

Partners



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

Welcome to Funday School!

by Joel A. Nelson, CYD Administrator

Did you see it? The December 2002 issue of *TIME Magazine* carried an article about the changing face of Sunday school ministry in America. The article was titled, "The New Funday School" and discussed what churches are doing to, "woo the Nickelodeon generation." One minister (Tom) drives his truck through a working-class Texas neighborhood and conducts a "Sidewalk Sunday School" that looks more like street theater than organized religion. In fact, the "Sunday" school actually takes place on Thursdays. The crazy antics and water balloon tosses may seem a little over the top, but Tom's philosophy is worth pondering a little. He says, "You've got to make it fun, or it's just more dry religious stuff."

Some churches, the article says, have "updated their facilities with computer stations for playing video games like *Bible Grand Slam*, and movie theaters for features like *The Creation*, narrated by Amy Grant. Teachers are baking unleavened bread as they read *Exodus* and aiming slingshots at large bottles for a hands on study of David and Goliath." Other examples find toddlers setting up a mini altar with small candles, prayer books and Bibles for "church services," or students using "bang and clang" instruments to dramatize the storm that nearly drown the prophet Jonah. And what is the result? Look at these quotes:

"When I was sitting here before," said one student, "I used to bring something to do, like draw. Now I'm learning things."

"The more kids touch and they hear and they feel," said one program director, "the more likely the content becomes not only interesting, but they comprehend and understand."

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"If a kid comes home and says, 'I met some kids, I had fun and loved it, and I want to go back,'" says one pastor, "most of the time the parent will say, 'OK' and return to that church.' There are church-wide benefits to a thriving children's ministry."

Like with anything else, doing what pleases God and maintaining balance is the key. The Apostle Paul said it well when he was inspired to write, "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible'—but not everything is constructive... So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:23, 31). But when it comes to what is permissible and beneficial to truly engage children in the Bible lessons you teach, there really is a lot of room for Christian creativity.

- ◆ How could music be a part of the lesson, either to illustrate a special setting, demonstrate something about the culture and times, or set a special mood before or after the lesson is presented? How might playing some soft, spiritual music while students pray silently or journal their thoughts about how the truths of the lesson apply to them today enhance your teaching?
- ◆ What physical movements could be incorporated into the lesson? For example, in a lesson about God giving the Law on Mt. Sinai, have students come to the front and use their faces and bodies to show the

fear the Israelites must have felt when they heard the thunder from the mountain—but without making a sound! In the lesson of Creation, have students physically show (mime) how different plants and animals might have come forth at the command of God.

- ◆ How might the professional mourners have shrieked and moaned at the young man of Nain's funeral? How might the father from the *Parable of the Lost Son* have cried, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" How could you make the smashing sound of the clay jars used when Gideon's army attacked the Midianites?
- ◆ How might students draw or diagram portions of the lesson while you tell it or immediately after a lesson section has been completed? Students could then present their pictures to each other and discuss what they have drawn.

Of course, anything you do in the classroom should be age, as well as, socially appropriate, and it should never compromise student safety. But don't be afraid to experiment. Students of all ages, whether they let on or not, appreciate these things being done. And it is an absolute fact: **learning occurs best when lessons are fun!**

Maybe the custodian won't let you cover the entire church basement floor with white paper pieces to represent the manna in the wilderness, but you can make your lessons and your Sunday school (or similar ministry) a lot more engaging in a variety of ways. If you do, don't be surprised if your students go home and tell their parents, "I loved Funday... I mean... Sunday school today!"

Great Sunday School Resources Available at NPFF, shopwels.net, or CYD

"Principles and Methods of Christian Education" (1990)
Cassettes and copy masters - \$49.99

"Sunday School for Today and Tomorrow" (1999)
Video and binder free to every WELS congregation requesting it from CYD.

