

Building a Strong Sunday School Teaching Plan

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Goal: To provide an understanding of the four essential foundations to build a strong Sunday School, the five relationship strategies inherent in Sunday School, and five actions needed to build a strong Sunday School.

Preparation:

Time Frame: Two-three hours is recommended. However, each section can be taught as a separate unit in a one-hour conference.

Primary Audience: Pastors, Staff Members and Sunday School Directors. If using in a church setting with Sunday School teachers, adjust the questions as necessary.

1. Print enough copies of the three Handouts: Foundations, Relationship Strategies, and Actions
2. Powerpoint Presentation on Building a Strong Sunday School
3. Assignments based on the Procedures
4. Supplemental resources as desired

Foundations Procedures:

1. **Create Interest:** (Slide Two). **Share:** Tony Evans uses this illustration to open a sermon that he uses on How the foundations have shifted in America. Dr. Evans shared that he noticed a crack in his ceiling and called a painter. The painter came patched the crack and repainted the ceiling. A few months later, the crack reappeared. He called the painter again and he returned and once again patched the crack and repainted the ceiling. In a few months however, the crack reappeared. He called another painter. That painter looked at the damaged ceiling and told Dr. Evans that he could not help him. Dr. Evans asked, "You are a painter, surely you can patch the crack and repaint the ceiling?" The painter replied, "But that's not your problem, your foundations have shifted." **Ask:** What are some indications that the foundations might have shifted in your Sunday School? *Allow for responses.* **Say:** Dr. Evans preached a sermon based on Luke 6:46-49. Read the scripture and make the point that Sunday School leaders must be wise builders.
2. **Share:** (Slide Three) **Say:** In order to build a strong Sunday School, we must build on a strong foundation. Let me share four essential foundations to building a strong Sunday School. The first foundation is "Dependence on the Holy Spirit." **Ask:** What are some steps that Sunday School leaders can do to encourage a dependence on the Holy Spirit?
3. **Share:** (Slide Three): **Say:** The Second foundation is an Appealing Primary Worship Service. [Note: primary worship service is the service that guest are expected. In most churches, this is the Sunday morning worship time.] **Ask:** What are some reasons would an Appealing Primary Worship Service be listed as a foundation for building a strong Sunday School? Call attention to word *appealing*. (Slide Four) **Share:** Two questions to consider: Why Worship is growing but Sunday School is Not? and What is your strategy for moving people from Worship to Sunday School? Consider doing a group activity allowing groups to answer on or both questions. **Allow for each group to prepare and share a report.** **Or State:** Here are some reasons that one blog writer shared on Why Worship might be growing and Sunday School is not: more energy is often poured into worship; leaders in worship

may be preparing better; people may be able to participate more in worship (singing, giving, praying, etc.) than happens in class; some want to be anonymous and worship allows them to do so; people may fear that in Sunday School they will be asked to read aloud or pray; members often invite people to worship but not to Sunday School; and people are more excited about worship.

State: Every pastor and Sunday School Director must have a strategy to move people from worship

to a group? **Ask:** What are some things that your church is doing to get people involved in groups?

4. (Slide Five) The third foundation to Building a Strong Sunday School is *Attractive Teaching*. **Ask:** On your handout, jot down two or three of your answer to the questions: What does attractive teaching look like? **Say:** Share with your neighbor, how you prefer to learn? **State:** Andy Anderson (growth specialist and author of the Growth Spiral), used to declare: BAD Lessons run off more people than good outreach programs can bring in. How many agree with that statements? Attractive Teaching is a foundation. Call attention to the word *attractive*. **Ask:** What does attractive teaching look like? (Slide Six) **State:** Steve Parr in Sunday School that Really Responds wrote, Boring teachers, more accurately boring presentations, are generally the result of a combination of these issues: spiritual passion, skills, and preparation. **Comment then state:** Attractive Teaching is an essential foundation to building a strong Sunday School.
5. (Slide Seven) **State:** The final foundation to building a strong Sunday School is a *Solid Organization*. (Slide Eight) **State:** A solid foundation begins by having a class for every age group. New groups will need to be started with a goal to have the class on average for every 20 in enrollment or 10 in attendance. Churches with a solid organization also implement a plan to accomplish teaching, outreach and ministry in each class? (In a two-three hour training session, ministry is the focus of the Relational strategies and outreach is the focus of the actions needed to build a strong Sunday School.) **Hold up the three strands of rope and ask:** What happens when any one of the three dimensions of Sunday School becomes most important and the other dimensions are seen as relatively unimportant. **Group participants into three teams.** Give each team one of the items below (Invite, Discover, Connect) and the questions associated with it. Allow five minutes to prepare to answer the questions.

