



Partners

Partners is published quarterly by the WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship to assist those in Sunday school ministry.

Is "Sunday School" Passe?

This article was written by Stephanie Martin, a Non-WELS free-lance writer and editor in Colorado. It is reprinted by permission, Children's Ministry Magazine, Copyright 1996, Group Publishing, Inc., Box 481, Loveland, CO 80539. Because the article raises a great question in an appropriate and compelling way, and because I couldn't say it better myself, it appears in this Partners issue.

Joel Nelson, Administrator – WELS Youth Discipleship

"Sunday school" by any other name is still Sunday school. Right? Don't be so sure.

Image is everything—at least in the business world. When its image needs repair, a company conducts a stylish PR blitz, complete with a celebrity spokesperson, slick ads, enticing giveaways, and maybe even a new name or slogan. Some Christian leaders now advocate a similar "corporate cure" for Sunday school's ailing image.

But is that all there is to it? To find out, Children's Ministry Magazine asked our readers: "Do you agree or disagree that the name 'Sunday school' needs to be changed?" By a 3-to-1 margin, children's workers said it's time for this ministry moniker to go.

PLAYING THE NAME GAME

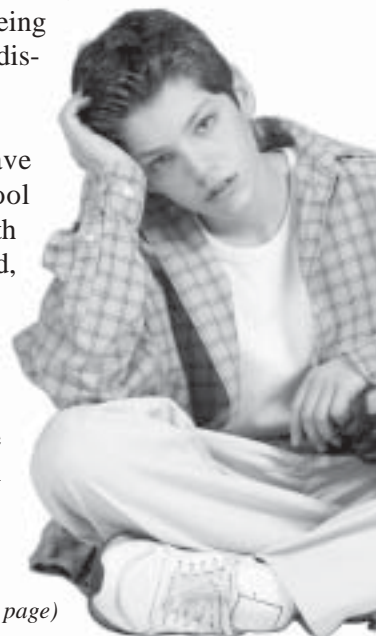
From a literal standpoint, the name "Sunday school" is obsolete because educational programs are no longer held just on Sundays, and most no longer resemble school-classroom settings.

Name Blame—From a practical standpoint, the name may turn kids away. "The last thing kids want to hear on the weekend is 'school,'" says Amy Sacha, a children's ministry

coordinator in Englewood, Ohio. Children's ministers who voted for a name change agree that five days of school is enough and that children need a change from their weekly routines. They need a place where they can be actively involved.

Most children's ministers who want to discard the "Sunday school" name cite its negative connotations, saying it "conjures up a picture of a long, boring session on your seat" and reminds people of textbooks, memorization, lectures, and "being forced to go to something they disliked as children."

In addition, children who have negative experiences in school associate the word "school" with failure and frustration. Instead, says Martha Parris, a director of Christian education in Springfield, Missouri, "Children need to be encouraged that learning about God is a positive activity." And a new name can do just that!



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Name Fame—The minority of readers who favor keeping “Sunday school” say it’s a well-established, recognized name that denotes tradition and has a rich history. Others say it has pleasant associations and is familiar and appealing to non-Christians and Christians.

Jan Bunner, a children’s ministry coordinator in DeRidder, Louisiana, says, “The unchurched know that God can be found at ‘Sunday school’ and that a teacher there will accept them unconditionally. Churchgoers know that the biblical teaching at Sunday school is the same as always.” Robyn Clifford, a children’s minister in Pinson, Tennessee, values the word “school” because it gives an expectation that learning will occur.

PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE

Whatever the name, that alone doesn’t necessarily mean your program is meeting needs. Whether they favor chucking or keeping the Sunday school name, many children’s ministers say it’s what’s inside that counts.

Soozung Sa, a Christian education coordinator in Wautoma, Wisconsin, says that although a name change can renew leaders’ spirits and attitudes, “the program has to be as credible as the name; the name is not enough.”

“When there’s a change in name only, children can see right past it...and recognize immediately that the learning experience is still ‘Sunday school,’ “ says pastor John Bartz from Frewsburg, New York. He supports a name change “only if the learning atmosphere and Christian education program are changed as well.”

Bartz offers this analogy: To change the name only and not the content or atmosphere of the learning experience would be like a store changing its name on the marquee, but keeping the same shelves, aisles, and, most of all, product.

MOVING BEYOND THE NAME

Making substantive changes within your program itself isn’t as overwhelming as it first sounds. To determine if genuine learning occurs in your program, answer the following questions.

What’s your goal?

First things first: If you can clearly state your program’s purpose, then meeting it will be much easier. Todd Crouch, a Sabbath school director in Washington, Pennsylvania, says his program’s goal—“teaching kids about God and their relationships with others”—is more important than its name. Kenn Gorman, a director of children’s ministries in Wenatchee,

Washington, is clear about his goal. He says church education must “lead children to a relationship with Christ, show them how to lead a holy life, and get them into ministry to others.” Everything flows from the goal. Do you emphasize teaching or learning? understanding or memorization?