National Sunday School Conference Keynote Address
Video and discussion guide - \$14.95

2003 "Children in the Church" – Jason Nelson

2002 "Show What You Know – Rev. David Kolander

2001 "You Will Shine Like the Stars" – Rev. Richard Gurgel

P-Web Discussion Boards on 13 Sunday School Topics (2002) Open to all WELS SS staff members – Type SST into the WELS web "jump word" box.

WELS Kids Connection

Monthly video with discussion guide - \$85.00 for the year.

One-Day VBS

(Christmas and Easter for Kids, Creation for Kids, Noah and the Flood)

Student lessons, leader's guide, and craft ideas - \$14.00 for packs of 25. Contact CYD office for assistance or samples.

CYD Staff and District Coordinator Consultation

cyd@sab.wels.net, 414-256-3274, or check the Youth Discipleship "Ministry" pull down at www.wels.net for a list of District Coordinators.

Sign Me Up!

Part II

Under the title “Sign Me Up!” the last *Partners* talked about the “creative” ways people become Sunday school teachers and briefly discussed why there seems to be so much turnover in Sunday school staffs. One of the paragraphs from that article said,

There will always be teacher turnover. People move, life changes, and things happen. But isn't it sad when recruiting Sunday school staff becomes such a regular and stressful situation? Isn't it unfortunate that some Sunday school ministries seem to be recruiting teachers all the time—and it's not because the enrollment is busting through the belfry? Why is it that some Sunday schools have so much turnover? Most of the time it's not because of anything they do but more so because of things they don't do.

It doesn't have to be that way! A Sunday school and Sunday school leadership that provides its teachers with the following can really turn things around:



A clear description of what the job and commitment will be.

Every ministry program wants committed people involved in it. But the committed people we want as Sunday school teachers are also committed in every other aspect of their lives. Research indicates that everyone wants to be a part of something meaningful, but frequently people cannot be involved in the way they are being asked. Committed people do not have the time to wonder what the job is about and how much time and effort it will take. They want to know and need to know these details, up front. Then they can ponder it, pray about it, and make an intelligent decision that will truly help the ministry and be good for them as disciples of Jesus. They don't have time or desire to spin their wheels, figuring everything out as they go. Wheel spinning creates friction and heat, and people who spend too much time spinning their wheels eventually (like tires) burn out. A Sunday school program that can not show prospective teachers what their job will be, communicates that it is disorganized, lacks clear direction, and doesn't really care about the people involved.



A positive, written articulation of the Sunday school's mission.

Can staff members (present and potential) see what the point and purpose of Sunday school is? Do they clearly see how Sunday school fits into the total ministry of the congregation? Unless the staff members know this, there is no way they can plug in totally. Every organization worth anything, has a mission statement that directs its efforts and focuses its activity. The fact that the mission statement is written down tells teachers that the program is important. Someone took the time to think things through and get on paper what the purpose and point really are. Everyone can, therefore, be “on the same page.” That the mission statement is positive, communicates an emotion and feeling about Sunday school ministry. If people cannot identify and connect emotionally with the effort, they will not remain for long. Finally, everyone wants to be connected to a winner. A mission statement that clearly expresses the joy we have in serving Jesus will provide the best reason for wanting to be a part of the Sunday school team.





A complete calendar for the year of lessons, staff meetings, and other activities.

Planning for a whole year in advance is commonplace today. In fact, many organizations plan even farther out than that. While things do change and adjustments need to be made, planning the whole Sunday school year out accomplishes several good things. First, it says, “We are organized and are thinking ahead.” It tells teachers and parents that the Sunday school ministry leaders have done their homework and that the program is not flying by the seat of its evangelical pants. Especially if the Sunday school is in a congregation with a Lutheran elementary school, the advanced planning can head off unnecessary and aggravating duplication of lessons. Second, it frees the teachers to concentrate on the agreed upon lessons rather than spend time wondering what lessons would be good to present each week. Third, it paints a clearer picture of what’s coming down the pipe. People need to see the whole picture if they are going to construct a proper understanding of what’s going on. Fourth, it helps a teacher to plan and schedule in advance, not only their availability to teach week to week, but also when staff meetings will be held, when special Sunday school activities will take place, etc. Knowing when lessons are coming also helps a teacher to think ahead about applications, demonstrations, activities, and objects that will enhance the lesson for the students.