- Invite. What happens if the Sunday School class has a strong focus on reaching new people, but when they arrive the Bible study is not meaningful to them (discover) and they do not experience strong relationships and ministry with others in the class (connect).

- Discover. What happens if the Sunday School has placed its total focus on doing a good job of teaching for those who come, but it does not reach out to new people (invite) or build relationships with people they are reaching and seeking to reach nor minister to members and unchurched (connect).

- Connect. What happens if fellowship and relationships are the number one issue and the intentional discovery of the Bible truths and how they apply to life take a back set to fellowship and the focus is totally on present members with little or no focus on the unchurched.

Call on each of the teams from procedure to report briefly.

Relationship Strategies Procedures:

1. (Slide 9) **State:** In our last session, we looked at 4 foundations for Building a Strong Sunday School. **Ask:** What is the purpose of the roof on your house? **State:** A few years ago, my wife noticed a leak in our ceiling above the fireplace. In order to stop the leak, we had to replace the shingles. Once we sure up the foundations of our Sunday School, we also must insure that there are no leaks by insuring that proper relationships are being established in our groups. Let me share with you five strategies that are inherent in Sunday School.
2. (Slide 10) **State:** Classes. Two key benefits of classes: Makes everyone the specific responsibility of a group and gives focus to class for reaching, teaching, and ministry.
3. (Slide 11) **State:** The second relationship strategy is Enrollment. (Move to Slide 12) Use the two circles diagram from Lyle Schaller's book *Assimilating New Members* to communicate the importance of enrollment. **State:** Classes are the first relationship strategy built into Sunday School, but how do you join a class or a group. The traditional word that we have used is to ENROLL them. When a prospect or church member is enrolled in a Sunday School class, they move into the Membership circle. The goal is not just to get people in the membership circle, it is to get them into the Fellowship Circle where they feel accepted and a sense of belonging. Divide the group into teams: Give each group the following quote from Dr. Schaller's book with the assignment following, [Note: Dr. Schaller writes that "From the perspective of the leaders, the long-time members, and the heritage-oriented people inside that inner circle, the line marking the boundary of the fellowship circle is no higher than the line painted on a gymnasium floor. Anyone who is interested and willing to take the initiative can step across it very easily and "From the perspective of the leaders, the long-time members, and the heritage-oriented people inside that inner circle, the line marking the boundary of the fellowship circle is no higher than the line painted on a gymnasium floor. Anyone who is interested and willing to take the initiative can step across it very easily and become a part of the inner circle. Some of the members of that inner circle go one step further and insist either that the line does not exist or that it is contiguous with that outer membership boundary." A radically different picture is perceived, however, by the members who are outside that fellowship circle. Instead of a thin line painted on the floor, many of them perceive the boundary of that fellowship circle to be a circular masonry wall 6 feet thick and 30 feet high." Page 81] **Group one:** What are some ways that our class could make sure that every guest and new member are welcomed and are asked to become a member of the membership circle of our class? **Group two:** What are some ways that our class could implement to move people from the membership circle into the fellowship circle? Allow time for groups to report. **State:** Two scenarios that indicate your teachers and members might not have a proper understanding of the importance of enrolling people in Sunday School: **Scenario one:** A teacher complains about members on his roll that are attending and ask these to be removed from the roll. He basically is saying we only want people on our roll who are in the fellowship circle) **Scenario Two:** A class that has a large enrollment with a small number of people attending. The class is basically saying, you can add all these people to the roll if you want to but we only care about the people in our fellowship circle. (Slide 13) **State:** Enrollment focuses the Sunday school on the people who are not present.
4. (Slide 14) **State:** The third relationship strategy built into Sunday School is Ministry Touches/Contacts. (Slide 15) **State:** A ministry touch is an intentional communication on behalf of the Sunday School class through phone calls, e-mails, visits, post cards, or random

encounters. Consider giving each conferee a copy of the Ideas for Making Contacts by Marie Clark. (Slide 16) **State:** Take time to complete the answer to the question on your handout: As contacts are made, what are some possible needs that could be discovered? Allow time for them to work. (Slide 17) **Ask:** Did any of your responses fit into one of these five areas? **State:** The goal is to contact every member and every prospect every week.

5. (Slide 18) **State:** Class Fellowships are the next relationship strategy built into Sunday School. **Ask:** How often do you think classes should have fellowships outside of class time? Allow for responses. **State:** Remember to invite every guest, every prospect and every associate member to each fellowship.
6. (Slide 19) **State:** The final relationship strategy built into Sunday School is Class Leaders. These leaders also help to insure a solid organization that focuses on the total work of the Sunday School. Every class regardless of size should have at least three leaders: A teacher, outreach/evangelism leader, and a ministry leader. Consider providing some examples of class organizations and job descriptions.
7. **State:** Growing Sunday Schools are intentional about building relationships. Give each member a post it note and ask them to write one way that their church discover prospects. Ask them to place the post it note on the tear sheet as they take a five minute break.