Just because you’re teaching doesn’t necessarily mean children are learning. When is the last time you checked to see if kids were really learning? Jesus, the master teacher, used his learners’ world and provided learners opportunities to practice what they learned. Jesus wanted to be sure they “got it.” Jean Mass Pike, a ministry associate in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, teaches as Jesus taught by approaching learning as “a lifelong process of faith development, with active learning and service opportunities for children, youth, and adults.”

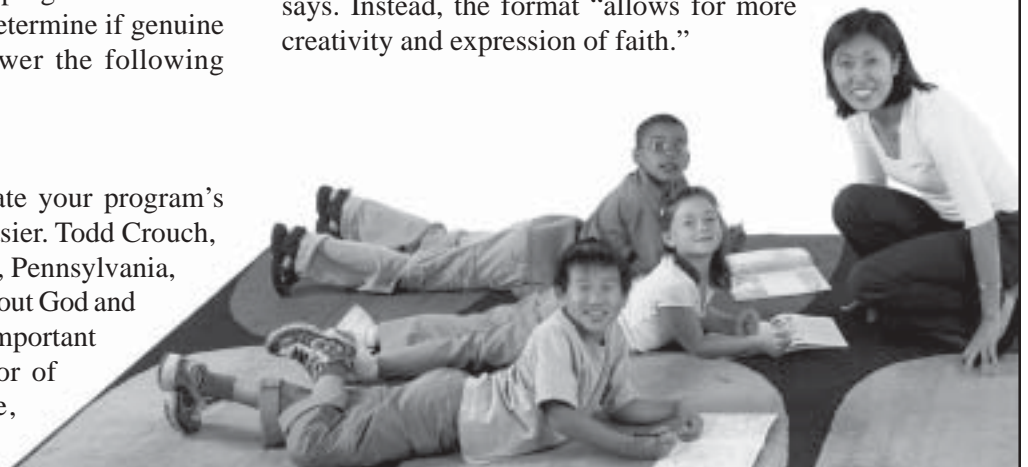
Focus on understanding. Contrary to the beliefs of many well-meaning Christian educators, requiring tons of memory work isn’t the way to make Scripture stick. Children who excel at memorization rarely retain the information long term, while those who struggle with memorizing view biblical literacy as beyond their reach. At Crouch’s church, children’s workers “are focusing kids’ minds on Christ as the key factor in all relationships—not just on memorizing facts.”

Does your curriculum promote lifelong learning?

When asked, “What other changes have you made in your Sunday morning educational program that have had positive results?” many children’s ministers cited new curriculum that’s more participation-oriented and active. Some children’s ministers write their own lessons, making them age- and need-appropriate. But remember: Even the best curriculum can’t make a difference unless teachers are trained to use it.

Do you challenge kids to think? to work together?

Although it’s tempting to automatically provide the right answers, an important part of kids’ learning is arriving at the answers by themselves—or with their classmates. Barbara Greenwald, a director of Christian education in Saginaw, Michigan, says changing her program’s name and focus to Disciples’ Enrichment Hour has had dramatic results. There’s “no more filling empty vessels with correct answers,” she says. Instead, the format “allows for more creativity and expression of faith.”



When children are encouraged to work together in pairs or small groups, they learn interpersonal skills and form relationships with other children-and adults. For example, Debbie Neufeld, a children's ministry coordinator in Winnipeg, Manitoba, says her teachers, or "care-group leaders," are responsible for the spiritual care of a small group of children. They get more involved in kids' lives than just teaching lessons on Sundays.

Do you focus on quality rather than quantity?

Thoroughly covering a few main points is more learner-friendly than cramming tons of material into one lesson. Jesus himself-who knew everything and had loads to communicate to his disciples-understood this principle. In John 16:12, Jesus said, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." He might've just coined the phrase: "Less is more!"

Staff members also work on their "quality" by praying together regularly, which gives them a sense of community and ownership and deepens their commitment to the children.

Does your program promote active learning?

"The education time on Sundays needs to be a positive active learning experience-not a paper-and-pencil lecture time," says Parris. "Just changing the name of something doesn't do any good if you don't improve the program and practice, too."

24 GREAT ALIASES

Great names arouse curiosity; give an instant feeling of belonging, fun, and excitement; and help teachers, parents, and children remember their Christian calling. If you're looking for a new label that better expresses your phenomenal Christian education program, try one of these.