A solid promise that staff meetings will be regular, upbeat, organized, meaningful, and reasonable.

Sunday school staff meetings need to be regular. This communicates that the ministry is serious and that there is an organized plan to it all. Hit and miss staff meetings produce “come and go” teachers. Staff meetings need to be upbeat because our God can raise people from the dead! We are sooooo happy about what Jesus has done for us, aren’t we? Also, upbeat meetings are a lot more fun to attend, and if I have fun at the meeting, I’ll come back again. Staff meetings need to be organized. This shows that Sunday school is a priority and that the Sunday school leaders have taken the time needed to make it the best. Time and attention spans are too short to be wasted at meetings that drag along in a go no where, do nothing mode. Sunday school staff meetings need to be meaningful. Teachers who are being fed with the Word and with helpful teaching strategies and approaches, grow. And you know what else? Their teaching gets better, their students come more often, and parents are more supportive. Sunday school staff meetings need to be reasonable. Volunteer ministers have families and lives outside of church. Meetings that drag on and on and on, because some of the previous things mentioned are not done well, create real frustration and impatience. They can really diminish the joy of serving.

Next issue we’ll cover these important things to provide Sunday school teachers:

- A total confidence that all guides, books, materials, visual aids, etc. will be there before needed.
- A Sunday school budget that provides for the ministry to be done.
- A sure trust that the rest of the ministry team is just that—a team.
- The appreciation of your congregation’s leaders.

Of course, one could say, “Sure, it’s easy to see what you need, it’s another thing to do it!” Truer words were never spoken, but you’d be surprised at how much easier the doing part becomes when the seeing part is understood and accepted. And it’s the seeing part that is the catalyst for lasting improvement.

Ten Keys to Strengthening Staff Relationships

- 1) Be in the Word
- 2) Support your pastor in his ministry
- 3) Be loyal and dependable
- 4) Be flexible yet consistent
- 5) Be humble
- 6) Communicate
- 7) Listen to others
- 8) Know your gifts and limitations
- 9) Encourage and appreciate others
- 10) Be approachable and friendly

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

~ Romans 15:5-7

Need Some Great Ideas?

One of the workshops at the recent WELS Sunday School Conference found 50 teachers exchanging great ideas for improving lessons, engaging students, and making Sunday school more enjoyable. Each issue of *Partners* will share some of these ideas.

If you’d like to receive a copy of all the ideas, contact <cyd@sab.wels.net> or call 414-256-3274.

168 Enjoy "Partners in the Promise"



Dave Zabel, Jerry Kastens, Aletha Gerken, and Pastor Al Zahn

Under the theme, "Partners in the Promise," 168 men and women from six WELS districts attended the National Sunday School Conference at the Howard Johnson's Antiqua Bay Resort in Wisconsin Dells, WI. An opening devotion presenting the theme passage, Acts. 2:39, was followed by an insightful and provocative keynote address, "Children in the Church" by Parish Schools Administrator, Jason Nelson (video and discussion guide available from CYD). Participants attended presentations on eight other Sunday school related topics. Rev. Karl Gurgel, President of the WELS conducted the closing devotion.

Susie Carpiaux, Children's Ministry Superintendent at St. Mark Lutheran Church in Green Bay, WI captured the sentiments of many when she said, "I was unable to attend last year's conference because I had just given birth to my son and was not able to 'leave' him at that point. I am thankful I was able to attend this year's conference though and found it to be everything I hoped it would be for me! All of the workshops I attended were relevant to myself personally and the ministry I am serving in. I am excited to not only share the ideas I learned over the weekend but to implement them as well!"

Input from two conference listening sessions called "Start, Sustain, Stop" and the submission of 128 written surveys by conference attendees will help CYD determine where and when the next conference will be held. The results of the surveys will be shared in the next *Partners*. It is almost certain that the conference will move around the country a bit, to provide more people with the opportunity to attend, and to change the scenery. Whether the conference will remain an annual event has yet to be determined. Keep your eyes and ears open for more details about the next national Sunday school conference.

