lasting influence.  

Trends

According to David Francis, Director of LifeWay Sunday School, the Sunday School in America has not really changed that much since its beginning. He states,

Sunday School is still practiced very much the same way that it has always been. A group of people get together in a room, whether they are preschoolers, children, students or adults and they are usually led by a teacher or someone that has a similar title. They have an experience that involves studying God’s Word, fellowshipping with one another, and sharing together in an age-appropriate way. In a lot of ways Sunday School has not changed. The setting has changed a little, but for the most part Sunday School is a classic that has its own life and movement.

Class Size

One major trend of Sunday School, says Francis, is that classes are getting larger rather than staying smaller. More and more churches are trying “larger groups for
children as well as adults, striving to create more enthusiasm—and deal with a shortage of committed leaders.”

The smaller adult Sunday School class has been championed by Southern Baptists from the very beginning. Larry Shotwell argued that 8 to 12 persons made for an ideal group for Bible study and better allowed for participants to be more involved in learning activities. An enrollment of 20 to 25 will usually provide 10 to 12 members in attendance.

Keeping classes small has been the general practice of Southern Baptist churches from the adult Sunday School ministry’s earliest beginnings. David Francis states that he has seen a change in this practice in recent years, at every age level, not just adults. Allan Taylor has made the same observation. Taylor states that larger classes are not necessarily bad, providing the teacher has the leadership ability to effectively manage and minister to a larger class. He believes that the size of the class should be based on the leadership level of its teacher. The author has noted the same trend. In every one of the churches that he visited for this project, all had at least one adult class with 50 or more enrolled. Dr. Lawrence Phipps, pastor of Vaughn Forest Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, who is also a strong advocate for the smaller class, acknowledged that classes for college students and singles are the exceptions to the small class rule.

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First Baptist Church of Foley, Alabama, of which the author is pastor, has one adult class that averages approximately 50 in attendance. Another adult class averages about 30 in attendance. The teachers for both of these classes are excellent Bible teachers and have the ability to organize their classes for growth and ministry.

### A New Name

Another trend that is taking place in Sunday School today is that it is being given a new name by many churches. “Some have changed the name from Sunday School to Bible Fellowships, LIFE Groups, or just Bible Study, hoping to be more relevant to newcomers.” Dr. Phipps states that Vaughn Forest Baptist Church changed the name of its Sunday School to Life Changing Bible Fellowship. Although the author’s church has not officially changed the name of its Sunday School, it is more and more being called Small Group Bible Study.

One reason many churches are giving Sunday School a new identity is because many church goers and non-church goers view Sunday School as being for children only. Sunday School is not seen as a ministry for adults. Many churches have changed the name in an attempt to attract more adults back to Bible study.

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30 David Francis, *Back to the Basics in Sunday School Work*

31 Phipps, interview by author.

32 Comment of Daniel Edmonds to author in a conversation at the Gulf Coast Sunday School Leadership Conference, Daphne, AL, January 2007. Daniel Edmonds is Director of the Office of Sunday School for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Montgomery, AL.
Customized Literature

According to the Barna Research Group, the fastest-moving shift within Sunday school programming is the move toward "customized" curriculum.\textsuperscript{33} Barna writes:

Currently, 1 out of every 5 churches (18\%) creates their own curriculum for elementary-age classes - nearly double the percentage measured in 2002 (10%). The profile of churches most likely to create their own curriculum is revealing. The data show that Buster pastors (26\%) and those in the West (25\%) - often viewed as pace-setters for other regions - are among the most likely to customize, suggesting that the trend is likely to grow in prominence. The churches least likely to customize were Southern Baptist (4\%) and African American (9\%).\textsuperscript{34}

Vaughn Forest Baptist Church is one of the few Southern Baptist Churches that creates its own Sunday School curriculum. The curriculum, which is written by Phipps and Bryant Bush, Teaching Pastor at Vaughn Forest, is prepared a quarter in advance and can be downloaded from Vaughn Forest’s website. Each week Vaughn Forest teachers can view Bryant Bush teaching the material for the upcoming Sunday over the internet by logging on to Vaughn Forest’s website and clicking on LIFEponts.\textsuperscript{35}

Conclusion

Sunday School has not seen the growth in recent years as it has seen prior to the 1960s and in the decade of the 1980s. Thom Rainer’s research has shown, however, that this does not mean that Sunday School is no longer an effective tool for reaching people for Jesus Christ and church membership. Most believe that Sunday School, in one form or another, is here to stay. Churches that have made Sunday School a priority and placed

\textsuperscript{33}Barna.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35}The written lessons and the video of Bryant Bush teaching the upcoming week’s lesson are accessible to anyone via Vaughn Forest’s website at www.vaughnforest.com.
a strong emphasis on reaching people through their Sunday School, have ranked Sunday School as one of their most viable evangelistic tools.

A thorough study of the history of the Sunday School will remind pastors that Sunday School has been the primary evangelistic arm of the church for over a century. Somewhere along the way, pastors and churches have forgotten this and attempted to replace Sunday School as the primary evangelistic arm of the church with other more modern programs and tools. This author believes that when pastors return the Sunday School to the position that it once had in priority, and with purpose and energy work Sunday School to be an evangelistically effective organization, the result will be a vibrant and growing church.

The following chapters will highlight four churches which have placed Sunday School among their highest priorities for reaching people for Christ and church membership. These churches have found great success in church growth through the Sunday School for five primary reasons:

1. The Sunday School is pastor supported and/or led.
2. The Sunday School is used as the primary evangelistic arm of the church.
3. The Sunday School organization is patterned after Flake’s Formula for Sunday School Growth.
4. The Sunday School is worked to be evangelistically effective.
5. The Sunday School has adapted to meet modern day needs of people.
CHAPTER THREE

VAUGHN FOREST BAPTIST CHURCH

Vaughn Forest Baptist Church began on February 6, 1994, in an auditorium at Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama. Dr. Lawrence H. Phipps, the founding pastor, came from First Baptist Church of Enterprise, Alabama. The church started with seventy-six members on its initial Sunday. The church’s emphasis on an evangelistic Sunday School and prayer has been the cornerstone of its ministry.

The history of Vaughn Forest has been marked by phenomenal growth—in terms of membership and mortar. The church paid off its first twenty-two acres in 1995, added an acre in 1997 and by September of that year had moved from a collection of trailers into the first worship center and educational space. In 2002 Vaughn Forest dedicated the second facility, a multi-use room and three story educational building. In 2005 the church purchased an additional seven acres.

The church currently has over 2,100 members and more than 2,400 enrolled in Sunday School, which Vaughn Forest calls LIFE-Changing Bible Fellowship. Vaughn Forest has averaged baptizing 130 people each year from 2000 to 2006 and is consistently in the top ten of Alabama’s Southern Baptist churches. See the growth of Vaughn Forest from 2000 to 2006 in Figure 9.
How did Vaughn Forest experience such growth? When Dr. Phipps met with the Pastor Search Committee, he told them that he would grow the church through prayer and a strong evangelistic Sunday School.

The author had the opportunity to interview Dr. Phipps for this project. In the interview Dr. Phipps stated, “We have become one of the fastest growing churches in the country and a big portion of the credit goes to the fact that we started out with a focus on doing Sunday School right, organizing it correctly, and using it for evangelism.”

Dr. Phipps states that the purpose for Sunday School at Vaughn Forest Baptist Church is “To reach, teach, minister, and motivate others to reach, teach, and minister.” The Sunday School classes or their LIFE-changing Bible Fellowship classes are always generation specific and open. By generation specific he means that each class has a designated age bracket attached to it. The Sunday School of Vaughn Forest is a fully age graded program. Open classes are those where believers and unbelievers can attend and

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|cc|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Total Members & Sunday School Enrollment & Sunday School Attendance & Baptisms & Worship Attendance \\
\hline
2000 & 1039 & 1443 & 650 & 78 & 705 \\
2001 & 1263 & 2296 & 700 & 108 & 850 \\
2002 & 1367 & 2534 & 848 & 114 & 1016 \\
2003 & 1599 & 1913 & 901 & 196 & 1200 \\
2004 & 1735 & 2547 & 912 & 123 & 1200 \\
2005 & 2099 & 2883 & 1017 & 126 & 1350 \\
2006 & 2142 & 2489 & 1086 & 164 & 1400 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Growth of Vaughn Forest Baptist Church 2000-2006}
\end{table}

\begin{flushright}
1 Data from Baldwin Baptist Association, P.O. Box 459, Silverhill, Alabama, 36576, Dr. Larry Patterson, Director of Missions.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
2 Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from Dr. Phipps are from an interview by the author for this project on March 16, 2007.
\end{flushright}
the class has no ending date.

**Locating the Prospects**

While Vaughn Forest locates prospects in a number of ways, Phipps states that the church uses two primary methods to search for prospects. The first is through its worship services. Most of the Sunday School prospects come from those who fill out the guest registration card in one of the Sunday morning worship services. These cards are collected and on Monday morning, worship service guests are assigned to a Sunday School outreach team for follow up during its *LIFE Outreach* on Monday evening.

The second primary way is through evangelistic events. The church has every guest at an event, such as a Christmas pageant, fill out a registration card. Non-churched guests are immediately assigned to a Sunday School class for follow up.

The church also does ministry surveys each semester of *LIFE Outreach*. Sunday School outreach teams, that do not have a specific prospect assignment for that week will go door to door, asking questions from a “Ministry Survey” that was designed by Vaughn Forest Baptist Church. Many unchurched prospects are found through these surveys.

**T.E.A.M.S. – Sunday School Organization**

In 1994 Phipps and church member Daniel Edmonds developed a strategy for Sunday School growth around the acronym T.E.A.M.S. The acronym stands for:

- **T**each
- **E**vangelize
- **A**dministrate

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3 Daniel Edmonds is Director, Office of Sunday School, Alabama Baptist State Convention.
Minister
Serve

The TEAMS plan basically takes the traditional Sunday School class organization and builds on it. The traditional Sunday School class organization is made up of a teacher who both leads and teaches the class on Sunday morning. The traditional class will also include a class secretary, outreach leader, prayer leader, fellowship leader, and one or more care group leaders. The typical traditional Sunday School class organization would look like the following.

![Fig.10. Traditional Adult Sunday School Class Organization Chart]

There are some differences in the TEAMS Sunday School class organization from the traditional Sunday School organization. For example, in the TEAMS approach, while the teacher is the true leader of the class, he or she is not the Sunday morning leader of the class: the class administrator serves as the Sunday morning leader. The TEAMS

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Sunday School class organization looks like the following:

![TEAMS Adult Sunday School Class Organization Chart]

When the author asked Phipps how the TEAMS class organization relates to the traditional Sunday School organization he commented,

In most Sunday Schools the teacher is the one who is in charge of the Sunday morning class time. He is the one who directs the class. In the TEAMS class organization, the administrator is the one who is in charge of the Sunday morning class agenda. We have found that if the teacher is the Sunday morning leader he walks in the class with the attitude, “You sit still while I instill,” therefore they will often skip the fellowship, prayer, and ministry sharing times. The administrator can allow such things to take place as the fellowship and ministry reports, evangelism reports, and announcements. By doing this the class begins to realize that they are part of a bigger picture, they are a part of a whole church. We actually have an easier time getting teachers now because they know they don’t have to run the class.

As one can see in the TEAMS chart above, the plan provides for potentially fifteen or more leaders in a single adult Sunday School class. But what about those
classes that do not have many members? Phipps commented on this: “We know that most Sunday School classes do not have enough members for every position. Many of those positions can be combined so that one person can do two at the same time. The key is to start small and do it right from the beginning.” This is further detailed in the *Growing Sunday School Teams* guide.

Step 1: One person begins a TEAMS class by filling two positions. He/She can be both the Teacher and Evangelism Coordinator.

Step 2: As the Teacher begins reaching and teaching, he/she can begin to delegate the other leadership positions to those that he/she reaches, or that God sends. This allows the class to begin to fill the TEAMS leadership positions.

Step 3: As the class continues to grow, the Teacher and Administrator can evaluate others who come and involve them according to their abilities, interests and availability.

Step 4: As the class grows, it may be discovered that some of the new members are more gifted in areas of leadership or more passionate about one of the TEAMS leadership positions than the first ones who were enlisted when the class started. Therefore, the teacher must be open to changing some of the positions as the class grows.

Step 5: A growing class will begin to send leaders from the class to serve in other areas. The measure of the ultimate success of a class will not be how many people can be put in seats, but how many people the classes place in service, and the classes’ ability to start new classes.5

Following are descriptions of the primary leadership positions in the TEAMS approach to Sunday School. The descriptions that follow were shared with the author in the interview with Dr. Phipps. A more detailed description of the positions can be found in the *Growing Sunday School TEAMS* guide, which can be purchased from Vaughn Forest Baptist Church.6


6 Vaughn Forest Baptist Church, 8860 Vaughn Road, Montgomery, AL, 36117. Website: www.vfbc.org. Phone: (334) 279-5433.
Teacher

According to Phipps, in the TEAMS plan, the purpose of the teacher is to teach people how to find and follow Jesus. The primary responsibilities of the teacher are:

- Prays, studies, and models what he/she teaches.
- Teaches, on average, three Sundays per month.
- Uses the Bible study material that has been provided for the class.
- Selects a class Administrator and helps him/her select other class leaders.
- Disciples a Teacher in Training.
- Works with the entire class to identify, contact, and enroll prospects.
- Attends monthly TEAMS meetings and annual training.
- Enthusiastically supports the start of new classes.

In the TEAMS plan the teacher is allotted about 40 minutes to teach. Phipps states,

Because our teachers have only forty minutes to teach we have found that they actually spend more time preparing their lessons. We have found that the longer a teacher has to teach, the less time he or she spends in preparation. But if you tell a teacher that he or she has only forty minutes to teach including discussion time, they realize they have to get prepared. When it comes to teaching, we're having better prepared teachers and therefore better teaching.

Teacher in Training/New Class Leader

The purpose of the Teacher in Training is to become a disciple of the teacher to learn how to teach people to find and follow Christ. As the New ClassLeader his/her purpose is to select an Administrator for a new class and work with class leaders to prepare to start a new class. The primary responsibilities are:

- Teaches at least one Sunday per month.
- Meets with class TEAMS leaders to prepare to start a new class when needed.
- Keeps the need for starting a new class before the current class.
- Has a class commissioning service the day the members leave to begin the new class.
- Attends monthly TEAMS meetings and annual training.

Discipleship Coordinator

The purpose of the Discipleship Coordinator is to insure that believers are
growing as disciples. The primary responsibility of the Discipleship Coordinator is to promote discipleship classes within the church.

Evangelism Coordinator

The purpose of the Evangelism Coordinator is to lead the class to keep evangelism as its chief priority. The primary responsibilities are:

- Receives training in the church’s evangelism ministry.
- Encourages class members to be trained in the church’s evangelism ministry.
- Recruits at least one outreach team from the class for each semester of the church’s outreach program.
- Seeks out and greets guests each week.
- Reports on the previous week’s outreach results.
- Attends monthly TEAMS meetings.
- Assists and supports the start of new classes.

During the interview, Phipps stated that as important as teaching is, it is not the most important thing to come out of the class. The most important task is developing a class attitude that knows that it does not want to be closed. It wants to be a class that is going after people.

Class Administrator

The purpose of the Class Administrator is to organize and lead the Sunday morning class time ensuring that the agenda stays on track and on time. The primary responsibilities are:

- Assists the teacher in selecting other class leaders.
- Arrives on time at all meetings.
- Attends Monthly TEAMS meetings.
- Disciples someone to administrate the class in his/her absence.
Class Secretary

The purpose of the class Secretary is to track the attendance of members and guests. The primary responsibilities are:

- Completes class records and distributes information to the proper class leader.
- Distributes cards to guests each time they visit (until they enroll in the class).
- Provides phone numbers, addresses and email addresses to class leaders as needed.

Fellowship Coordinator

The purpose of the Fellowship Coordinator is to build community by promoting fellowship inside and outside of class. The primary responsibilities are:

- Organizes coffee and refreshments for Sunday morning Bible study time.
- Plans and promotes out of class fellowship activities.