- Kidz Club**
- High Calling**
- Journey With Jesus**
- Songland Celebration**
- Sunday Challenge**
- Sunday Friends**
- School of Christian Living**
- Disciples' Enrichment Hour**
- Power Hour**
- Bible Fellowship Hour**
- Foundations**
- Spiritual Adventures**
- Bible Adventure**
- Great Adventures**
- Kid Konnection**
- Kids of the Kingdom**
- Faith Exploration**
- Sunday Morning Live**
- Community Kids**
- The Vineyard Playhouse**
- Kidventure**
- Sunday Bible School**
- First Steps in Faith**
- Bungalow**

(Believers Understanding Nurtured in God Alone)

A word of caution: Initially a new name can be confusing, so promote and explain it well to children and parents.

Learning by doing involves direct, purposeful, and personal experiences. It's fun, focused, inclusive, and acknowledges different learning styles. Active learning evokes emotions that are then focused through questions and tied to Scriptural truths.

At Judy Basye's church in San Mateo, California, Sunday mornings have been totally revamped to feature two-and-a-half-hour VBS-style programs. Deb Nafziger, coordinator of elementary grades, praises the changes at her Wheaton, Illinois church. The addition of activity stations, hands-on learning, creative Bible lessons, and small groups has led not only to positive responses from parents and children but to easier volunteer recruitment.

You can incorporate active learning through exciting Bible lessons

with life applications. Kids can go deeper into hands-on learning with music, crafts, dramas, role-plays, puppets, videos, stories, games, computers, and service projects.

Sa says active learning is necessary because unlike school, children can choose not to come to church. "We don't have the luxury of being able to snap our fingers and have everyone come running to us. Children will float away if we don't keep their interest."

Although change can be threatening, it's urgently needed in Christian education. "We're hung up on the name when we should be concentrating on developing programs that are radically different," encourages Gorman. "Many are the same as when I was in them 20 years ago."

What do you think? Log on to the *Sunday School Talk (SST)* discussion board at <www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship> , click on the SST link in the "Discussions" section and join the discussion called "Name Change".

Resource Recommendations

2004 Children's Christmas Service *God's Love in the Manger*

Written by WELS Pastor, Paul Huebner, *God's Love in the Manger* is a traditional children's Christmas service that tells the wonderful message of how God's love came to this earth when Jesus, the Savior of the world, was born. This Christmas service is full of narration, recitation, and music. Traditional hymns and carols, alternative accompaniments and introductions, and children's choir arrangements are included in the service.

Prerecorded vocal demonstrations, accompaniment tracks, and an electronic text file are provided on CD. Accompaniment MIDI files are provided on CD for use with the HymnSoft(R) Player Module or a MIDI keyboard. A service text copy master and an electronic file include all song and hymn texts.

Visit www.nph.net to download a sample of the service and listen to sample songs in MP3 format. The complete service text for *God's Love in the Manger* is available as a PDF file at www.nph.net. Click on the Christmas kit icon to access this sample as well as a listing of the service music and portions of the vocal scores and accompaniments.



NPH Stock #18N0374, \$49.99

Resource Catalog – Rainbow Publishers

If you are looking for time fillers, bulletin board ideas, worksheets, etc., for your Sunday school classroom, check out this site <www.sundayschoolstore.com>. Phone number is (800) 522-5005. Although the materials were not created by WELS, many of the ideas/suggestions can work in your Sunday school classroom. Download an activity to check it out - <<http://www.sundayschoolstore.com/dsp.html>>

New Life for Your Sunday School

WELS Youth Discipleship was granted permission to make available an out of print resource for Sunday schools. The 1995 NPH resource called, *New Life for Your Sunday School*, is available for download in pdf format at <www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship>. Look in the "Sunday School Resources" folder in the "Consultation and Resources" collection. *New Life for Your Sunday School* contains 33 staff devotions, 13 discussion starters, and 25 ideas for promoting your Sunday school.

Only At Sunday School!

"Teacher," announced little Joey, "there's somethin' I can't figger out."

"What's that Joey?" asked the Sunday school teacher.

"Well accordin' to the Bible, the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, right?"

"Right."

"An' the Children of Israel beat up the Philistines, right?"

"Er—right."

"An' the Children of Israel built the Temple, right?"

"Again you're right."

"An' the Children of Israel fought the 'gyptians, an' the Children of Israel fought the Romans, an' the Children of Israel wuz always doin' somethin' important, right?"

"All that is right, too," agreed the teacher. "So what's your question?"

"What I wanna know is this," demanded Joey. "What wuz all the grown-ups doin'?"