Finally, the conference will no longer be organized by a standing committee, but will use an individual conference coordinator working with the CYD staff and each district's committee member assigned to Sunday school ministry. CYD would like to thank Mrs. Aletha Gerken (Woodbury, MN), Mr. David Zabel (Milwaukee, WI) and Mr. Jerry Kastens (Watertown, WI) for their many years of service on the Sunday School Conference Planning Committee.

Did You Know?

- ◆ In 2001 (the 2002 data is not all in yet), there were 36,425 students in WELS Sunday schools. In 1990, there were 43,559 students. That was 7,134 (19.5%) more than in 2001.
- ◆ In 2001, there were 5,583 Sunday school teachers – down 529 from 1990.

There are currently 1,244 WELS congregations. This is 23 more than in 1990.

What Are You Waiting For?

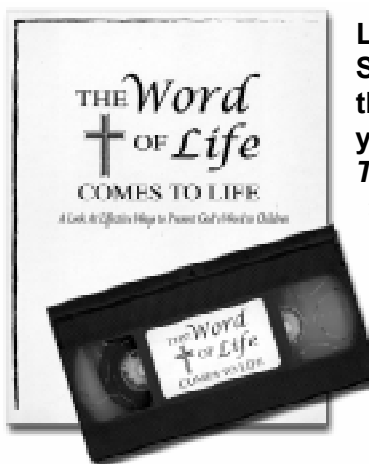
Get into the Discussion!

Sunday School Talk (SST) is a new discussion board enabling WELS Sunday school teachers to share ideas with each other. The following topics are part of SST's discussion board:

- ◆ Involving Parents in Sunday School Ministry
- ◆ Developing an Outreaching Sunday School
- ◆ Great Ideas to Engage Visual Learners
- ◆ Great Ideas to Engage Auditory Learners
- ◆ Great Ideas to Engage Kinesthetic Learners
- ◆ Majestic Music and Sensational Songs
- ◆ Including Special Needs Students
- ◆ Tips on Classroom Management
- ◆ Staff Development and Teacher Training
- ◆ Improving Congregational Support
- ◆ Keep 'em Coming—Sunday School Attendance
- ◆ SS & LES—Partners in the Promise
- ◆ This & That

To participate, go to the WELS website (www.wels.net) and type SST (either case works) into the upper right hand corner "jump word" box. Hit "enter" or click on the jump word icon and you will be taken to the discussion board where you can click on the topic you desire and share ideas with WELS Sunday school teachers from all over the country.

THE WORD OF LIFE COMES TO LIFE



Learn how to teach Sunday school lessons that really connect with your students. Order *The Word of Life Comes to Life* from Northwestern Publishing House (800-662-6022) or <www.shopwels.net>. Item #38-3086. \$24.95 plus shipping and handling.



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Partners

The Partners Silhouette



The logo for *Partners* can be viewed in several ways. First it shows others (adults, teens, and children) holding hands with Jesus, staying connected to him. The “others” can also be viewed as...

- Sunday school teachers and aides holding on to Jesus and their students.
- A mom and dad joined by Jesus and holding on to their five children.
- A single dad on one side with his two children holding on to Jesus while a single mom on the other side holds on to Jesus and her three children.

However you view it, the *Partners* logo, designed for CYD by Amy Kuether of ASK Publishing, presents a wonderful picture of being partners connected to Jesus. Amy does the layout for *Partners* as well as the CYD newsletter for youth workers, *REACH!*

If you or anyone you know would like these newsletters sent directly to your home, send the names and addresses to cyd@sab.wels.net.

So we can keep our database current, and serve you better, please contact the CYD office if your Sunday school staff changes. Updated mailing addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses will ensure that the best and most up to date Sunday school ministry information gets to you on time.

Please contact us with any questions or for further information.

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