Ministry Coordinator

The purpose of the Ministry Coordinator is to insure that the Sunday School class is ministering to its members. The primary responsibilities are:

- Serves as a Care Group leader.
- Enlists and trains other Care Group leaders.
- Attends monthly TEAM meetings.
- Assists and supports the start of new classes.

Phipps stated that ministry is one of the most important aspects of the TEAMS approach. It teaches the class that it has a responsibility to take care of its members without believing that ministry is the job of the pastor and staff. Phipps stated, “I must model ministry. I do that by going to the hospital and praying with someone, but I can’t effectively minister to over 2000 members. Ministry to class members and class
prospects is the responsibility of the class. Through TEAMS, ministry is being done very effectively here at Vaughn Forest.”

Care Group Leaders

The purpose of the Care Groups is to organize the class to a manageable size for ministry. The primary responsibility of Care Group leaders are:

- Meets with the Ministry Coordinator for training, information, and receiving new members for his/her Care Group.
- Meets with and becomes closely acquainted with everyone in the Care Group.
- Ministers to everyone in his/her Care Group through weekly phone calls, cards, or personal visits.
- Reports on absences and needs each week during Sunday School.

Prayer Leader

The purpose of the Prayer leader is to provide ultimate care for class members by leading the class to pray for each other inside and outside the class time. The primary responsibilities are:

- Leads the class prayer time or enlists someone to do so before class begins.
- Organizes a prayer chain for times of special prayer needs.
- Encourages class members to be prayer partners for class outreach teams.

Service Coordinator

The purpose of the Service Coordinator is to encourage class members to use their spiritual gifts in ministry. The primary responsibilities are:

- Receives reports about areas of the church that needs workers.
- Encourages members from the class to meet these needs.
- Assists Class Administrator in enlisting people to fill class leadership roles.
- Attends monthly TEAMS meetings and annual training.
Class Missionary Leader

The purpose of the Class Missionary Leader is to lead the class to keep in touch with individuals who have left the class to serve in other areas. The primary responsibilities are:

- Takes photos of the missionaries and places them on the class bulletin board.
- Encourages class to send cards of encouragement to those serving outside their class.
- Invites class missionaries to class fellowships.

Vaughn Forest created class charts to help classes see how the class is organized and who in the class is serving in each leadership position. Classes are encouraged to place these charts on bulletin boards. Two charts are used. The first chart is the Bible Study TEAMS chart. The second is the Care Groups chart. The charts are shown on the following pages.\(^7\)

\(^7\)Poster size charts can be purchased from Vaughn Forest Baptist Church, 8860 Vaughn Road, Montgomery, AL, 36117. Website: www.vfbc.org. Phone: (334) 279-5433.
Fig. 12. Bible Study TEAMS Chart
The monthly TEAMS meetings are a very vital part of Vaughn Forest’s Sunday School program. The monthly TEAMS meeting is held on a Wednesday night. The format of the meeting is as follows:

6:00  General Assembly  
6:15  T.E.A.M.S. Meetings  
6:45  Class Meetings  
7:15  Dismiss

*General Assembly* – During these fifteen minutes, all of the adult class TEAMS
leaders meet together in one place and the Minister of Education leads this time. He shares some encouraging and motivational remarks and then discusses items that relate to the whole Sunday School or church, such as a special Sunday School emphasis. He may also discuss areas where the Sunday School is not doing well (contacting absentees, completing records, etc.) or give praise to areas where classes are excelling.

_T.E.A.M.S. Meetings_ – This is a thirty minute period when all adult T.E.A.M.S. leaders meet together in separate rooms. Each group is led by a lay person who serves as the Teachers, Evangelism Coordinator, Administrator, Ministry Coordinator, or Service Coordinator leader for the whole Sunday School. During these meetings the leader covers ways to improve their area of ministry. Time is given for class leaders to share ideas and talk about struggles.

_Class Meetings_ – Class meetings make up the final thirty minutes of TEAMS meetings. In the class meeting the teacher, evangelism coordinator, administrator, ministry coordinator and service coordinator discuss what is happening in their areas of ministry. Phipps points out that the monthly TEAMS meeting does not negate the need for class meetings at other times. At these meetings all of the class leaders will be present to discuss their areas of ministry.

According to Phipps the attendance percentage for their monthly TEAMS meetings is much higher than the average weekly or monthly Sunday School workers meetings. He states that for teachers and administrators the average attendance is between eighty and ninety percent. For the average weekly or monthly Sunday School leaders meeting fifty percent is considered good in most churches.\footnote{Based on interviews the author has had with many pastors, he has concluded that the average attendance at weekly or monthly Sunday School leaders meetings is between 40 and 50 percent of all}
TEAMS Covenants

Every leader in the TEAMS plan is asked to sign a covenant. Phipps states that one of the main reasons for the downfall of Sunday School in America is because too many churches had teachers who were leading with their lips and not with their lives. At Vaughn Forest Baptist Church every Sunday School TEAMS leader is asked to sign a covenant that he/she will hold true to the guidelines and responsibilities in his/her area of service and leadership. Vaughn Forest lists “Five Steps of Spiritual Preparation” that all leaders are asked and expected to follow:

1. Spend time with God
2. Study the Word
3. Share your faith
4. Practice Christian stewardship with your resources
5. Serve the Lord.

The covenant that TEAMS leaders are asked to sign includes following the Five Steps of Spiritual Preparation. The Teacher’s Covenant is given as an example.

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Sunday School workers.

9 Phipps and Edmonds, 19.
**The Teacher’s Covenant**

With God’s help and as long as I am able to serve as Teacher . . .

- I will seek to follow the **Five Steps of Spiritual Preparation**.
- I will seek to follow the **Primary Responsibilities** of a Teacher.
- I understand the importance of being present at and supporting the monthly TEAMS meetings.
- I will seek to organize and be present at my class meetings.
- I will support the ministry of the other TEAMS leaders in my class.
- I will seek to be trained in and supportive of our church’s outreach ministry.
- I will seek to serve on an evangelism team at least one semester each year, but will attempt to visit members and prospects, and lead my class to do, throughout the year.
- I will seek to be obedient to God in every area of my life so that will not be hesitant to teach the class how to apply any truth from God’s word, the Bible.

Signed: __________________________ Date: _____ / _____ / _____

Class: __________________________

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**Pastor Involvement**

The Sunday School at Vaughn Forest is very much pastor supported and led.

Phipps not only wrote the TEAMS plan for Sunday School but he also models it by being in a class himself, and he requires his staff to be in a class. He asks, “If we’re not going to be in a class, how can we expect other people to be in a class?”

Phipps starts classes. He does not have a traditional pastor’s class. He believes that pastor’s classes are counter productive. He states, “Every church that I’ve ever been to that has a pastor’s class, the people sit in the auditorium and do nothing.” When Phipps starts classes he immediately puts the TEAMS structure in place, begins to equip the Teacher in Training, and usually within seven to eight months he is able to turn the class over to the Teacher in Training.
Another way that Phipps is involved in the Sunday School ministry is that he teaches one of the three teacher training courses that Vaughn Forest offers for their teachers. He also promotes Sunday School from the pulpit on a regular basis.

**Recruiting and Training Workers**

Vaughn Forest enlists teachers using four different approaches. The first is their new member class. A list of ministry opportunities is provided and a number of people will volunteer during the new member class. The second approach is a spiritual gifts class that is offered using Willow Creek Community Church’s Network spiritual gifts curriculum. The third approach is an annual enlistment campaign encouraging interested members to sign up for teacher training. The fourth approach, the one from which the vast majority of their teachers come, is a one on one approach where a class Teacher personally recruits a Teacher in Training for his or her class. All potential teachers, including Teachers in Training, must go through Vaughn Forest’s Teacher Training class before they can become class Teachers.

Teacher Training is not only a high priority at Vaughn Forest, it is a requirement for teaching in the church’s Sunday School. Before one can teach a Sunday School class he or she must attend the Teacher’s Training course which is offered twice a year, in January and in August. Another required course that all teachers must attend every year is Vaughn Forest’s annual TEAMS Training course. Whether a teacher is just beginning his or her first year as a teacher or has been teaching for many years, that teacher must attend the annual TEAMS Training if he or she wants to teach during the next Sunday.

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10Network is a six session spiritual gifts course that was first written in 1994 for the members of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois by pastor Bill Hybels. A newly revised DVD curriculum written by Bruce Bugbee and Bill Hybels is now available through Zondervan publishing. The author found the DVD curriculum at [http://www.christianbook.com](http://www.christianbook.com), accessed September 18, 2007.
School year. Phipps states that the best training is on the job training. Potential teachers receive this when they agree to serve as a Teacher-in-Training for a Sunday School class. A Teacher-in-Training has not only taken the required courses, but he or she also has one year’s experience behind him or her. Those who have served as a Teacher-in-Training have proven to be the better teachers at Vaughn Forest, according to Phipps.

Providing Sunday School Space

Providing space for a growing Sunday School is not always easy. Vaughn Forest Baptist Church added space by going to two Sunday Schools. Their Sunday morning schedule is as follows:

- 8:00 AM - Sunday School
- 9:15 AM – Worship
- 9:30 AM – Sunday School
- 10:45 AM – Worship

Phipps states that by going to two Sunday Schools they were able to double the number of Sunday School rooms without the huge cost of constructing another building. Prior to going to two Sunday Schools Vaughn Forest would start classes in non-Sunday School rooms such as the choir room or the church library.

Going After the People

*LIFE Outreach*\(^{11}\) is Vaughn Forest’s weekly visitation program. *LIFE Outreach* meets once per week for fourteen weeks in the Fall and Winter/Spring. The Fall semester

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\(^{11}\) LIFE Outreach materials including an administrative guide, student workbooks, evangelistic tracts, and prayer partners cards can be purchased from Vaughn Forest Baptist Church, 8860 Vaughn Road, Montgomery, AL, 36117. Website: www.vfbc.org. Phone: (334) 279-5433.
begins two weeks before Labor Day. This allows the semester to conclude by Thanksgiving. The Winter/Spring semester begins the last Sunday of January which allows time to conclude the semester right before Mother’s Day. A typical schedule for a semester of *LIFE Outreach* at Vaughn Forest will look like this on a Monday evening:

6:00   Praise and Prayer
6:05   Practice with your team
6:20   Teaching Time
6:55   Visitation
8:30   Reporting and Rejoicing time.

Weekly visitation still takes place December through January and mid-May through mid-August when *LIFE Outreach* is not in session.

The key to *LIFE Outreach* is that it is directly connected to the Sunday School. Outreach teams come from the Sunday School classes. Each team visits for two purposes:

1. To reach people for Christ
2. To enroll people in their Sunday School class

The outreach teams are made up of three persons with at least one woman on each team. Each team is made up of a team leader (someone who has previously gone through *LIFE Outreach*) and two team learners. Team learners are in the process of being equipped by the team leader to become team leaders themselves. By the end of the *LIFE Outreach* semester team learners will have learned how to share their salvation testimony, a Sunday School testimony, and memorized the *LIFE* evangelistic outline which was written by Phipps.
Open Enrollment

Vaughn Forest practices open enrollment. Open enrollment is the practice by which any church member can enroll any person in Sunday School at any time and in any place. Church members have enrolled people in their Sunday School classes while shopping at a store or in a restaurant. All church members need in order to enroll a person in Sunday School is his or her permission and personal information such as name, age, address, and phone.

Summary

Vaughn Forest Baptist Church is a mega-church in a large city. It has experienced tremendous growth in its short life because the church has built a strong evangelistic Sunday School. Vaughn Forest has followed Flake’s Formula for Sunday School growth by effectively locating the prospects through it’s LIFE Outreach ministry, enlarging the organization by placing an emphasis on starting new classes, recruiting and training workers, providing the space for Sunday School classes, and going after the people through its open enrollment policy.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\)Materials available from Vaughn Forest Baptist Church for Adult Sunday School classes can be seen in Appendix C.
CHAPTER 4

JUBILEE BAPTIST CHURCH

Jubilee Baptist Church began on April 21, 1996 in an auditorium at Faulkner State Community College in Fairhope, Alabama. Dr. Mack Morris, the founding pastor, preached a message entitled “Jubilee” from Leviticus 25. 253 people were in attendance at that first worship service. The church’s emphasis on evangelism and Sunday School has led to ten straight years of growth.¹

The history of Jubilee is a remarkable one. Just six months after its inauguration service in 1996, the church purchased fifteen acres of land in Daphne, Alabama which the church paid off in May of 1997. Jubilee’s emphasis on Sunday School is seen in the hiring of Mike Selby in June of 1997 as Associate Pastor and Minister of Education. In August of 1998 the church moved into a new 24,000 square foot multi-purpose building which houses a 500 seat worship center, education space, and an office suite.

In June of 2001 Dr. Paul Matthews, the son of a North American Baptist missionary, was called as Pastor. The following October the church dedicated a new 13,000 square foot Education Building providing space for its growing Sunday School and youth ministry. In December of 2001 Jubilee purchased an additional five acres of property adjacent to the existing fifteen acres.

¹Historical information of Jubilee Baptist Church was provided to the author by Roxann Allen, Pastor's Ministry Assistant of Jubilee Baptist Church, Daphne, AL., October 2007, author’s notes, Foley, AL.
During this time the church continued to grow and soon outgrew its worship space. In January of 2003 the church went to two Sunday morning worship services. The following year the church purchased an additional six acres of land adjoining its property and began construction on a new 28,000 square foot multi-purpose worship center which seats 800 in worship. In April of 2006 the church exceeded 1000 in worship on Easter Sunday.

Jubilee Baptist Church currently has over 850 members and more than 970 enrolled in Sunday School. Jubilee has averaged baptizing 32 people each year from 2001 to 2006 and is consistently one of the top churches in Baldwin Baptist Association in baptisms.\(^2\) Figure 15 below shows the growth of Jubilee Baptist Church from 2000 to 2006. Figure 16 (on the next page) isolates and gives a quick view of the growth of Sunday School in enrollment and attendance from 2000 to 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Sunday School Enrollment</th>
<th>Sunday School Attendance</th>
<th>Baptisms</th>
<th>Worship Attendance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>363</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>249</td>
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<td>2001</td>
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<td>851</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\)Baldwin Baptist Association is made up of 59 Southern Baptist churches in Baldwin county, AL.

\(^3\)Data from Baldwin Baptist Association, P.O. Box 459, Silverhill, Alabama, 36576. Dr. Larry Patterson, Director of Missions.
The responsibility of overseeing the work of the Sunday School falls to the Minister of Education at Jubilee Baptist. Dr. Matthews, however, is a pro-Sunday School pastor. Matthews affirms that he believes in the Sunday School and his church members know this. He publicly and strongly supports and promotes Jubilee’s Sunday School program. This is done in several ways. From the pulpit, at the close of every 8:30 AM worship service, he encourages guests to stay and attend one of their Bible study classes. In letters to first time guests, he encourages them to return and attend a Sunday School class. In Jubilee’s New Member Training class, Sunday School is promoted and all new members who are not enrolled are encouraged to enroll in a Sunday School class that is either age appropriate for them or meets a current need they have. Periodically Matthews will write about the Sunday School ministry of Jubilee Baptist Church in his newsletter articles.

Ibid.
The Sunday School leaders of Jubilee also know that Matthews supports them and the Sunday School. From time to time he will show up at Sunday School leaders and workers meetings to express words of appreciation and encouragement to the Sunday School leaders. Every year, Matthews speaks at a Sunday School Leader Appreciation Banquet to affirm, encourage, and show appreciation to Jubilee’s Sunday School leaders.

The author had the opportunity to interview Paul Matthews and Mike Selby for this project. During the interview, Matthews stated that while they do not have a specific written purpose of Sunday School for their church, their unstated purpose, which is taught to their leaders, is fourfold:

1. Reach people for Sunday School
2. Connect them to a group
3. Win them to Christ
4. Teach them the Bible

The Sunday School of Jubilee Baptist is organized around age and need. From Jubilee’s beginning, the Sunday School has been a fully age graded program. Jubilee also, however, has classes based on needs. For example, Jubilee has a class for “Blended Families.” This class is for those couples who have previously been married and have children from former spouses. All of the Sunday School classes at Jubilee, whether age graded or special needs graded are open Bible study groups. There is no completion date and both believers and non-believers can be enrolled and attend these classes.