Actions Procedures

1. **State:** During the last two sessions, we have looked at the four foundations to building a Strong Sunday School and the relationship Strategies built into Sunday School. Now let's look at five essential actions that are needed to build a strong Sunday School.
2. (Slide 20) **State:** The first essential action to building a strong Sunday School is to SEE your Sunday School Differently. Seldom do our Sunday School classes move outside the walls of the church to conduct mission projects unless they see their class differently. Most Sunday School classes have very little lost people in them. Why because of how they see their Sunday School. Significant growth will not happen unless you SEE Sunday School Differently. (Slide 21) **State:** How you SEE Sunday School will Determine how your LEAD Sunday School and MEASURE its success. **Ask:** On your handout, complete the question, How do you measure the success of your Sunday School? **Allow for responses and list them on the board.** **State:** Three things took place this morning in Sunday School: The word of God was taught, people were prayed for and with, and fellowship took place. If that is all Sunday School does, it is worth doing. Every pastor and director has to ask themselves this question: If all Sunday School does is teach the Bible to those who show up, pray for those who show up, and fellowship with those who show up, is that enough? (Slide 22) Pass out the BELIEVE-SEE-LEAD-MEASURE Chart. **Explain the Chart and State:** If you are a teacher, how you see your members will determine how you see your Sunday School. Let me challenge you to begin to see your members as missionaries. **State:** On your handout, you will find this quote by Arthur Flake from *True Functions of the Sunday School*, "If any SS is to perform its greatest ministry, it must be rightly related to the program of the church. It must be directed by leaders who have a clear vision of its possibilities."
3. (Slide 23) **State:** Enlisting and Training Leaders is the next Essential Action for Building a Strong Sunday School. (Slide 24) **State:** Your Sunday School will seldom rise above the level to which you equip your leaders. **Ask:** Get in groups of three or four and complete the question on your handout: What are some areas that your leaders need to be equipped (to build a strong Sunday

School)? An alternative activity is to create a handout based on *Creating a Development Plan* in the Appendix of the book *TEACHER: Creating Conversational Community*. Ask them to circle the top three competencies on the list that would be essential to building a strong Sunday School class. Allow for discussion.

4. (Slide 25) **State:** Identifying, Welcoming and Enrolling Prospects is the next essential action to building a Strong Sunday School. Remind them that you must identify and enroll lost prospects if you want to have an evangelistic Sunday School. Call attention to the tear sheet created in the last session with the post it notes. **Read a few of these aloud.** **Ask:** What are some other ways that church uses to discover prospects.
5. (Slide 26) The fourth essential to building a strong Sunday School is to conduct aggressive Outreach and Evangelism. Read Mark 1:17. **State:** If Jesus formed his group for evangelism, shouldn't our classes and groups be involved in outreach and evangelism. (Slide 27) **State:** Outreach is not: Visiting MEMBERS in the hospital, Visiting Sunday School MEMBERS, Sending Cards or making calls to class MEMBERS, Providing food to a church MEMBER that has experienced a tragedy. **Ask:** What is the word underlined in each statement. Members. Outreach is not done to class members. Outreach is to reach people who are not members. **Pass out the handout entitled:** How can my class? Read each one with emphasis: How will my class: Pray specifically for lost people by name; Build an identity with the people we want to reach; Intentionally search for lost people; Cultivate relationships with lost people; Equip members to share the Gospel; Make lost people feel welcome at Class Activities and Bible Study; Become engaged outside the walls of our classroom. (Slide 28) If you want to get your classes engaged in outreach and evangelism, lead your church to be involved in the Connect>1 Evangelism Campaign?
6. (Slide 29) **State:** The next action of Building a Strong Sunday School is to Focus on Adults to insure the long-term growth of the church. Of course, we want to reach the Gen Z and the Millenials Generations. But we must reach adults if we want to Revitalize our churches.
7. (Slide 30) Ask everyone to gather in a circle and hold hands. State the following quote from Ken Hemphill book, *Revitalizing the Sunday morning Dinosaur*: Sunday School must be plugged into a passion for evangelism. Otherwise it will settle into the comfort zone of a maintenance organization. By ignoring the evangelistic potential of the Sunday School, we have reduced Sunday School to a stagnant pool of introverted groups looking primarily to their own needs and interests and ignoring the plight of the unsaved. (Page 15). **State:** Many of our Sunday School classes have turned inward. One of our jobs is to lead our classes to be outwardly focused. As we conclude, let's turn around and ask God to give us an outward vision for our Sunday School.