



REFLECTIONS

By Leonard G. Wymore



Looking for Leaders?

Mark Taylor, editor of *CHRISTIAN STANDARD*, was editor of *The Lookout* in 1980. That year he led in developing an evening to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Sunday school during the North American Christian Convention in Seattle, Washington. The children joined us in the main assembly during a colorful balloon drop and the cutting of a huge birthday cake with candles.

Mark's remarks that evening are still important to hear today. "Each week more people meet for Bible study in Sunday school than in any other institution of the church," he said. "Sunday school not only creates Bible study, but it provides groups for fellowship and organizes us for evangelism. As churches grow larger, they must also grow smaller. Sunday school is one of the best ways to provide groups for folks to belong to. Although in-home small groups meet many needs, Sunday school classes provide an every-week opportunity for fellowship and study at a time people can predict, in a place they know how to get to."

The Sunday school's textbook, the Scriptures, will never change. The message remains the same. Yet surveys reveal that many (in fact most) regular church attendees today do not read their Bibles in-depth. Teachers and preachers can no longer assume that listeners understand Bible doctrine or history, spend time in prayer, or submit their lives to Christian values. Our goal in Bible teaching is to equip others to become mature examples, living the life God intended for us to live when He first thought of us.

The Importance of Sunday School

P.H. Welshimer, minister who served for decades with First Christian Church, Canton, Ohio, was persistent in his support of consecrated leadership for the Sunday school with classes for

everyone. His contention was that the Sunday school is the teaching arm of the church to win souls to Christ and to train them in Christian service. Our purpose should be to find those who are outside of Christ, to love them, teach them, win them to Christ, nurture them, and send them out to reach more persons.

Teachers frequently ask, "How may I know that my teaching is being effective?" My answer? "When the pupil says, 'Teacher please let me teach' then you will know you have succeeded." This happens in the children's class when a pupil asks to retell the story with the visuals. It happens in the teen class when a student accepts an assignment to research a verse or topic and gives a report. It happens in an adult class when a member teaches a class, serves as a youth coach, or becomes an elder or deacon.

Sunday school classes have functioned as church small groups for more than 200 years. They provide an ideal setting for fellowship and Bible teaching.

A Sunday school teacher has the awesome privilege to help prepare more people for leadership and Christian service than any other person. Speak with those in a leadership role, and most often they will say a Sunday school teacher made

the difference. Teachers, our goal should be to motivate and equip many of our students to become teachers and leaders. As they replace us, we will be free to "stretch" ourselves into other ministries within the church.

Assemble Teachers for Planning

Preachers have discovered the value of meeting in groups of three to six for a half-day of sharing and study on sermons they are preparing. My question is, "Why wouldn't this be a great project to initiate among Sunday school teachers in your area?" This could be arranged on a Saturday morning among the entire teaching staff of three or more congregations. Those who teach compa-

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rable age levels would meet in their respective rooms and share lesson presentation ideas, attendance promotion, appearance of the classroom, teaching skills, ways to stimulate class participation, and other areas of common interest. A devotional and refreshment time for the combined group would be appropriate. The frequency of this meeting would be set by the group, and the location should be rotated so that teachers and assistant teachers would become acquainted with facility possibilities.

The Sunday school class, along with home cell groups, are the ideal places for forming the building blocks of any sizable congregation. When preachers emphasize this fact and encourage these ministries, people will become involved.

Coordinate Ministry

There is one more approach to leadership for the Sunday school and other ministries in the church that is already in place in every congregation—it just needs fine tuning. Every church, no matter the size, has a staff. In some churches they are paid, and in others they are volunteers; but they are staff, nonetheless. We need to relate to them the same way, whether or not they receive salary.

For example, even small churches usually have a leading elder, a Sunday school superintendent, a leading teacher in the children's area, a youth coach, a music leader, a missions chairperson, and a preacher. Why not give staff status to all such leaders? They could prepare written task descriptions and begin holding regular staff meetings to develop

and coordinate the ministry of the body, the church. Each leader could be encouraged to enlist at least two people to be prayer partners for the area of ministry he or she is leading.

Preacher, you will need to spend quality time with

each leader and share your vision and resources. Say *thank you* often, and provide encouragement. Do the work and don't worry about who receives the credit. I have seen this succeed to at least some degree. It will work for any sizable assembly and even in any specific area of ministry in the megachurch.

The reason we must reach within the membership and beyond is that we will have the opportunity to teach and win others to Christ. Then nurturing will take place, which will equip us all to be sent out to reach still more people to become involved in the ministry of serving in the kingdom of our Christ.

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Leonard G. Wymore was born and reared in southwest Nebraska during the dust bowl and Great Depression years. After high school he attended Manhattan (Kansas) Bible College, graduating in 1944 with an A.B. degree. His student ministries were at Princeton and North Lawrence, Kansas. Graduate studies took place at Butler School of Religion, Indianapolis, Indiana, while preaching at Roachdale, Indiana, 1945-49. After a six-year ministry with Fairfax Christian Church in Indianapolis, he was called to Standard Publishing in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he was on the staff of *The Lookout* for one year and then became director of the National Christian Education Convention, sponsored by Standard Publishing. In 1964 he became the first convention director for the North American Christian Convention, a position he held for 23 years. In 1987-89 he served as resource director for Double Vision, a ministry of our fellowship to encourage new church planting. He directed the Arizona Evangelistic Association in 1990 and 1991. He has been active in area ministries in and around Johnson City, Tennessee, since moving there in 1992.