**Identifying and Enrolling Prospects**

Jubilee Baptist Church is proactive in locating prospects for Sunday School.

Mike Selby states that Jubilee’s number one source of prospects is the worship services.

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^5All quotes from Dr. Matthews and Mike Selby are from an interview by the author for this project in March, 2007.
Most of the Sunday School prospects come from those who fill out the guest registration card in one of the Sunday morning worship services. The registration card has information on it that enables the Minister of Education and the Sunday School Director to quickly identify an appropriate class, by age group, for that particular prospect (see Figure 17 below). The prospect’s information is passed on to the teacher or outreach leader of the appropriate class for follow-up and for outreach visitation.

According to Selby, Jubilee also locates prospects through periodic neighborhood canvasses and door to door canvasses in apartment complexes. Through these canvasses, information is gathered on those people with whom they are able to talk. This
information is then input into a prospect file on their computer and is later retrieved for
follow-up up by Sunday School classes and for outreach visitation. Jubilee keeps and
maintains an up to date prospect file through their computer software.

Selby strongly encourages every Jubilee Baptist member to practice open
enrollment. As can be seen in Appendix E, it is the responsibility of every Sunday
School class member to seek to enroll prospects in Sunday School. Members can,
anywhere and at any time, enroll people in Sunday School classes as long as those people
agree to be enrolled.

**Outreach**

Unlike Vaughn Forest Baptist Church, Jubilee Baptist does not have a weekly
visitation ministry. Matthews states that they have found that over 50 percent of those
who fill out the guest registration card in the worship services request not to be visited by
the church. He points out that they have found through surveys that most of the people in
their area neither want nor appreciate an unannounced and uninvited visit from the
church.

Jubilee does, however, have a *Contact Night* two times per month. On Contact
Night, two types of contacts are made: home visits and phone calls. Contacters are
divided up into visitation teams and a phone team. Usually about four visitation teams go
out each Contact Night. These visitation teams only visit those who have indicated they
are willing to receive a visit from the church on the guest registration card. Selby states
that about 10 percent of those who fill out the guest registration card in the worship
services indicate they would like a visit from the church.
The phone team contacts those who have filled out a guest registration card in the worship service who did not desire a visit from the church. Thus follow up and contacts are made without infringing upon the wishes of the guests. The phone team also contacts those members who have missed several weeks consecutively.

As indicated by its growth in Sunday School, Contact Night seems to be working well for Jubilee, as it has seen nearly a 91 percent growth in Sunday School attendance over a 6 year period.

**Sunday School Organization**

As mentioned above, the Sunday School of Jubilee Baptist Church is graded by age from infants to senior adults, yet for adults, classes are also graded by special need. Mike Selby says this is because some people respond better to classes that meet their special needs.

Jubilee is currently using the traditional Sunday School model for organizing its Adult Sunday School program. While it does not have specific departments that meet in opening assemblies before breaking down into the individual classes, Jubilee’s Sunday School does have Department Directors assigned to these age groups. The organization of the Adult Sunday School Division can be seen in the Figure 18 (on the next page). The Sunday School Director’s Ministry description can be seen in Appendix D.
According to Selby, there are three purposes for having Department Directors in the Adult Sunday School organization:

1. To broaden the leadership base. Having Department Directors allows for more people to get involved in the ministry of the Sunday School insuring a higher level of loyalty to the Sunday School.

2. To serve as a communication link between the Minister of Education, Sunday School Director, and adult Sunday School classes. Adult Department Directors communicate Sunday School goals, needs, programs, etc. to adult class leaders. Directors also call the teachers in their departments each week to encourage them in their ministry and to offer help and training in organizing their classes for growth.

3. To serve on the Sunday School Team. The Sunday School Team is made up of The Minister of Education, the Sunday School Director and all Department Directors.

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6The Ministry Description for the Adult Department Directors for Jubilee Baptist Church can be seen in Appendix E.
Directors. The Sunday School Team exists for the purpose of recruiting Sunday School workers for the upcoming year and for planning the direction of the Sunday School for the new year. The Sunday School Team meets weekly during the Spring while it is enlisting new workers for the upcoming year. It meets as determined by the Minister of Education during the rest of the year for the purpose of planning and addressing Sunday School issues that may come up throughout the year. The Sunday School Team is trained by the Minister of Education and the Sunday School Director.

Adult Class Organization

Selby states that the adult classes are organized using the traditional adult class organization structure. Selby teaches Sunday School leaders that every adult class should have a minimum of the following leaders:  

- Teacher
- Secretary
- Outreach Leader
- Fellowship Leader
- Group Leader
- Prayer Leader

The class organization chart for Jubilee Baptist Church is seen in Figure 19 on the next page.

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7 A brief explanation of each position can be seen in Appendix F. A list of duties for each position can be seen in Appendix G. These documents are used in Sunday School leadership training.
According to Selby, this class organization allows both small and large classes to have a basic organization that, if administered efficiently, will position the class for growth and effective ministry.

*Adapting TEAMS:* Matthews and Selby have seen the TEAMS material produced by Dr. Phipps and Vaughn Forest Baptist Church. The Sunday School of Jubilee Baptist is currently not using a literal TEAMS approach to Adult Sunday School class organization; however, Selby plans to revise the TEAMS material and adapt it to his Sunday School in the near future. Selby states that his adult classes are already basically organized following the same organization pattern as the TEAMS plan with few exceptions.

**Expanding the Organization**

Jubilee Baptist expands its Sunday School organization by starting new classes as needed. While most churches wait until the beginning of a new Sunday School year to start new classes, Jubilee Baptist will start a new class when it is needed. The need is determined by the size of an existing class. When an adult Sunday School class reaches
about 30 in attendance, Jubilee will attempt to start a new adult class in that same age group. The Minister of Education and the Sunday School Director closely monitor the growth of classes throughout the year to determine when a new class start is needed.

**Enlisting Workers**

Enlisting workers to fill vacated positions or to start new classes is never an easy task for a church that does not have an effective enlistment plan. Jubilee has a plan for identifying and enlisting potential teachers. Selby states that one of the first and most important ways that they identify potential teachers is to ask current teachers to identify members of their classes who would potentially make good Sunday School teachers.

Another method of identifying potential teachers is an annual Ministry Survey. On this survey, church members check areas of ministry in which they feel led and spiritually gifted to serve. The Sunday School Survey can be seen in Appendix H. Selby says that Sunday School position needs are also promoted in the church newsletter.

One of the responsibilities of the Sunday School Team is to identify and enlist potential teachers. The Sunday School Team serves as the Nominating Committee for the Sunday School. During the early summer the Sunday School TEAM starts to meet on a weekly basis to start enlisting leaders for the next Sunday School year.

According to Selby, from time to time they will have a person express an interest in teaching a certain age group. This person is set up with the current teacher of the class for that particular age group and allowed to work with that teacher for an agreed upon number of Sundays. This allows the potential teacher and the church leadership to
determine if he or she really is a good match for that age group and has the gift and
ability to be a class leader.

**Sunday School Workers Meetings**

Sunday School workers meetings are less frequent than what most Sunday School
experts would recommend, but no less vital to the work of Sunday School at Jubilee
Baptist Church. The Sunday School workers meeting is held once per quarter and is for
all Sunday School workers. This not only includes Department Directors and teachers,
but all class leaders as well. Selby says, “Because we meet just once per quarter with all
the Sunday School workers, we strive to have a high quality and very productive and
beneficial meeting for the teachers and the workers.” The quarterly Sunday School
Workers meeting is held on a Sunday evening. The format of the meeting is kept simple
and flexible. The agenda for each meeting is basically the same.

- Prayer
- Sharing
- Communication and Training – Minister of Education shares information
  about the Sunday School and uses this time for some training.

*Prayer*—This is led by the Sunday School Director.

*Sharing*—The Sunday School workers have an opportunity to share what is
working well in their classes and to bring up problems they are facing. Problems can
vary from not having enough Sunday School literature for the class to not having time to
prepare an effective lesson. Selby states that this is one of the most important times in
the meeting because teachers and workers have an opportunity to encourage one another
and to help each other with a need or a problem.
Communication & Training—Communication and training make up the last segment of the meeting. The Minister of Education leads this section and shares information and encouragement. He also uses this time for Sunday School leadership training.

According to Selby, because the Sunday School Workers meeting is held only once per quarter, teachers and workers realize the importance of the meeting. Missing the meeting means missing vital information and/or training that they will need for the next three months. Selby says that about 70% of his Sunday School workers attend the quarterly Sunday School Workers meeting. As stated in chapter three, the author has observed that in most Southern Baptist Churches, Sunday School workers meetings are attended by about only 40 percent of the Sunday School leadership. This puts Jubilee’s Sunday School Workers Meeting attendance at about 30 percent higher than the average Southern Baptist Church.

Leadership Training

Jubilee Baptist provides three training opportunities for its Sunday School leaders. The first opportunity is the Southern Regional Sunday School Conference held in Mobile, Alabama every August. The conference is sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions Sunday School Department. Since the new Sunday School year begins in September at Jubilee Baptist, this conference is highly encouraged for first time leaders. They receive excellent training prior to taking on their leadership responsibilities in September.
The second training opportunity is the Gulf Coast Regional Sunday School Conference held on the Eastern Shore of Alabama every January. This conference is also sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions Sunday School Department in cooperation with Baldwin Baptist Association. This conference is very similar to the conference held in Mobile, but provides training for those who could not attend the Mobile conference, and additional training for those who did attend the earlier conference.

The third training opportunity that Jubilee offers is its Quarterly Sunday School Workers Meeting. As previously noted, time is set aside for Sunday School leadership training in each meeting.

**Sunday School Needs to be Flexible**

Matthews believes that the Sunday School needs to be flexible enough to meet the changing needs of contemporary culture and of various age groups. One way that Jubilee Baptist has demonstrated flexibility and innovation in its Sunday School is by starting a singles class that meets on Sunday night rather than on Sunday morning. After surveying the singles in their church, they found that the singles, in their church, would better attend a Sunday night Bible study.

While currently not meeting, Jubilee has had a Tuesday night Bible study class that met in a local nursing home. Matthews stated that they are not limiting their Sunday School time and place to Sunday morning on the church campus. They will start a class that will meet anywhere and at any time people are willing to attend.
Fellowship

Sunday School class fellowship is one of the keys to their Sunday School success according to Dr. Matthews. Selby affirms this, stating that whenever he meets with the Sunday School leadership, he encourages classes to have a fellowship outside of the classroom at least once per month. Selby teaches his Sunday School leaders that people today need community, and fellowship builds community; therefore, community builds strong Sunday School classes.

Summary

Jubilee Baptist Church is a large church located on the outskirts of a medium sized but growing city. Like Vaughn Forest Baptist Church, its Sunday School has experienced great growth in its short life.

Jubilee’s Sunday School is organized around the plan that Southern Baptist Sunday School leaders have been teaching from the very beginning. Jubilee has followed Flake’s Formula for Sunday School growth by effectively locating the prospects through its worship services and following up on them through its Contact Night. It has been attempting to enlarge the Sunday School organization by placing an emphasis on starting new classes as those classes are needed and not waiting until the beginning of each new Sunday School year.

Jubilee follows Flake’s Formula for Sunday School growth also by recruiting workers using its Sunday School Team and then trains those workers for the job by providing job descriptions and several training opportunities. Jubilee provides the space for Sunday School classes with buildings on campus and when needed, meeting in space
off campus. Jubilee also goes after the people through its open enrollment policy which it strongly encourages its members to practice.
CHAPTER 5

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF GULF SHORES

The town of Gulf Shores, located on Pleasure Island in south Alabama, struggled into existence in 1957. There were 37 registered voters in a local population of about 120 persons. In December of 1957 Howard Rush, Associational Missionary for Baldwin Baptist Association, expressed the need for a Baptist church in the town of Gulf Shores. Rush challenged churches in Baldwin Baptist Association to plant a church in Gulf Shores. Lagoon Baptist Church, a small congregation long established on Pleasure Island, took the challenge when members of the church living in Gulf Shores expressed a desire to begin their own church.¹

The first service was held on June 1, 1958 in the local community house. In only one short month, the decision was made to constitute as a separate church. On July 13, 1958 First Baptist Church of Gulf Shores, Alabama was formally organized with 48 members. One week later, on July 20th, three lots were donated to the fledgling church for the purpose of erecting a church building. A building program began that resulted in the purchase of two additional lots to provide more room for the church building, parking, and future growth.

That same Sunday, July 20, 1958, the church started its Sunday School ministry with 62 members divided into eight different classes. Because there was little room at the community house, some met under trees and in cars until different ones invited them to meet in their homes.

In August of 1999, Lloyd Stilley was called as pastor of First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores. Prior to taking the pastorate at Gulf Shores, he pastored two churches in Louisiana for a combined total of 12 years.

The Sunday School of First Baptist, Gulf Shores remained stagnate for most of its life. From 1980 to 2000, Sunday School saw virtually no growth at all. Under Stilley’s leadership and the leadership of Bobby McNair, who was called to Gulf Shores in 2001 as Minister of Youth and Education, Sunday School has seen a 116 percent growth in enrollment and a 123 percent growth in Sunday School attendance from 2000 to 2007. Worship attendance has experienced a 52 percent growth from 2000 to 2006. The church has averaged 14 baptisms per year from 2000 to 2006. Figure 20 shows the growth of First Baptist, Gulf Shores from 2000-2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>SS Enrollment</th>
<th>SS Attendance</th>
<th>Baptisms</th>
<th>Worship Attendance</th>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>699</td>
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<td>290</td>
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</table>

Fig. 20. Growth of First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores, 2000-2006

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Data from Baldwin Baptist Association, P.O. Box 459, Silverhill, Alabama, 36576, Dr. Larry Patterson, Director of Missions.
Figure 21 (next page) shows the growth of Sunday School at Gulf Shores from 1980-2007. Notice the incline in growth beginning in 2001 under the leadership of Lloyd Stilley and Brian McNair.

![Fig. 21. First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores SS Growth, 2000-2007](image)

The responsibility of overseeing the work of the Sunday School falls to the Minister of Youth and Education at First Baptist, Gulf Shores. The author had the opportunity to interview Lloyd Stilley and Brian McNair for this project. As with all of the pastors discussed in this paper, Lloyd Stilley is a pro-Sunday School pastor. Stilley affirms that he believes in the Sunday School so much that he tells his church members that if they have to choose between attending worship or Sunday School, they should choose Sunday School. Stilley comments that he knows that if a person chooses to attend worship only, he or she may never choose to be a part of a Sunday School class. If a

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³Ibid.

⁴All quotations from Lloyd Stilley and Brian McNair are from an interview the author had with them for this project, June, 2007, tape, Foley, AL.
person, however, chooses to attend Sunday School only, that person will eventually start attending worship because he or she has grown spiritually through Bible study and has developed relationships with people who will encourage him or her to attend worship.

Stilley also promotes the Sunday School from the pulpit. At the close of the early morning worship service, which is immediately prior to the Sunday School hour, he will end the service by saying, “If you are looking for a Sunday School, ushers are standing by to help you. We have classes that are just right for you. There is a place for everyone.” Stilley makes a point to encourage everyone in the early service to stay and attend Sunday School. Service times for First Baptist Church, Gulf Shore are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:15 AM</td>
<td>Worship service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 AM</td>
<td>Sunday School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45 AM</td>
<td>Worship service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In his new member training (Class 101), he has a section on Sunday School and encourages every new member to enroll in a Sunday School class. In Class 101, Stilley emphasizes that in the large group worship service, relationships cannot be developed, accountability cannot take place, and ministry cannot happen on the level that it can in a smaller group. Stilley also attends and is involved in the monthly Sunday School leadership training and in the weekly Sunday School outreach program.