A WELS Sunday School Creating a "Cat's Meow"

by, *Pastor Mike Quandt,*
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church – Salt Lake City, UT

While we've watched our overall ministries grow and change, the one arm of ministry that hadn't looked at itself for the entire ten years I've been here was our Sunday School. Fact is, as of last winter we had more adults in our Basic Christianity course than children attending SS ... and the ones who did attend were those "have to's" — (Pastor's kids, Principals kids, Board of Ed Chairman's kids, etc). Our other conclusion: only a few adults are allowed to use their spiritual gifts and there was a huge gap in "ownership/awareness". So we surveyed, we subcommitteed, we brainstormed, and we came up with something that kinda sorta resembles how we do VBS.

Bottom line ... we take one lesson for every two week period. We begin with a family opening in the chapel. (Opening team consists of four or five adults who rotate the privilege). Then we offer two stations per Sunday. One is Lesson (always offered week one ... consists of a three or four adult team who rotate the privilege). One is Discussion (always offered week two ... consists of a three or four adult team who rotate the privilege). Then any one of the following other stations is offered opposite the Lesson/Discussion station (mid-way thru the morning the groups will switch stations) — Craft, Project (a mission or service project) Multi-Media (uses video or web or powerpoint) Drama (either uses drama team members who are teens/adults OR recruits and uses kids from the SS). Each of those floating teams/stations has anywhere from five to ten adults on the team. Then we have a closing with singing and that also has a team concept.

One of the most notable benefits is the massive use of the spiritual gifts distributed among the many without putting them on the spot every single Sunday. Matter of fact, some of the gifts used do not require all to be public presenters ... a fear which probably would keep many out of serving on a Sunday School level.

Way too early to judge whether this is the cat's meow or a hair ball but early indications do suggest some short term and long term blessings are in the works. I also love how it has been adopted by and enjoyed by our Lutheran elementary school (LES) staff. They know they aren't committing to a 42 week, every Sunday morning deal. They plug in where and when they can and find themselves more involved with the non-LES kids in a non-threatening yet quasi-recruiting role.

To talk to pastor Quandt
about his innovative Sunday
school, email: pastor@popslc.org

First Youth Ministry Conference a Success!

228 people, representing all 12 WELS Districts, attended the first ever national WELS Youth Ministry Conference (YMC) in Naperville, IL on September 17-19. The 228 were 59 pastors, 32 staff ministers, 27 Lutheran elementary or area Lutheran high school teachers, and 110 lay men and women.

The theme for the YMC was "Building from the Ground Up" with 27 different speakers from WELS and WELS affiliated organizations and ministries, sharing ideas for how to engage and impact youth from birth through high school as well as their parents. 20 WELS and WELS affiliated ministries also sponsored displays at the conference. The conference stressed the importance of partnering together in order to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the best possible ways. The next YMC will be held in 2006 in a more western part of the United States. Watch for details.

Videos of the four main plenary presentations below are available in a two video set from the WELS Youth Discipleship office (<cyd@sab.wels.net> – 414-256-3274). Cost is \$11.99 including shipping and handling.

- ◆ **Building from the Ground Up:
The Importance of Parents and Home**
*Pastor John Boggs, Dean of Students-
Michigan Lutheran Seminary*
- ◆ **Building An Outreaching Ministry:
The Importance of Sharing Jesus
with Everyone**
*Mr. Kevin Festerling, Teacher-St.
Marcus Lutheran School-Milwaukee, WI*
- ◆ **Building a Ministry of Strong
Partnerships: The Importance of
Working Together**
*Pastor Bruce Becker, Administrator
WELS Parish Services*
- ◆ **Building for All Eternity: The
Importance of the Gospel in
Today's World**
*Pastor Ron Heins, Director WELS
Parish Assistance*

Partners

Check It Out!

One Day Sunday School Conference *Stewards of Our Faith, Pass It On at Home; at Church; in the Community*

Keynote address, four training sessions, and four discussion groups for Sunday school teachers and superintendents will be offered on Saturday, January 22, 2005. The conference which is being hosted by St. John's Lutheran Church and School, Baraboo, Wisconsin, is sponsored by the Western Wisconsin District Commission on Youth Discipleship. Conference times are 9:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Cost for the workshop is \$10 per person. Registration fee includes lunch and refreshments. Registration deadline is January 20, 2004. For information or to register, contact Debbie Rothe at 920-262-2988 or <debbie@smls.org>

It's Live!

The new website for kids (www.kidsconnection.tv) is live! Go to it and check out these exciting areas: Rewind, Sneak Peek, Kids' Corner, Connection Central, Prime Time, About Kids' Connection, Q&A, and Idea Bank. Your kids can also take the poll.

Kids' Connection videos can be ordered from the Commission on Youth Discipleship <cyd@sab.wels.net> or call 414-256-3274. A one-year subscription is \$80.00 plus \$5.00 shipping and handling and gets you nine awesome episodes to help your students and you, "Stay connected to Jesus."



Please contact us with any questions or for further information.

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