Stilley confesses that he and his staff began to explore Small Groups ministry as a supplement to Sunday School. He states that dropping Sunday School entirely was never the intention. They were, however, looking to provide a ministry that could accomplish some things that could not be done in a one hour Sunday School class. Stilley states that they soon discovered that it was very difficult to effectively lead and manage a full time Sunday School ministry and a full time Small Groups ministry without burning out the
staff and the membership. Stilley says, “We are currently tinkering with doing Small Groups for a season, with a start and cut off date. But we are keeping the fire stoked under Sunday School as the primary evangelistic Bible study.”

Stilley states that the purpose of their Sunday School is threefold: To Reach, To Teach, and To Minister.

1. Reach people for Christ and Bible study
2. Teach people the Bible.
3. Lead people to Minister in the body of Christ.

This threefold purpose is taught to the Sunday School leaders at Sunday School leaders’ meetings and in Sunday School training conferences.

**Sunday School Organization**

The Sunday School organization of First Baptist Church is a combination of an age-graded Sunday School and a topical Sunday School. There is a Sunday School class for every age from infants to senior adults. First Baptist Church also offers a number of topical classes as well. Topics range from parenting to Bible book studies. McNair states that one class is going through the book of Revelation. The material was written by the teacher himself, who is a retired pastor with an earned doctorate. Other topical classes that are currently being taught include a class on parenting youth and a book study of *The Case for Christ.* All topics are approved by the pastor before being allowed to be taught in the Sunday School.

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While most classes are open Bible-study classes, some are not. Most topical classes are closed groups. A closed Bible study group means that it has a starting date and an ending date. Once the class has started, no one else can enroll in that class. According to McNair, most topical classes are chosen by whether or not they meet needs.

Snow Birds

First Baptist is located in a resort city. Gulf Shores is a popular destination for Snow Birds. Snow Bird season is typically January through March. Some Snow Birds however will arrive in December and some will stay through the middle of April. During Snow Bird season, Sunday School attendance at First Baptist Church will increase by more than one hundred. First Baptist will start a new Bible study class specifically for Snow Birds that starts in January and ends usually by the second week in April. This class is a temporary open Bible study class, meaning that anybody can attend until the class disperses in April.

Not all Snow Birds attend the Snow Bird class. Many will go to existing classes because they like the teacher or because the class is studying a topic in which they are interested. First Baptist, Gulf Shores goes the extra mile to make sure that Snow Birds feel welcome and that they are a vital part of their Sunday School.

Adult Class Organization

McNair is in the process of transitioning the adult Sunday School classes from the traditional class organization to the T.E.A.M.S. model (See chapter 3). Currently the

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6Snow Birds are people from the northern states who travel to Gulf Shores for the winter. Many of these people will attend the same church every season.
senior adult classes are continuing to use the traditional organizational plan, but the newer and younger classes are using the T.E.A.M.S. model.

One unique aspect of Gulf Shores’ Sunday School is the class sizes. Their classes, according to Stilley, would be considered large classes by Southern Baptist Convention standards. Although they have a number of small classes, they have not been strict in keeping classes small. Stilley comments, “Our larger classes are very dynamic and very involved in the outreach programs of our church, and they continue to grow. In the area of class size we are, to a certain degree, breaking the old standard rules of Sunday School.” This confirms the finding of David Francis, of LifeWay Christian Resources, that one of the current trends of Sunday School in America is that classes are getting larger.⁷

**Outreach**

Because, according to Stilley and McNair, Sunday School is the primary evangelistic arm, reaching people for Bible study is a priority. First Baptist, Gulf Shores has a weekly outreach program that is connected to the Sunday School. Stilley states that it is a revision of the G.R.O.W.⁸ outreach program distributed by LifeWay. In First Baptist, Gulf Shores revised version of G.R.O.W., Sunday School members are asked to commit to just one Tuesday evening a month for outreach. G.R.O.W. out-reachers can choose from several different avenues of outreach. During G.R.O.W., Sunday School

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⁷ See Chapter 2.

members may write letters, make visits, make phone calls, or pray. Cards and letters are written to homebound members, visitors, newcomers to the community, prospects, and absentees. Members may also make hospital visits, take information about First Baptist Church to recent visitors, visit homebound members, or those in nursing homes. Phone calls are also made to visitors, prospects, homebound members or members recovering from surgery or an illness, and to those new in the community. One way they encourage Sunday School classes to participate in the weekly G.R.O.W. outreach is that they inform teachers that visitors and prospects will be directed only to those classes which participate in the outreach program.

**Training**

Sunday School leadership training falls under the leadership of the Minister of Youth and Education. Stilley states that McNair plans and leads the monthly Sunday School leadership training meeting. Stilley participates in this meeting and always speaks some words of encouragement and appreciation to the Sunday School leaders.

The monthly Sunday School Leadership meeting is divided into five parts:

1. Promotion
2. Praise
3. Preparation
4. Planning
5. Prayer\(^9\)

*Promotion:* This time is used to promote upcoming events and training opportunities.

*Praise:* This is the time for Sunday School leaders to share testimonies of how God is blessing their class.

\(^9\)A typical meeting agenda can be seen in Appendix J.
Preparation: This is training time. During this time either the Pastor or the Minister of Education will bring a Sunday School training lesson.

Planning: During this time McNair leads the Sunday School leaders to plan for ways to grow their class, or to encourage their class to participate in an upcoming Sunday School event. This is a time when general Sunday School business is handled, such as ordering material for the next quarter.

Prayer: A prayer for the Sunday School leaders and their classes closes out the meeting. McNair says that approximately 60 percent of their Sunday School workers attend the monthly Sunday School leaders meetings.

Every year McNair takes his current and potential teachers to two training conferences: The Southern Regional Sunday School Conference held in Mobile, Alabama every August and the Gulf Coast Regional Sunday School Conference held on the Eastern Shore of Alabama every January. This training is paid by the church. Stilley comments that if a teacher or potential teacher is willing to give up a Saturday to be trained, then the church ought to pay for the cost of the training. It is a demonstration of the church’s commitment to helping that teacher be the best he or she can be.

Identifying and Enrolling Prospects

While indentifying and enrolling prospects is a priority, according to McNair, First Baptist does not typically ask first time guests in a Sunday School class to enroll in the class. The reason for not asking first time guests to enroll is because First Baptist, Gulf Shores is a resort area church. They, therefore, receive a fairly large number of visitors who attend while they are vacationing at the beach. This is also because of the

10See also Chapter Four, Leadership Training, for information on these two conferences.
number of Snow Birds that attend the church. First Baptist usually will wait until a person’s third visit before they will ask if he or she wants to be enrolled in the class. This, however, is not a hard-and-fast rule. Many are enrolled before attending three times, says McNair. Stilley comments that many teachers in the adult Sunday School department will automatically enroll a person in their class when that person has attended three times.

One interesting fact about First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores is that, although not indicated on the Annual Church Profile, Sunday School attendance on many Sundays, is actually higher than Sunday School enrollment. Stilley comments that three reasons are the cause for this anomaly:

1. First Baptist Church does not practice open enrollment.
2. First Baptist Church does not enroll persons in Sunday School on the first visit.
3. First Baptist Church has a large number of first time guests because of their resort area location.

The majority of the prospects for Sunday School come from guests in the worship service who fill out the guest registration form. Stilley says that worship service guests are “our gold.” He goes on to say, “These are the ones we make a special effort to go after.” The guest registration forms are reviewed by the Minister of Youth and Education and he assigns the guests to a G.R.O.W. visitation team for follow up.

One future plan that First Baptist has for identifying prospects is a phone canvass. The plan is for members of the church to call people living in Gulf Shores to ask them whether or not they have a church home. If they do not, then the member will ask them if they would be interested in information on First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores.
First Baptist Church maintains a comprehensive prospect file on the church computer. The prospect file is used to assign prospects to a G.R.O.W. outreach team each week and also for follow up by Sunday School classes.

**Starting New Classes**

McNair understands that the key to growing a Sunday School is to start new classes. Three weeks prior to the author’s interview with Stilly and McNair, Gulf Shores started three new Sunday School classes. McNair states that they will start new classes as the need arises. They use two criteria to determine the need to start new classes: Size and Topic.

**Class Size:** While First Baptist, Gulf Shores typically has larger classes than the average church, McNair states there is no set formula for determining when a class is too large. He says, “For some classes 20 in attendance is too big because the class is not doing what they should be doing. For other classes 40 is not big enough because they have strong leadership and are effectively fulfilling the purpose of reaching, teaching and ministering.”

**Class Topic:** According to McNair, periodically they will get a request to start a class for the purpose of teaching a specific topic. If the leadership finds that there is enough interest in the topic to start a new class, they will do so. Stilley stated that they have found it to be much easier to start a new class by introducing a topic. Once the topic is completed, the class usually decides to continue on as a permanent class. They will either start a new topic or they will start using on-going Sunday School literature from LifeWay.
Enlisting Sunday School Workers

Finding good Sunday School workers is very important to Lloyd Stilley. He states that at the end of a church year, when new workers are being recruited for the new church year, First Baptist, Gulf Shores has a Nominating Committee in place to complete this task. The Nominating Committee is responsible for recruiting all church officers and ministry leaders. Sunday School however, is the exception. The Minister of Education and the Sunday School Director personally identify potential Sunday School leaders and interview them. If they determine that these potential leaders meet the desired qualifications, the names are then given to the Nominating Committee to present to the church. Stilley states, “We take recruiting Sunday School teachers so seriously that we do not just turn that over to a committee.”

During the interview process a teacher is presented with a “Sunday School Leader Covenant.” Before they will be allowed to lead Sunday School classes, potential Sunday School teachers must sign the covenant indicating their willingness to fulfill the responsibilities of being a Sunday School teacher. McNair states that this covenant is very significant because “it lets us know that they are behind us, that they are on the same page that we are.” McNair goes on to say that when he receives the covenant back, if a potential teacher has indicated that he or she is not in line with a certain point, “I have reservations concerning placing them in a position of leadership in the Sunday School.” The Sunday School Covenant must be signed by all teachers every year whether they have been teaching for a long time or they are just beginning.

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11The covenant can be seen in Appendix I.
Fellowship

Stilley and McNair both comment that most people probably attend Sunday School for the fellowship. Therefore, they encourage their classes to have class fellowships at a minimum of once per quarter. They also encourage their classes to invite non-churched friends to these fellowships.

Summary

First Baptist Church of Gulf Shores, Alabama is a growing church located in the heart of a resort city that itself is growing. Unlike Vaughn Forest Baptist Church and Jubilee Baptist Church, its Sunday School struggled for many years before coming under the leadership of a Pastor and Minister of Youth and Education who believe in the Sunday School.

Gulf Shores’ Sunday School is an organization in transition. They are moving from the traditional Sunday School plan to the T.E.A.M.S. plan for adult Sunday School class organization. First Baptist, Gulf Shores has followed Flake’s Formula for Sunday School growth by effectively locating the prospects through its worship services and following up on them through its G.R.O.W. Outreach program. The church maintains a prospect file on its church computer. First Baptist, Gulf Shores has been attempting to enlarge the Sunday School organization by placing an emphasis on starting new classes as those classes are needed. They start most of their new classes by introducing a new topic. Gulf Shores recently started three new classes.

First Baptist, Gulf Shores actively recruits and trains workers. It lets Sunday School workers know what is expected of them by having them sign a Sunday School
covenant. First Baptist Church of Gulf Shores is a church with a growing Sunday School because it places a high priority on evangelistic Bible study in the Sunday School class.
CHAPTER 6

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, FOLEY, ALABAMA

First Baptist Church of Foley was started in May of 1906 with the formation of a Sunday School. Sunday School was the only program for the first year until the church was formally and officially organized in 1907 with sixteen members. Later that year, two lots were donated to the church with the condition that a building must be erected within three years; which was accomplished. Since its beginning the church has had twenty-two pastors. Today the church has a total membership of 950 and maintains seven buildings on 4.8 acres of property in the heart of downtown Foley. Although for many years of the church’s history, Sunday School has not been emphasized or worked as it should have been, it has still played a significant role in the life of the church.¹

In February of 2000, the author became pastor of First Baptist Church with the commitment and determination to grow the church primarily through the Sunday School. Prior to coming to First Baptist Church, the author pastored churches in North Carolina, Florida, and Georgia. He led every church to growth through the Sunday School.

First Baptist, Foley, averaged 22 baptisms per year from 2000 to 2007. Worship attendance saw a 60 percent increase while Sunday School attendance experienced a 59

¹A history of First Baptist Church, Foley, AL was written by Jo Solorzano for its Centennial Celebration on 10 May 2007. Jo Solorzano is a member of First Baptist Church and provided the historical information to the author, May 2007, Foley, AL, author’s notes, Foley, AL.
percent increase. Figure 22 shows the growth of First Baptist Church, Foley from 2000 to 2007.²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Worship Att.</th>
<th>SS Enrollment</th>
<th>SS Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>314</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>389</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>766</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 22. Growth of First Baptist Church, Foley, AL from 2000-2007

The Sunday School of First Baptist, Foley, has seen its ups and downs in terms of enrollment and attendance numbers. From 1980 to 1987 the Sunday School saw significant growth. 1987 to 1993, however, saw a just as significant decline in Sunday School attendance. Beginning in 2000, Sunday School began to see steady growth again. Figure 23 (on the next page) charts the growth of First Baptist, Foley, Sunday School from 1981 to 2007.

²Total Membership is omitted because the church reversed its church membership roll in 2005. An accurate accounting, therefore, cannot be given.
In August of 2003, the church lost its largest education building to fire, displacing approximately 60 percent of its Sunday School members. From August 2003 to August 2006, Sunday School classes met in various places, both on and off campus. They included the church offices, the local elementary school, an old funeral home, an old house which the church was able to purchase, and a modular unit that was provided by the Alabama Baptist Convention. In August of 2006, a new education building was completed. Between August 2003 and August 2006, the Sunday School continued to see minimal but steady growth in attendance.

From the author’s first day as pastor of First Baptist, Foley, he made it clear from the pulpit that he believed in the Sunday School and expected every member of First Baptist Church to be enrolled in a Sunday School class. As with Lloyd Stilley of First
Baptist Church, Gulf Shores, the author repeatedly tells his church that if they have to choose between Sunday School and worship, they should choose to go to Sunday School. Those who attend worship only, may never enroll in a Sunday School class. Those who attend Sunday School usually end up attending worship as well.³

With the assistance of a Sunday School Director, the author leads the Sunday School ministry at First Baptist, Foley. He oversees every aspect of the program. He plans for the growth of the Sunday School by attempting to start at least one new class every year, he personally recruits the teachers for adult Sunday School classes, he leads the monthly Sunday School leaders meeting, and he provides training for the teachers. The author promotes the Sunday School ministry from the pulpit, in new member orientation, and when he makes visits to prospects. At the close of the 8:30 AM service, the author encourages everyone to stay and attend a Sunday School class. He informs guests of the location of the “Welcome Center” where they can obtain assistance in finding a class that is just right for them. The Sunday morning schedule at First Baptist, Foley, is as follows:

- 8:30 AM early worship service
- 9:45 AM Sunday School
- 11:00 AM worship service

Like Stilley at First Baptist, Gulf Shores, the author spends an entire section of New Member Orientation on the importance of Sunday School in the life of a believer. He teaches that through the Sunday School, believers can fulfill all five purposes that God has for them. The five purposes are discipleship, fellowship, ministry, missions, and worship.

³See page 95 for Stilley’s comments on this.
Discipleship: This purpose is met through the teaching and learning of God’s Word as it is taught transformationally.

Fellowship: Only in the context of a small group can one really develop close relationships. In a Sunday School class one can find acceptance, accountability, and encouragement.

Ministry: Because one is known in a Sunday School class, he or she can find a place where others will minister to him/her and where he/she will have the opportunity to be involved in ministering to others as they have needs.

Missions: Members of the class have the opportunity to be involved in evangelism and missions as they participate in the outreach program and in class mission projects in the community.

Worship: The Sunday School hour is conveniently sandwiched between two worship services. Class members can attend either one of the services and Bible Study without having to leave the church campus. Children’s Sunday School classes, children’s church, and preschool childcare are also provided, making it easier for adults to participate in both Sunday School and worship.

The Purpose of Sunday School

First Baptist Church of Foley has a purpose statement for its Sunday School ministry. This purpose statement is taught in the New Member Orientation class and to all new Sunday School leaders. It is also referenced from time to time in the monthly Sunday School Leaders Meeting.
The purpose of Sunday School is to . . .

1. *Reach people for Bible study and Jesus Christ,*
2. *Teach them the Word of God,*
3. *Minister to their needs.*

The purpose of the Sunday School is accomplished through (1) evangelistic Bible study that meets spiritual needs, (2) concerned outreach and active witnessing to the unreached, (3) a caring ministry for members and prospects, and (4) an active participation in total church life.

The whole focus for Sunday School at First Baptist, Foley, is that it is strategic for fulfilling the Great Commission. Sunday School is the primary evangelistic tool used at First Baptist, Foley for reaching its community for Jesus Christ. Almost every other event that is held at the church is for the purpose of connecting people to the Sunday School.

**Sunday School Organization**

First Baptist Church, Foley, has a written statement for how it organizes its Sunday School with a purpose. This statement is taught to all Sunday School leaders.

*First Baptist Church organizes its Sunday School ministry to accomplish the objectives as stated in the purpose statement by –*

- Using the concept of age-graded, open Bible study groups as the primary organizing principle for Sunday School classes.
- Providing groups for all ages, including preschool, children, youth, young adults, median adults, and senior adults.
- Providing levels of leadership in every Sunday School class to maximize personal involvement in ministry.
The Sunday School of First Baptist, Foley, is a fully age-graded program. Every class is divided into ministry areas giving members an opportunity to use their spiritual gifts in ministry. As with First Baptist Church of Gulf Shores, First Baptist, Foley is transitioning to the T.E.A.M.S. approach to adult Sunday School class organization. Most of the adult classes are currently using a combination of the traditional model and the T.E.A.M.S. model. Currently every adult class has at least the following leadership positions in the class.

1. Teacher
2. Assistant Teacher
3. Secretary
4. Outreach Leader
5. Fellowship Leader
6. Prayer Leader
7. Care Group Leaders

Figure 24 graphs the adult class organization for most classes at First Baptist, Foley.

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4 See Chapter 3 for a full explanation of the T.E.A.M.S. approach to adult Sunday School class organization.
There are a few adult classes, however, which have already made the transition completely to the T.E.A.M.S. model.\(^5\)

While First Baptist, Foley’s Sunday School is a fully age-graded program, the church has offered one class that is not age graded. It is a topical class called “Foundations.”\(^6\) It is a study of basic Baptist doctrine. The class spends one year studying the book by the same name, which was written by Tom Holladay and Kay Warren. This book is also the only non-LifeWay material that is taught in the Sunday School of First Baptist, Foley.

**Outreach**

The outreach program at First Baptist, Foley, is directly connected to the Sunday School. Each year the church will come up with a new name for its outreach program based on the Sunday School theme for that year. In 2007 the Sunday School theme is “Casting for Christ.” The outreach program therefore, is called “Cast Night.” The previous year the outreach program was called “Reach.” No matter what the outreach program is called its purpose and plan remain the same every year.

*The Purpose:* The purpose of the outreach ministry of First Baptist Church is two-fold:

1. To reach people for Christ.
2. To enroll them in Sunday School.

*The Plan:* Outreach is divided into two semesters. The first semester runs from the middle of August to the end of November. The second semester runs from the middle

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\(^5\)See Figure 10 on page 60 for the organization chart of the T.E.A.M.S. model.

of January to the end of April. Outreach teams are made up of three people, at least one of whom must be a female. All three members of the team are preferably from the same class. If they are not, they are, at least, from the same adult Sunday School department. Every member of the team is trained to present the plan of salvation using the *Eternal Life* booklet.\(^7\) They are also trained to share their evangelistic testimony and their Sunday School testimony. Each Tuesday night the teams go out and visit prospects for their Sunday School classes. Following the visit, all of the teams meet back at the church for a time of sharing and celebrating salvations and new enrollees in Sunday School.

**Identifying and Enrolling Prospects**

Identifying Prospects

There is nothing more important for the healthy growth of any Sunday School than identifying and enrolling prospects. The author believes that identifying prospects for Sunday School is the responsibility of the church as a whole and the responsibility of classes in particular. It is also the responsibility of the classes to enroll prospects in their particular class.

Sunday School leaders at First Baptist, Foley are taught that the number of prospects for their class should equal the number of members enrolled in their class. For example if a class has 25 enrolled in the class, then that class should have at least 25 names on its prospect list. A prospect is any person who is not currently enrolled in a Bible study group.

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\(^7\)The *Eternal Life* booklet is a tract published by the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 4200 North Point Pkwy, Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176. The tract can be ordered by calling the Customer Service Center, 1-800-448-8032.
The majority of the prospects for Sunday School come from guests who fill out the guest registration form in one of the worship services. These forms are reviewed by the Minister of Evangelism and assigned to a Sunday School class and outreach team for follow-up based on the age of the prospect. Following the morning worship services, a decorative gift bag is carried to guests who fill out the registration form. This gift bag is taken to the home of the guest by a deacon. Inside the gift bag is a coffee mug with the church name and logo imprinted on it, a pen with the church name and phone number printed on it, a book mark, and a church brochure.

Other prospects who are identified at First Baptist, Foley include:

1. Those who register at a church event. Events include: The Foley Christmas pageant, Heavenly Harvest (Halloween alternative event), Wild Game Banquet for sportsmen, and others. All guests to these events are asked to register. Again, the Minister of Evangelism reviews the registration forms and assigns prospects to particular classes and outreach teams based on the age of the prospect.

2. Names given to the staff from church members. Periodically in a worship service the author will provide cards for every person attending, asking each to write down the name and address of at least one person he/she would consider a prospect for the church or his/her particular Sunday School class. Figure 25 (on the next page) shows an “I Know a Prospect” card that has been used at First Baptist, Foley.
3. New home owners. First Baptist Church also uses an organization that identifies new homeowners in the Foley area. The church sends “Welcome to the Community” cards to these families. Outreach teams visit the new home owners after they have received the card from the church.

Information on all prospects is kept and maintained in an up-to-date filing system on the church’s main office computer.

Enrolling Prospects

First Baptist Church practices universal and open enrollment. Universal enrollment simply means that all church members are enrolled in Sunday School whether they ever attend or not. All new church members are asked to enroll in a class. If they do not enroll, they will be automatically enrolled in a class based on their age. The purpose
for this is ministry. Every member is assigned to a small group of people who will make sure that he or she always feels love and receives ministry to in times of need.

Open enrollment means that members can enroll prospects into their Sunday School classes at anytime and at any place as long as the prospects agree to be enrolled. Many prospects are enrolled in Sunday School by outreach teams on Tuesday night.

**Training**

Sunday School leadership training is intentional, planned, and budgeted at First Baptist, Foley. Sunday School training takes place in four ways:

1. Sunday School Preparation Week
2. Sunday School Conferences
3. Monthly Sunday School Leaders Meetings
4. Short term courses

*Sunday School Preparation Week:* Sunday School preparation week takes place two weeks prior to the beginning of a new Sunday School year. The week actually begins on a Saturday with long term and new Sunday School leaders attending the Southern Regional Sunday School Leadership training in Mobile, Alabama. The church pays for this training. The following Wednesday and Thursday nights the author leads all Sunday School leaders in a two hour training session each night.

During Sunday School Preparation Week the Sunday School leaders are trained in how to organize a class for growth and ministry, how to identify and enroll prospects, the importance of outreach and class fellowships, and how to plan an effective Bible lesson.

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8See Chapter 4 for more information on this conference.
Also during this week, leaders are trained in how to conduct a Sunday School class. The recommended “Adult Sunday School Class Schedule” can be seen in Appendix M.

**Sunday School Conferences:** Two Sunday School conferences are attended each year. The first conference is the Southern Regional Sunday School Leadership conference, mentioned above. The second conference is the Gulf Coast Sunday School Conference\(^9\) held on the Eastern Shore of Alabama every January. Both of these conferences provide excellent Sunday School training for long term and new Sunday School leaders.

**Monthly Sunday School Leaders Meeting:** The first part of each Monthly Sunday School Leaders Meeting is for leadership training. The author considers this training one of the most important training opportunities for the Sunday School leaders. The author spends about 20 minutes teaching a basic Sunday School growth principle. A typical monthly Sunday School Leaders Meeting follows the agenda below:

- A Time for Inspiration
- A Time for Information
- A Time for Evaluation
- A Time for Communication
- A Time for Intercession

*A Time for Inspiration:* 20 minutes—This is the time for training as discussed above.

*A Time for Information:* 10 minutes—The pastor uses this time to promote any event that will affect the Sunday School. This would include items such as a Friend Day, an upcoming revival, or a Sunday School leader training event. The Sunday School Director may also use some of this time to share information he deems necessary.

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\(^9\)See Chapter 4 for more information on this conference.
A Time for Evaluation: 5 minutes—During this time the Sunday School Director passes out attendance reports to the teachers so they can track the attendance of their class members. This gives them an opportunity to see who has missed several weeks in a row or who shows signs of dropping out.

A Time for Communication: 5 minutes—Led by the Sunday School Director, this is a time for Sunday School leaders to share praises, concerns, and needs.

A Time for Intercession: 5 minutes—Usually led by a participant in the meeting, this is a time for taking prayer requests and closing the meeting in prayer for the Sunday School and its members. A sample agenda of a typical meeting can be seen in Appendix K.

Short Term Courses: Periodically a short term course specifically for Sunday School leaders will be offered. These courses usually last from 4 to 6 weeks and are taught on a Wednesday evening. Courses that have recently been taught include:

- Teaching the Jesus Way\textsuperscript{10}
- Sunday School Done Right\textsuperscript{11}

Starting New Classes

Starting new classes is a priority for First Baptist, Foley. The church has a goal to start at least one new class every year. From 2001 to 2007 six new adult classes have been started, 3 youth classes have been started, one children’s class and one preschool class have also been started. In six years, 11 new classes have been started. Each class resulted in the growth of the total Sunday School ministry.


\textsuperscript{11}Allan Taylor, \textit{Sunday School Done Right} (Dallas, TX: Sampson Resources, 2007).
Classes are normally started at the beginning of each new year. When a class grows to the point of saturating its room, however, a new class is started in that age group. For example, two months into the 2006 Sunday School year, the Adult 60s Couples class had outgrown its room. A new class needed to be started. The author recruited three couples to leave the existing class to start a new Sunday School class. The original class replaced those three couples within a few weeks, and the new class went on to average 16 in attendance that year.

While most classes are started because a particular class has outgrown a room or has grown beyond the teacher’s ability to effectively manage it, two classes have been started based on topic rather than size. The same topic was used to start both classes. The topic was the “Foundations” class mentioned above. The course was originally designed to last for one year and then the members would return to their original Sunday School classes. In both instances, the classes decided to stay together at the end of the year.

What the author found was that not only did the “Foundations” class grow throughout the year, but so did the classes that the members left. The author is now planning to start a third year of “Foundations” for the purpose of starting a new class.

**Enlisting Sunday School Workers**

Sunday School work is primarily done by lay persons. Sunday School may be led by a paid ministerial staff person, but the work of Sunday School is carried out by volunteers who serve in positions such as Sunday School Director, Teachers, Class Secretaries, Class Outreach leaders, Fellowship Leaders, Prayer Leaders, and Care Group
Leaders. Finding volunteers who are excited about the work of Sunday School and who will do it effectively is a daunting task. At First Baptist, Foley, the task of enlisting Sunday School leaders is a year long process. The pastor is always looking for qualified teachers and leaders.

First Baptist Church Sunday School Teachers are recruited by the ministerial staff and the Sunday School Director. The Minister of Children is responsible for enlisting preschool and children’s teachers, the Minister of Youth is responsible for enlisting youth teachers, and the Pastor and Sunday School Director are responsible for enlisting adult teachers. The pastor and staff have chosen to take on these responsibilities rather than leaving the work up to the Nominating Committee. Once the teachers are enlisted by the ministerial staff members, the names are given to the Nominating Committee to present to the church.

Every potential teacher is given an “Enlistment Guide,” describing the purpose and the work of the Sunday School. This guide also includes a standard of excellence for the Sunday School of First Baptist Church, a curriculum policy, and a Teacher’s Covenant. This “Enlistment Guide” can be seen in Appendix L.

The Sunday School covenant, which was implemented for the first time in 2007, is given to all new and returning Sunday School teachers. This covenant serves as a promise from the teacher to the Pastor and the Sunday School Director that the teacher will support the pastor and ministerial staff in the work of the Sunday School and the church.
Sunday School Leader Appreciation

The most attended event that the church has every year is its Sunday School Leader Appreciation Banquet. This banquet is held the last Wednesday evening of August. The banquet is for the sole purpose of recognizing and appreciating all of the teachers in the Sunday School ministry.

At the banquet, teachers are recognized and presented awards for accomplishments and innovations in the class. The awards are meant to be humorous and are not necessarily the same every year. For example, one year an “On-line” award was given to the teacher who used email effectively to communicate with his class. He was presented with a clothes line for his award. Recently a teacher was recognized for having “Explosive Growth” in his class. He was presented with three fake sticks of dynamite. One year the Sunday School Director and the Assistant Sunday School Director were presented with the “Dynamic Duo” award. This was a blown up picture of Batman and Robin.

Sunday School classes decorate their own tables prior to the banquet. Sunday School members are encouraged to write notes to their teachers letting them know how much they appreciate them. These notes are presented to the teacher at the banquet. Classes usually pool their money together and buy the teacher a gift. The church also presents the teacher with a little gift. The event usually lasts about 90 minutes. A sample program for a Sunday School Leaders Appreciation Banquet can be seen in Appendix N. At the close of the event, a Sunday School Commissioning service is held for all Sunday School leaders serving during the new Sunday School year. A responsive reading that is used for the service can be seen in Appendix O.
Fellowship

The author firmly believes that one of the keys to growing a Sunday School class is vibrant fellowship. Spontaneous and intentional fellowship are an essential function for all Sunday School classes in the assimilation of prospects into the life of Sunday School and the church. The goal is to help people feel they are wanted, needed, and belong. The author remembers hearing at a conference he attended several years ago, that a poll of Sunday School attendees revealed that the number one reason people attend Sunday School is for the fellowship. People may first attend a Sunday School class for a number of reasons, but it is the development of relationships that keep them there. Therefore, at First Baptist Church of Foley, Sunday School fellowships are strongly encouraged. Teachers are taught to plan both in-class and outside-class fellowship times.

In-class Fellowship: In-class fellowship is that time that members and guests arrive for Sunday School. Before they arrive the Class Fellowship Leader will have already set up coffee and donuts (or other breakfast food) for people to enjoy while they mingle with one another before the class time begins. This gives the class members and guests time to connect with one another and develop relationships. In-class fellowship is an important part of the Sunday morning class experience.

Outside-Class Fellowships: Sunday School classes are encouraged to have outside of class fellowships at least once per quarter. They are also encouraged to have these fellowships in an environment where class members and prospects can interact with one another, such as a member’s home or a park.

Outside-Class Fellowships are such a priority for First Baptist, Foley that the church plans times for classes to have them. During the summer months of June, July,
and August, the church cancels Sunday evening worship services on the last Sunday of the month and encourages Sunday School classes to have “Parties with a Purpose.” Every class is encouraged to plan a “Party with a Purpose” sometime during the last weekend of each month during June, July, and August. The first “Parties with a Purpose” were held in 2002. They were so successful and the classes enjoyed them so much that, by the requests of classes, the church has continued to have them every year. Many new Sunday School members’ first connection with a Sunday School class was through a class’s “Party with a Purpose.”

Summary

First Baptist Church of Foley, Alabama is a growing church located in a small town in south Alabama. Sunday School has been a vital part of the ministry of First Baptist, Foley from its very beginning, though it went through periods where it struggled in terms of growth.

When the author was called to serve as Pastor of First Baptist, Foley, he committed himself to growing the church through the Sunday School. The Sunday School began to see growth after several years of decline and plateau. In 2002, the Sunday School surpassed the 300 mark in attendance, which it had not seen since the early 1980’s.

The key to turning the Sunday School around was returning the Sunday School to a place of priority in the church for evangelism and outreach. The pastor began to teach and work Flake’s Formula for Sunday School growth.
1. **Locate the Prospects**: Finding prospects and maintaining an up to date prospect file became a high priority.

2. **Enlarge the Organization**: Starting new classes also became a high priority as seen in the starting of 11 new classes in six years.

3. **Recruit and Train Workers**: Recruiting and training is taken very seriously as can be seen in the use of the “Enlistment Guide” and the many opportunities for training that are offered.

4. **Provide the Space**: Space, at times, was a real challenge for the church when it lost its education building to fire in August of 2003. The church immediately responded to the challenge, however, by first holding classes off campus until buildings adjacent to the property could be purchased. In August of 2006, a new education building was completed which houses enough space for continued Sunday School growth.

5. **Go After the People**: First Baptist, Foley goes after the people by following up on all guests in worship and at special events. The church also goes after the people through its “Cast” outreach program.

The author believes that First Baptist Church has seen growth in its Sunday School because his enthusiasm and belief in the Sunday School has been caught by the members of the church.
What is the secret to Sunday School growth? What has been seen in the churches discussed in this project is that there is no real secret. The principles of Sunday School growth discussed and learned from these churches are timeless. While methodologies can and should be adapted to settings, tried and true principles cannot be ignored if growth is desired. As Thom Rainer quoted one pastor in his book *Effective Evangelistic Churches*, “I have been a pastor in California, Florida, and now in Texas . . . In each of these churches, because of different contexts, we had to make some adjustments in our Sunday School organization. But the bottom line is that basic Sunday School principles worked in a blue-collar Florida church, and California yuppie church, and a Bible-belt middle class Texas church. Sunday School works if it is worked right.”

Allan Taylor writes, “To leave the fundamentals of Sunday School is to leave Sunday School. So let’s not relinquish the fundamentals of a sound Sunday School ministry and then make declarations that Sunday School does not work! Nothing works if it is not worked!” This truth, that Sunday School works if it is worked, is confirmed by the author’s research in the Sunday Schools discussed in this paper. The pastors of

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these churches held onto the basic principles of effective Sunday School ministry and worked them successfully.

**Make Sunday School a Priority**

Allan Taylor observes, “How we view our Sunday School will have everything to do with what we do with it. I believe we need a new vision of what Sunday School is and what it can do. Sunday School is not just a program; it is a ministry. Sunday School is not just a weekly event; it is a strategy.”

Ray Johnston and Ronald Brown agree. They write, “Sunday School is the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great Commission Christians through Bible study groups that engage people in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship.”

The pastors and churches in this study see Sunday School as a strategy for reaching people for Christ, teaching them the Word of God, and ministering to their needs. The work of Sunday School is a priority in every church in this study. Sunday School is not just another program attached to an already overcrowded church schedule. Sunday School is seen, by these pastors and churches, as a way to do the work of the Great Commission. It is not a one day a week meeting; rather it is a seven day a week strategy to make disciples, baptize them, and to teach them everything Jesus has commanded.

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3Taylor, 14.

Two of the pastors in this study, Lawrence Phipps, of Vaughn Forest Baptist Church, and the author, of First Baptist Church, Foley, feel that Sunday School is such a priority that they need to lead it themselves.

**Know the Purpose of Sunday School**

Talmadge Johnson and Stan Toler write, “Sunday Schools usually grow on purpose . . . Growth is a by-product of God’s blessings and our cooperative (and purposeful) efforts.” The primary purpose of Sunday School is the Great Commission. It is the driving force behind doing the work of Sunday School. Allan Taylor says, “What then is the mission of the Sunday School? Its number one purpose is to fulfill the Great Commission. The Sunday School is the church organized to do the work of the Great Commission.”

Bill Taylor writes,

> God’s blessings can be realized in a least four ways as you lead your church to make Sunday School your strategy for focusing more intentionally on the Great Commission.

- Spiritually lost people will come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized into the fellowship of the church.
- Christians will grow in their understanding of and obedience to Christ as they study the Bible individually and with others.
- The ministries of the church will expand as God’s people discover their gifts and abilities, identify opportunities to minister to others, and respond to the call to serve people in Jesus’ name.
- The mission of the Lord will advance as God’s people go into their world in His power with His good news.

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6Taylor, 13-14.

Ken Hemphill writes, “Is there an effective strategy to help a church carry out the Great Commission to make disciples? . . . There is. Sunday School at work can be that strategy.” Each church in this study understood Sunday School to be the number one tool for carrying out the Great Commission.

Not every church had a written statement of purpose for their Sunday School. Each church did, however, understand the purpose of its Sunday School.

Vaughn Forest Baptist Church: “To reach, teach, minister, and motivate others to reach, teach, and minister.”

Jubilee Baptist Church: “The purpose of Sunday School is fourfold:

1. To reach people for Sunday School.
2. Connect them to a group.
3. Win them to Christ.
4. Teach them the Bible.”

First Baptist, Gulf Shores: “The purpose of Sunday School is to Reach people for Christ and Bible study, Teach them the Bible, and lead people to Minister in the body of Christ.”

First Baptist, Foley: “The purpose of Sunday School is to Reach people for Bible study and Jesus Christ, Teach them the Word of God, and Minister to their needs.”

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In his book, *The 21st Century Sunday School*, Wes Haystead writes, “Sunday Schools must pursue four highly worthy goals in order to make a positive lasting impact on people’s lives. All four goals are necessary in order to have a balanced, healthful ministry that does not become ingrown or cater only to a narrow segment of people.”

Haystead lists the four goals as,

1. Win People to Christ
2. Teach God’s Word
3. Build Supportive Relationships

Every church in this study has strived to achieve all four of these goals in their Sunday Schools. Though not explicitly stated, all four of these goals can be seen in the purpose of their Sunday Schools.

**The Pastor Must be the Primary Supporter**

J.N. Barnette, in his classic book, *A Church Using Its Sunday School*, writes, “Dr. William E. Hatcher, great denominational leader of the past generation, in his book *The Pastor and the Sunday School*, said: ‘A minister who cannot thoroughly identify himself with his Sunday school ought not to be a pastor.’” While a strong statement, its meaning is clear. Pastors ought to be strong supporters of Sunday School. Before a church will buy into the Sunday School ministry as the number one evangelistic tool for fulfilling the Great Commission, the pastor must buy in to it. “Whether he intentionally

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10Haystead, pp 21-27.

strives to do so or not, the pastor sets the tone for the church’s attitude toward its Sunday School. He is not only its spiritual head . . . but he is also its example in life and in his recognition of the importance of Sunday School.”

Danny Von Kanel writes,

Sunday School works in reaching people when the pastor leads out in its promotion, outreach, and planning. Pastors don’t have to have ultimate control, but they must stay involved – providing leadership, guidance, and inspiration. Pastors who talk, sleep, eat, and dream Sunday School have Sunday Schools that are a priority. In most churches, when the pastor speaks, the people listen. What’s important to church leadership becomes important to the congregation.

All four pastors in this study stated, without any reservation, that they are strong supporters, if not leaders, of the Sunday School. Lawrence Phipps’ involvement in Sunday School goes a level above that of most pastors. He wrote a new plan, based on timeless principles of Sunday School growth, on how to organize adult Sunday School classes for growth. He trained his Sunday School leaders in the plan and continues to administer the plan. Paul Matthews, of Jubilee Baptist Church, and Lloyd Stilley, of First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores, not only promote Sunday School from the pulpit and through other media, but also will attend Sunday School meetings to share words of appreciation and encouragement. The author leads and administrates the Sunday School ministry of First Baptist Church, Foley.

In 1994, Dr. Thom Rainer, now president of LifeWay Christian Resources, conducted a research project involving over 4000 churches. He states, “Indeed, Sunday School is neither neglected nor accidental in the healthy churches we researched. The pastor made a conscious and intentional decision to utilize the Sunday School as a key

\[12\] Elmer Towns, *How to Grow an Effective Sunday School* (Lynchburg, VA: Church Growth Institute, 1987),

area in reaching, teaching, and retaining.”¹⁴ Rainer goes on to say, “A healthy Sunday School and church are integrally related to the pastor’s attitude and vision about Sunday School.”¹⁵ In other words, the pastor must demonstrate his passion for the Sunday School. If the congregation does not see this, they will view the Sunday School as just another program in the church.

**Identify and Enroll Prospects**

In his book, *Breakthrough: Adult Sunday School Work*, Larry Shotwell writes, “Before we can make a breakthrough in our churches, we must make a stronger and more intensive effort to identify more prospects and seek to enroll them in Sunday School.”¹⁶ A prospect is defined as “any unsaved or unchurched person who is in such proximity as to be reached by a church.”¹⁷ For a church’s purpose however, a prospect is any unsaved or unchurched person, living near enough to the church to attend and receive ministry from that church, and for whom the church has at least a name and address. As has been said, if the church does not have the name and address of the person, he is not a prospect but a “suspect.” In his book, *Bible Teaching for Adults Through the Sunday School*, C. Ferris Jordan says, “Little progress in outreach will be made until adult class leaders and members know by name, address, and spiritual condition persons who need to be

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¹⁷ Taylor and Hanks, 131.
reached. Without that kind of information compassion is generalized, plans are indefinite, and outreach seldom moves beyond the talking stage.”

Find Prospects

Prospects are everywhere. The question is not where to find prospects but how to identify them and reach them for Bible study and Christ. Prospects can be found among the family, friends, relatives, co-workers, school-mates, fellow club members, and neighbors of the members of the church.

Probably the greatest place to find prospects for Sunday School is in the worship service. “Recent visitors or newcomers to the church provide a fertile source of prospective members for adult classes. These adults are generally unattached but very attachable.” As Pastor Lloyd Stilley of First Baptist, Gulf Shores says, “Guests are our gold.” All four churches in this study agreed that the number one source for prospects was the worship service guest registration forms. Other sources mentioned included:

- Neighborhood canvasses
- Newcomers to the community
- Church events (Christmas pageant, Halloween alternative event, etc.)
- Church members not enrolled in Sunday School
- “I Know a Prospect” card that church members fill out

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Maintain a Prospect File

The prospect file contains the names and other information of persons who meet the definition of a prospect. The file should be used by churches to make assignments to classes and outreach teams for contacting, witnessing, and ministry. All four churches in this study maintain a prospect file. The file is kept on a computer for quick retrieval. (Most church software programs today have modules for maintaining a prospect file.) Every church in this study uses the prospect files to make contact assignments for classes and outreach teams. First Baptist Church of Foley also uses its prospect file as a mailing list to invite prospects to church events, such as the Christmas pageant.

Enroll Prospects

In *The Church Growth Spiral*, Andy Anderson writes, “The Sunday School enrollment is the most important statistic in the church. It is more important than the attendance, the offerings, and even more important than baptisms because, to a large degree, it controls these items.”\(^{20}\) Anderson lists five values of enrollment:

1. Ministry begins at enrollment.
2. Sunday School attendance is controlled by enrollment.
3. Worship service attendance is controlled by enrollment.
4. Offerings are controlled by enrollment.
5. Baptisms are affected by enrollment.\(^ {21}\)


\(^{21}\)Ibid., 36-37.
Every book on Sunday School that the author has read, advocates practicing open enrollment. Open enrollment simply means to enroll a person anytime, anywhere, as long as he or she agrees to be enrolled. All four churches in this study practiced open enrollment. First Baptist Church of Gulf Shores, however, does not practice open enrollment to its fullest extent. While Pastor Lloyd Stilley and Minister of Education, Brian McNair agree with the principle of open enrollment, they have found that asking first time guests in a Sunday School class to enroll is cumbersome for their teachers. This is because their resort setting brings an unusually large number of out of town visitors each Sunday who are vacationing at the beach.\(^{22}\)

**Organize for Growth**

Arthur Flake writes, “There can be no large permanent growth unless there is an organization strong enough to reach, hold, and teach the people who should be in the Sunday School.”\(^{23}\) J.N. Barnette states, “Whenever the Sunday School has been adequately organized and the organization used, lost people have been reached.”\(^{24}\) Ken Hemphill lists seven benefits of a well organized Sunday School:

1. A good organizational strategy will enable your church to faithfully fulfill the Great Commission.
2. A good organizational strategy will serve as a master plan and thus help to avoid costly mistakes.
3. A good organizational strategy will enable your church to manage its resources.

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\(^{22}\)See Chapter Five for full explanation.


\(^{24}\)Barnette, 38.
4. A good organizational strategy will create a team spirit.

5. A good organizational strategy will provide for better communication.

6. A good organizational strategy will help you create new units.

7. A good organizational strategy enhances the total ministry of the church.¹⁵

How should the Sunday School be organized? Hemphill goes on to say that every Sunday School should meet the following organizational criteria:

- Simple enough for members and visitors to understand
- Comprehensive enough to include everyone who presently attends or should be reached by the church.
- Flexible enough to grow with the church.
- Make the creation of new units natural and obvious.
- Provide for natural movement of members in the Bible study program.
- Maximize known growth principles.²⁶

Age-grade the Sunday School

The organizational strategy that best meets these criteria is an age-graded Sunday School. Arthur Flake says there are three reasons for grading a Sunday School by age:

1. To make it easier to reach those who ought to be in the Sunday School. Definite responsibility is fixed on certain ones for bringing into the school those who should attend. For example, those in the youth department are responsible for bringing in only those of youth age in the community.


²⁶Ibid., 76.
2. To make it easier to teach those who are in the Sunday School. It is much easier for a teacher to teach those who are approximately the same age than it is to have to prepare lessons for pupils who are different in age and maturity.

3. To make some individual definitely responsible for the winning of each lost pupil to Christ. This simply means, for example, that the teacher of fourteen year old boys is responsible for winning to Christ all fourteen year old boys in the Sunday School and on the prospect list for the school.27

Every church in this study has a fully age-graded Sunday School. There is a class for every person, infants through senior adults. While three of the four churches also offered at least one topical class (Vaughn Forest Baptist Church being the exception), age-grading was still the primary method of assimilating people into the Sunday School.

Enlarge the Organization

Harry Piland says, “Growing Sunday Schools have a growing, expanding organization. They create new classes and departments.”28 Wes Haystead agrees, “A church that wants to grow by reaching out to new people must regularly create new groups to give impetus to that growth. A new group should be started whenever an existing group approaches the maximum recommended attendance.”29 Larry Shotwell lists two reasons for starting new classes:

1. New classes grow faster than established classes.

2. New classes tend to visit more, reach more people, and witness to more people than established classes.30

27Flake, 43-45.


29Haystead, 35.

30Shotwell, 65-66.
Haystead comments that “groups tend to have their greatest growth in the first eighteen months of existence. Long-established groups rarely grow much. Once a group reaches an attendance plateau, it is more likely to maintain that level or decline than it is to begin a new period of growth.”

Enlarging the organization means starting new classes. Every church in this study has made a commitment to start new classes. Vaughn Forest Baptist Church has a pool of “Teachers in Training” for the specific purpose of starting new units. Jubilee Baptist, First Baptist, Gulf Shores, and First Baptist, Foley, all practice Haystead’s advice of starting new units whenever an existing class gets too large. First Baptist, Gulf Shores and First Baptist, Foley, intentionally offer topical classes for the purpose of creating new units.

Organize Classes for Growth

In 1937 J.N. Barnette wrote, “Each class for adults should be organized with the following officers with duties as specified:

President – administration and personal guidance
Vice-president – social, fellowship, publicity
Group leaders – direction of group activities, or personal ministry to members and prospects
Secretary – records, reports, supplies, class funds.

31 Haystead, 81.
32 Barnette, 121.
In 1990 Larry Shotwell suggested the same basic class structure but created more leadership positions by dividing the duties. At a conference that the author attended in January of 2007, Dr. Lawrence Phipps recommended that every class ought to have at least the positions that Larry Shotwell recommended, but expand even on his organizational structure. At this conference Dr. Phipps taught his T.E.A.M.S. plan for class organization.

Obviously smaller classes will not have enough members to fill every position. In a smaller class some members may actually serve in two or more capacities. Shotwell states, however, that “as a class increases in enrollment, additional leaders should be enlisted. Some combinations of leadership roles can be continued, but there are advantages to giving more persons opportunity to serve.” Phipps agreed with Shotwell.

The churches in this study all had well organized classes. Most used the T.E.A.M.S. class organization model to some extent. All had at least the minimum class leaders that Larry Shotwell recommended. Every church taught their Sunday School classes that they should have at least the following:

1. Teacher
2. Assistant Teacher (Teacher in Training)
3. Secretary
4. Outreach Leader
5. Fellowship Leader

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33 Shotwell, 81.
34 Lecture of Lawrence Phipps, Gulf Coast Sunday School Conference, Daphne, AL, January 2007. Also see Figure 10 on page 60. Lawrence Phipps gives many of the positions new names.
35 Shotwell, 81.
6. Care Group Leaders

**Enlist Leaders Effectively**

Effective Sunday School work is dependent upon leaders and members who work together to accomplish the purpose and tasks of Sunday School. Choosing the right people to serve in Sunday School leadership roles can be very challenging. Identifying and enlisting prospective Sunday School workers is probably the most important task of a Pastor, Minister of Education, and/or Sunday School Director. Harry Piland says that “the Sunday School is the church’s chief ‘enlistment agency.’” Bernard Spooner adds, “Nothing is more basic to Sunday School growth than an adequate corps of Sunday School teachers and officers.”

Arthur Flake writes, “There are three steps which, if followed persistently, will produce the required number of officers and teachers:

1. Pray publicly and privately for workers.
2. Make a list of prospective officers and teachers.
3. Secure the consent of those who have been selected to serve.”

Ken Hemphill and Bill Taylor comment that, when reviewing lists of prospective leaders, ask the following questions about each name being considered:

- Is this person already a Sunday School member?
- Could this person serve if he or she would?

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36 Piland & Adams, 87.


38 Flake, 27-29.
• Would this person be acceptable to the church according to the standards of the church?³⁹

In their book, *Rediscovering the Sunday School*, Talmadge Johnson and Stan Toler lists five leadership qualities that need to be looked for in prospective teachers:

• Vision

• Integrity

• Risk-taking

• Patience

• Kindness⁴⁰

All four churches in this study had some type of leadership enlistment program in place. Vaughn Forest had the most extensive leadership enlistment program with its T.E.A.M.S. program. This is partly because every adult class has a “Teacher in Training” as part of its class organization. Most of the Sunday School’s teachers were first “Teachers in Training.” Vaughn Forest also recruits teachers in its new member orientation class, its spiritual gifts class, and through an annual enlistment campaign.

At First Baptist, Gulf Shores and First Baptist, Foley the ministerial staff play a key role in enlisting Sunday School workers. Although both churches have a Nominating Committee, the staff feel that finding the right leadership is too important to be done without pastoral leadership involvement. First Baptist, Foley also recruits teachers through its spiritual gifts class.

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³⁹Hemphill & Taylor, 83-84.

⁴⁰Johnson & Toler, 53.
Job Descriptions

A key to effective enlistment is to have a job description for every position. The job description is an important part of the enlistment process. Prospective Sunday School leaders need to know what they are being asked to do. Allan Taylor says, “Each leader needs to know exactly what is expected of him in order to properly go about performing the functions of his responsibilities.”

All four churches have written job descriptions for every position. All four churches also have covenants that are shown to the prospective leaders during the enlistment process. Prospective teachers are asked to sign the covenant once they accept the position. First Baptist, Foley has put together an “Enlistment Guide” to be used in recruiting teachers. This guide is used along with the job description.

Train Leaders Adequately

“Training may well be the single most important ingredient in building a solid, growing evangelistic Sunday School. Churches experiencing permanent growth are churches that spend a great deal of time and money in training their Sunday School workers.” Arthur Flake states that the real need “is an organization of sufficient size made up of intelligent, skillful, Spirit-filled men and women who will bring the pupils into the Sunday School, teach them the Word of God, and win them to Christ. Thus the

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41 Taylor, 17.
42 Piland, 93.
real problem of building great Sunday School anywhere, under all conditions and circumstances is one of developing trained officers and teachers.\textsuperscript{43}

Larry Shotwell describes Sunday School worker training as “the process of preparing church-elected Sunday School workers to perform their job assignments in an efficient and productive manner and of initiating training of persons who are potential Sunday School workers.”\textsuperscript{44}

Who is Responsible for Training

Harry Piland and Ernest Adams write, “A part of the God-ordained work for those who have received the special calling to lead God’s churches is that of equipping the believers for service. The pastor and educational staff are to lead in developing and implementing a program of Sunday School worker training.”\textsuperscript{45} Every pastor in this study believes that it is the responsibility of the ministerial staff to adequately train Sunday School workers. In every church, it is the ministerial staff who plan training opportunities for the Sunday School workers.

Potential Worker Training

Vaughn Forest Baptist Church and First Baptist Church of Foley have potential worker training. At Vaughn Forest Baptist Church prospective teachers cannot teach in the Sunday School until they have completed the teacher training course which is offered

\textsuperscript{43}Flake, 124

\textsuperscript{44}Shotwell, 114.

\textsuperscript{45}Piland & Adams, 106.
two times per year. The “Teacher in Training” position in the class is a large part of Vaughn Forest’s potential teacher training program.

First Baptist, Foley offers teacher training by offering Sunday School leadership courses. These courses are not only for current teachers, but potential teachers are encouraged to attend as well.

Sunday School Worker Training

Three kinds of Sunday School worker training are consistently offered by all four churches: monthly or quarterly workers’ meetings, conferences, and training prior to the beginning of a new year.

Workers Meetings: Three of the four churches interviewed hold monthly workers meetings. Jubilee Baptist Church offers quarterly workers meetings. A part of each meeting is set aside for training.

Conferences: Three of the four churches interviewed specifically mentioned carrying Sunday School leaders to Sunday School leadership conferences. Jubilee Baptist Church, First Baptist, Gulf Shores, and First Baptist, Foley carry Sunday School leaders to an average of two conferences per year: one in August, prior to the beginning of a new Sunday School year, and another in January, for ongoing training.

Prior to the Beginning of a New Year: While all of the churches provided training prior to the beginning of a new year, First Baptist Church, Foley and Vaughn Forest Baptist church have the most extensive training -- First Baptist, Foley, with its “Sunday School Preparation Week,” and Vaughn Forest with its “Annual T.E.A.M.S.
Training.” Jubilee Baptist and First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores carry teachers to a conference prior to the beginning of each Sunday School year.

Go After the People

Harry Piland and Ernest Adams write, “If the Sunday School is to be the church reaching, teaching, witnessing, and ministering, it must be a going Sunday School.”\(^{46}\) In his book, *Church Growth Principles*, Kirk Hadaway reports a significant finding from a study of growing churches that he conducted. Hadaway found that “77 percent of growing churches had a regular time for Sunday School visitation.”\(^{47}\)

Three out of the four churches in this study offer weekly outreach visitation at least twice a year, in the Fall and in the Winter/Spring. Vaughn Forest Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores, and First Baptist Church, Foley have outreach visitation two semesters per year. Vaughn Forest continues weekly visitation after the Winter/Spring semester but not on the same scale. Jubilee Baptist Church is the only church in the study that does not have a weekly visitation outreach, but it does have a “Contact Night” twice a month. Contact Night involves contacting prospects through phone, mail, and home visits.

Piland and Adams state that “the purpose of a Sunday School visitation program is to mobilize Sunday School members and leaders to make contact with unreached persons for the purpose of enrolling them in Bible study, sharing a Christian witness, and

\(^{46}\)Piland & Adams, 187.

making contacts to encourage members to be regular in attendance.”

All three churches that have weekly visitation state their purpose for outreach is to reach people for Christ and enroll them in Bible study. Ministry visits are also made to encourage people in their Sunday School attendance.

**Sunday School Growth Power Points**

- Make Sunday School a priority
- Get the pastor behind Sunday School.
- Write a purpose statement for the Sunday School.
- Intently and intensely search for prospects.
- Maintain an up-to-date prospect file.
- Assign prospects to classes and outreach teams for follow up.
- Practice open enrollment.
- Age-grade the Sunday School
- Organize the class by having at least a teacher, secretary, outreach leader, fellowship leader, and care group leaders.
- Start new classes at least annually.
- Use topics of special interest to start new classes.
- Recruit workers using written job descriptions.
- Consistently train workers using a variety of training methods.
- Conduct workers meetings at least monthly.
- Conduct weekly outreach visitation.

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48Piland and Adams, 188.
Conclusion

Sunday School can be a great church growth tool for today if pastors will return it to the place of priority that it once had and should have today. Pastors must keep the purpose of the Sunday School in mind as they organize their Sunday Schools and Sunday School classes, and as they enlist and train Sunday School workers. Pastors who build on the great basics of Sunday School work will find that Sunday School is still a viable tool for church growth for the 21st century.

This study affirms the author’s conviction that the Sunday School is still the best church growth tool that churches have for fulfilling the Great Commission. It is the author’s prayer that this project will fulfill its purpose of assisting churches to fulfillment of the Great Commission through the Sunday School.
APPENDIX A

ARTHUR FLAKE’S SUNDAY SCHOOL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Arthur Flake’s Sunday School Standard of Excellence for Baptist Sunday Schools

I. CHURCH RELATIONSHIP
1. The church shall elect the officers and teachers.
2. The school shall make monthly or quarterly reports to the church.

II. ENLARGEMENT
1. The enrolment of the school shall at least equal the number of resident church members as recognized by the church.
2. The school shall promote a program of visitation.

III. GRADING
The school shall be graded as follows: Cradle Roll, birth through 3; Beginners, 4-5; Primaries, 6-8; Juniors, 9-12; Intermediates, 13-16; Young People, 17-24; Adults 25 and above, and an Extension department for those who cannot attend. (Note.-If possible one or more Nurseries should be provided for children, birth through three.)

IV. BAPTIST LITERATURE
Southern Baptist Sunday school literature prepared for the teachers and pupils in the various age groups shall be used throughout the school.

V. BIBLES
1. The Bible shall be used as the textbook of the school.
2. The officers and teachers shall provide opportunities for the pupils to use their Bibles in the school.
3. The officers and teachers shall encourage the pupils and their parents to engage in daily family Bible reading and prayer.

VI. PREACHING ATTENDANCE
1. An average of at least 70 per cent of the officers, teachers, and pupils above eight years of age attending the school shall remain for the preaching services.
2. The Beginners and Primaries shall be encouraged to remain for the preaching services.

VII. EVANGELISM
1. The school shall be positively evangelistic.
2. The teachers shall earnestly seek to lead their pupils who are not Christians to a personal acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord.
3. The superintendent and pastor shall give frequent opportunities for the pupils who are not Christians to confess Christ publicly, and urge them to do so.

VIII. MEETINGS, EQUIPMENT, AND RECORDS
1. The school shall maintain a weekly officers and teachers’ meeting or a monthly workers’ conference.
2. The Sunday sessions of the school shall be at least one hour in length, preferably one hour and fifteen minutes.
3. Each age group below the Intermediates shall be separated from the remainder of the school at least for the class sessions by walls, movable partitions, screens, or curtains.
4. At least 50 per cent of the classes above the Juniors shall be separated from the remainder of the school for the class sessions by walls, movable partitions, screens, or curtains.
5. The school shall use the Six Point Record System.

IX. TRAINING
1. The school shall conduct at least one training school each year, completing at least one book in the Sunday School Training Course.
2. At least 50 per cent of the officers and teachers, including the pastor or superintendent, shall hold an award for either Building a Standard Sunday School, A Church Using Its Sunday School, or The Pull of the People.
3. At least 50 per cent of the officers and teachers, including the pastor or superintendent, shall hold an award for at least one other book in the Sunday School Training Course.

X. STEWARDSHIP
1. The school shall support the church program and promote the general missionary, educational, and benevolent causes fostered by the denomination.
2. The school shall present educationally each year at least four denominational causes, and shall provide opportunities for the members to contribute to each of these causes in accordance with the policy of the church.
APPENDIX B

DATA FROM ANNUAL CHURCH PROFILES
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APPENDIX C

ADULT CLASS SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM VAUGHN FOREST BAPTIST CHURCH
ADULT CLASS SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM VAUGHN FOREST BAPTIST CHURCH

It’s LIFE Materials

It’s LIFE is a witnessing/discipling process, connected to the Sunday School, that seeks to equip believers to reach people for Christ and enroll people in Sunday School.

- **It’s Life Leaders Guide**: Offers helpful hints for the teacher as well as a complete teaching guide. The teacher uses the Leaders Guide to lead the fourteen weeks of It’s LIFE.

- **It’s Life Student Workbook**: Provides most of the material that is available in the Leader’s Guide. There are blanks to be filled in, homework assignments and a fourteen week devotion guide that reinforces what the student is learning each week.

- **It’s Life Prayer Partner Commitment Card**: The Prayer Partner cards help those in the ministry to begin the work of involving the church in the LIFE process. One card is needed for each It’s LIFE participant to enlist two prayer partners for each semester of It’s LIFE.

- **It’s LIFE Salvation Tract**: A tri-fold tract with the plan of salvation using the acrostic LIFE. Includes a prayer for salvation, a new-birth certificate, and a tear-off with the new Believer’s information that can be taken back to the church for follow-up.

- **It’s LIFE Evangelism Outline Card**: This card contains the It’s LIFE gospel presentation. Learners can keep a copy in their Bible, pocket, or purse to use whenever an opportunity allows. Enough cards are needed for each learner and team leader to have at least one copy.

- **Baptism -The Christian’s First Witness**: Use this leaflet to follow up someone’s decision to accept Christ and to encourage them to follow Christ in Baptism. Shares what the Bible has to say about Baptism using the acrostic BAPTISM.

- **It’s LIFE Administrative Guide and CD**: The Administrative Guide is for the person implementing and administering the It’s LIFE program. The CD includes: The Life Presentation, Powerpoint for each teaching session, and supplemental materials. Also includes a DVD of the LIFE presentation.

- **It’s LIFE Ministry Surveys**: Use to discover what people in the community are thinking while searching for divine appointments.

### Sunday School TEAMS Materials

• **Growing Sunday School TEAMS:** Guides churches to build their Bible study ministry through the Sunday School. It is designed to help churches reach people and retain those they reach. It also teaches churches how to begin TEAMS, provides job descriptions for those who serve, includes charts and surveys that can be duplicated, and offers a scenario that shows how TEAMS works in a class.

• **Growing Sunday School TEAMS DVD:** Shows how TEAMS works in a Sunday School class. Each part of the TEAMS strategy is discussed and explained by Dr. Lawrence Phipps.

Prices for all of the above resources are available online at [www.forlifeministries.com](http://www.forlifeministries.com) or by calling Vaughn Forest Baptist Church at (334) 279-5433.
APPENDIX D

SUNDAY SCHOOL DIRECTOR MINISTRY DESCRIPTION
FOR JUBILEE BAPTIST CHURCH
SUNDAY SCHOOL DIRECTOR
MINISTRY DESCRIPTION

The Sunday School Director will be involved in the overall planning, conducting, and evaluating of the work of the Sunday School.

- Arrive about 30 minutes before Sunday School each Sunday in order to survey the entire Sunday School facilities to insure that everything is ready and turn on lights.

- Visit classes, oversee the arrival of members and visitors, and help solve problems and meet the needs of workers and pupils on Sunday morning.

- Regularly attend Sunday School workers meetings, and participate as needed. Also, attend other Sunday School meetings and training as needed.

- Support the overall work of the church as led by the pastor and staff including regular attendance.

- Support the - twice a month - visitation program of the church (Contact Night) by attending whenever able and setting an example for others as a witness.

- Serve on Sunday School Team.

- Advise the Minister of Education of any particular needs relating to Sunday School.
APPENDIX E

DUTIES OF ADULT DEPARTMENT DIRECTORS
FOR JUBILEE BAPTIST CHURCH
Duties of Adult Department Directors

1. Lead several adult classes under the direction of the Sunday School Team.

2. Train and help your teachers to organize their classes with workers to minister to class members and prospects.

3. Discover and recommend adult teachers to the Sunday School Team. Also help your teachers get substitutes when they will be out.

4. Inform the Sunday School Team of any special needs or problems that your classes may have.

5. Advise the Education Minister or Sunday School Director of any needed supplies or furniture in your teachers’ rooms.

6. Contact your teachers on a regular basis to provide direction and also encourage them to attend the meetings/training.

7. Be faithful in meeting with the Sunday School Team every 2 months for training and direction.
APPENDIX F

ADULT CLASS ORGANIZATION FOR JUBILEE BAPTIST CHURCH
PREPARED LEADERS

A leader is anyone who does anything in service in the Sunday School. This includes general leaders, teachers, assistant teachers, helpers, people reachers, care leaders, greeters, hospitality leaders, secretaries and anyone who serves. The higher the number of leaders, the greater involvement and higher the attendance.

BASIC ADULT CLASS ORGANIZATION

Adult Organizational Structure.

Every Adult class should have at least the following:

1. **TEACHER** – Responsible to lead in the studying of God’s Word on Sunday morning. Serves as the class leader.

2. **OUTREACH LEADER** – Leads the class to make specific plans to discover prospects and make contacts.

3. **CARE LEADER** – Organize the class into groups of approximately 8 people each. Enlist group leaders to minister to their group and contact them when absent.

4. **SECRETARY** – Keeps accurate and up-to-date records.

5. **FELLOWSHIP LEADER** – Plans fellowships to build community.

6. **PRAYER LEADER** – Prays for the needs of the class and Sunday School.
APPENDIX G

ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL WORKERS DUTIES
FOR JUBILEE BAPTIST CHURCH
ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL WORKER DUTIES

TEACHER
1. Provide Leadership
2. Teach
3. Enlist the Team (with Outreach Leader)
4. Lead the Team Planning Meeting
5. Attend Workers Meetings

OUTREACH LEADER
1. Assign Members to Groups
2. Assign Prospects to Groups
3. Maintain Prospect file
4. Welcome visitors and ENROLL them
5. Lead the class meeting
6. Enlist Group Leaders
7. Attend Weekly Workers’ Meeting

FELLOWSHIP LEADER
1. Assist Outreach Leader
2. Lead members in Ministry to Members and Prospects
3. Lead in planning fellowship activities
4. Attend the Team Meeting

SECRETARY
1. Maintain records
2. Enroll visitors
3. Provide a list of absentees to Outreach Leader

GROUP LEADER = The KEY to Success
1. Cultivate and ENROLL prospects
2. Contact Prospects and Members Weekly
3. Minister to Members and Prospects
4. Attend the Team Meeting

MEMBERS
1. Attend Bible Study
2. Seek and Enroll Prospects
3. Pray for, and Witness to, the Lost
4. Minister to Members and Prospects
APPENDIX H

ANNUAL SUNDAY SCHOOL SURVEY
FOR JUBILEE BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School Survey

Please take a few moments at this time to complete this survey for the Sunday School Team. Return it with the class records this morning. Thank you!

NAME ________________________________

HOME PHONE ____________________ ALTERNATE NUMBER ____________________

H – Have served in this position before
W – Willing to serve in this position
S – Willing to Substitute for his position
T – Willing to be Trained to serve in this position

Circle the letter that corresponds with the appropriate answer.

Area of Service

General
Sunday School Director          H   W   S   T
Sunday School Asst. Director    H   W   S   T
Sunday School Secretary         H   W   S   T
Substitute for Secretary        H   W   S   T
Sunday School Outreach Director H   W   S   T
Churchwide Outreach Team        H   W   S   T

Teachers
Nursery Teacher                 H   W   S   T
Preschool Teacher               H   W   S   T
Children Teacher                H   W   S   T
Youth Teacher                   H   W   S   T
Adult Teacher                   H   W   S   T

Class Organization
Class Outreach Leader            H   W   S   T
Class Care Group Leader         H   W   S   T
Class Secretary                 H   W   S   T
Class Fellowship Leader         H   W   S   T
Class Prayer Leader             H   W   S   T
Other position (specify) ________________  H   W   S   T
APPENDIX I

SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS’ COVENANT
FOR
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, GULF SHORES
Read carefully the following covenant, check the appropriate box for each statement. Please sign and date at the bottom if you wish to join yourself to a group of leaders committed to ministry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I feel called of God to serve Him through the Sunday School.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I will strive to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I will *actively participate in training and growing opportunities.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I will *actively participate in reaching lost and unchurched persons.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I will *actively participate in planning meetings.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I will do all I can to make Sunday mornings a positive, uplifting experience.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I will be faithful in tithing (giving 10% of my gross earnings).</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I will completely refrain from the use of alcoholic beverages.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I will attend Sunday morning and evening Worship Services and Wednesday evening activities unless providentially hindered.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I will be supportive of the Pastor and staff.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I have read and agree with the church’s <em>Sunday School Philosophy</em> and will lead my class according to it.</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before my Lord Jesus Christ, I commit myself to serve Him and His church
By faithfully ministering through the Sunday School of First Baptist Church
Gulf Shores, AL

____________________________________________________
Sign

____________________________________________________
Date

* “actively participate” means that you will be involved unless providentially hindered.

Adapted from First Baptist Church, Woodstock, GA
APPENDIX J

SAMPLE MONTHLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP MEETING AGENDA FOR FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, GULF SHORES
Welcome!

Sunday School Teachers/Workers Meeting
Sunday School is the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building on-mission Christians through open Bible Study groups that engage people in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship.

Elements of the Meeting

To begin with, Elmer Towns, “How Students Learn”

1. Promotion:
   March 17...Josh Hunt at FBC Fairhope
   “How to double your class”

2. Praise:
   Testimonies

3. Preparation:
   How can we help you?

4. Planning:
   Class Moves = Sunday School Growth
   Class Materials and Orders

5. Prayer
APPENDIX K

SAMPLE MONTHLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP MEETING AGENDA
FOR
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, FOLEY
SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERS MEETING
October 2006

A Time for Inspiration
Exodus 18:18-23
The benefits of a good organization for the Sunday School leader and for the people.

A Time for Information
- Friend Day – October 29th.
- Heavenly Harvest – October 31st.
- REACH Teams – Need Teams from a couple of more classes.
- Remind secretaries to complete the guest registration forms in their entirety.

A Time for Evaluation
- Review Attendance reports
- Note those who have missed several weeks in a row.

A Time for Communication
- Praise reports
- Concerns
- Needs

A Time for Intercession
- Prayer requests
- Prayer
APPENDIX L

SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADER ENLISTMENT GUIDE
FOR
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, FOLEY, AL
CONGRATULATIONS!

You are being asked to serve in the greatest organization in the world … Sunday School. It is the greatest organization because it has the specific purpose of reaching people for Christ.

YOUR POSITION ______________________________

YOUR CLASS _________________________________

YOUR DEPARTMENT _________________________

YOUR DIRECTOR _____________________________

HAVE A GREAT YEAR!
The Purpose of the Sunday School is to . . .

1. **Reach people for Bible study and Jesus Christ.**
   Every person who does not know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is lost. Millions of people are on their way to hell, an eternal destiny without hope, without Christ, and without God (John 14:6, Acts 4:12).

2. **Teach them the Word of God**
   When a person studies the Word of God regularly, that person is far more likely to be saved. When a person attends Sunday School and studies the Word regularly, Christian growth occurs.

3. **Minister to their needs.**
   When a person’s needs are being met by those in their Bible study group, they feel loved and cared for. They see the love of Jesus demonstrated in a tangible way. The goal for Sunday School ministry is *Members in Ministry to Members.*

The purpose of the Sunday School is accomplished through (1) Bible Study that meets spiritual needs, (2) concerned outreach and active witnessing to the unreached, (3) a caring ministry for members and prospects, and (4) an active participation in total church life.

You have an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of people. By committing yourself to the purpose of the Sunday School, you can help fulfill the Great Commission and be a faithful servant of the Lord.

There are people all around who need the witness and ministry of a great Bible study class. You can be a partner with God as He fulfills His plans for our community. You may think that you do not have the ability. It is not your ability that God needs. God always gives to us the resources we need to carry out the work to which He has called us. It is your availability that God needs. Won’t you let Him bless you as you serve Him through the Sunday School this year?
THE TASKS
OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

1. REACH PERSONS FOR BIBLE STUDY

2. TEACH THE BIBLE

3. WITNESS TO PERSONS ABOUT CHRIST AND LEAD THEM INTO CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

4. MINISTER TO PERSONS IN NEED

5. LEAD MEMBERS TO WORSHIP

6. INTERPRET AND UNDERGIRD THE WORK OF THE CHURCH AND THE DENOMINATION.
HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADER

The worker’s guidelines on this page are a standard of excellence for our Sunday School. They are not meant to produce guilt on the part of any worker, but they are goals which we need to work toward. If we will strive for these goals we will reach more people for Jesus Christ and make disciples of them which is our Commission as the Sunday School.

1. Be a Christian and an adult member of the church (John 15:8, 2 Tim 5:22).

2. Attend all Sunday School training opportunities. (2 Tim 2:15, Phil 2:2)

3. Organize the class with at least the following leaders:
   - Secretary
   - Assistant Teacher or Teacher in training
   - Outreach Leader
   - Fellowship Leader
   - Care Groups Leader
   - Care Group Leaders
   - Prayer Leader

4. Contact both absentees and prospects each week (Matt 28:19-20).

5. Support the outreach ministry of the Sunday School by having at least one team represented from your class (Acts 1:8).

6. Support the total mission of the church. Be regular in attendance. All workers shall be present fifteen minutes before Sunday School begins (2 Peter 3:14).

7. Support my church faithfully with my tithe (Mal 3:10).
Because evaluation reveals that Southern Baptist curriculum is biblically based and provides the best guide for consistent and comprehensive Bible study and because LifeWay Christian Resources curriculum materials published by Southern Baptist Convention:

- Guide people in Bible study and are consistent with the Baptist Faith and Message
- Are evangelistic in purpose
- Support our church’s goals and programs
- Are based on sound educational principles and teaching methods

We believe that the LifeWay Christian Resources curriculum materials will best help our church carry out its mission and achieve its objective. Therefore, LifeWay Christian Resources curriculum materials are to be the materials each Sunday School class and department in our church will use.

Periodically, the Pastor, staff and Sunday School Director will lead the Sunday School workers in an overview of LifeWay Christian Resources curriculum series to determine which curriculum series will best meet the needs of each age division and class.
First Baptist Church Sunday School Covenant

Read carefully the following covenant, check the appropriate box for each statement. Please sign and date at the bottom if you wish to join yourself to a group of leaders committed to ministry.

☐ I have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
☐ I feel called of God to serve Him through the Sunday School.
☐ I will strive to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
☐ I will *actively participate in training and growing opportunities.
☐ I will organize my class for outreach, ministry, and fellowship.
☐ I will *actively participate in Sunday School leadership meetings.
☐ I will do all I can to make Sunday mornings a positive, uplifting experience.
☐ I will be faithful in tithing to the Lord.
☐ I will faithfully attend Sunday morning worship services.
☐ I will be supportive of the Pastor and staff.

Before my Lord Jesus Christ, I commit myself to serve Him and His church by faithfully ministering through the Sunday School of First Baptist Church, Foley, AL for the 2007-2008 Sunday School year.

____________________________________________________
Sign

____________________________________________________
Date

*“actively participate” means that you will be involved unless providentially hindered.

(Revised from Sunday School Covenant of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, GA.)
APPENDIX M

ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS SCHEDULE
FOR
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, FOLEY, AL
ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS SCHEDULE

1. Arrive Early (minimum of 15 min.)
   • Arrange room
   • Put up kit items
   • Get extra material

2. Fellowship: Greet Members and Guest
   • Have nametags for everyone.

3. Begin Class Time (Start and End on Time)
   • Recognize the Secretary (30 sec.)
     ○ Be sure to have class records.
     ○ Register all guests
   • Recognize the Class Outreach Leader (2-3 min.).
     ○ Get report
     ○ Make assignments
   • Recognize Fellowship Leader (2-3 min.)
     ○ Share plans for next fellowship event or report on last event.
   • Recognize Care Group Leaders (2-3 min.)
     ○ Each leader reports on members and absentees.
   • Recognize Prayer Leader (2-3 min.)
     ○ Receive prayer requests

4. Teach the Lesson (40 min.)

5. Recognize Prayer Leader (3-5 min.)
   • Announce Prayer Requests
   • Pray

6. Invite guests to sit with you in worship
APPENDIX N

SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERS APPRECIATION BANQUET PROGRAM

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, FOLEY, AL
Sunday School Leaders Appreciation Banquet
August 29, 2006

6:00 PM  Blessing
          Let’s Eat!

6:45 PM  Music – Sunday School songs we learned as children
          Recognition of all Sunday School Teachers
          Sunday School Testimony - child
          Recognition of longest tenured teacher
          First Presentation of Awards
          Sunday School Testimony – youth
          Second Presentation of Awards
          Sunday School Testimony - Adult
          Third Presentation of Awards
          Sunday School Testimony – Teacher
          Sunday School Leader Commissioning Service
          Closing Prayer
APPENDIX O

SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERS COMMISSIONING SERVICE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, FOLEY, AL
Sunday School Leader Commissioning Service
Responsive Reading

**Pastor:** Following our Lord in service is a high calling. As His church we affirm that calling and renew our commitment to His service.

**Congregation:** We, the members of First Baptist Church acknowledge that as God's children by faith in Jesus Christ, we are to be witnesses for Him. We do not give away that responsibility to our ministers or Sunday School leaders. We gladly accept the privilege and responsibility to stand for Christ in His power and by His grace.

**Pastor:** Yet God does specifically call out some to particular roles of service and leadership. Sunday School leaders, you stand before us tonight because you have responded to His call and this congregation's confirmation to serve as a leader in Sunday School. The call is to be a servant leader called, surrendered, committed, and able. I challenge you to serve faithfully and by example to show us how to love God, love others, and reach out with the good news to people who are lost and seeking.

**Sunday School Leaders:** We affirm that we have answered the call of the Lord. We commit our lives to love and serve Him with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We accept the challenge of service and in Christ's power will do our best to share the good news that has the power to change lives.

**Pastor:** Do you, members of First Baptist Church commit to pray for, encourage, and support these leaders during this year before us?

**Congregation:** We do commit to pray for, encourage, and support these who serve among us and with us.

**Pastor:** As pastor of this church and colaborer with all of you in the high calling of Jesus Christ, I urge you to keep the commission of Christ foremost in your minds and the love of Christ foremost in your hearts as you serve Him by reaching out to others with good news.

**Pastor/Congregation/Sunday School Leaders:** Amen
Bibliography


Dennis, Joseph A. “Building Bridges to Baby Boomers through the Sunday School.” A Doctor of Ministry Project, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993.


VITA

Billy E. Nale

PERSONAL
Born: May 18, 1959
Married: Rhonda B. Nale, August 4, 1979
Children: Justin Colin Nale, born January 28, 1981
Ashley Lauren Nale, born July 7, 1983

EDUCATIONAL
B.S. in Religion, Campbell University, 1981
M.A.R., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991
M.Div., Equivalency, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003

MINISTERIAL
Licensed: Galatia Baptist Church, Seaboard, NC., 1986.
Ordained: Galatia Baptist Church, Seaboard, NC., 1986.
Minister of Youth, Antioch Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC, 1979-1981.
Minister of Children, Memorial Baptist Church, Buies Creek, NC, 1982-1983.
Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church, Panama City, FL, 1993-1997.
Pastor, First Baptist Church, Foley, AL, 2000 – present.