

CONNECTIONAL LAY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF LAY MINISTRY
OF THE
CHRISTIAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH



**QUARTERLY
PROGRAM OF STUDY**
JANUARY ~ FEBRUARY ~ MARCH 2008
“THE POWER OF SUNDAY SCHOOL”

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I would like to dedicate the second Quarterly Program of Study to two individuals who strongly influenced my attitude and understanding of Sunday school and my desire to be a regular attendee. The two individuals are *Mrs. Minnie Goff and Presiding Elder Emeritus Rev. W. B. Harris.*

Mrs. Minnie Goff, who I, along with my brothers and sisters, referred to as “Mrs. Minnie”, was my *first* Sunday school teacher. I can still remember and appreciate, as a young child, how special she made me and all of the children in her class feel. Her life and witness reflected the joy and happiness she experienced in serving the Lord and teaching us to do the same.

As a result, her special way of caring and communicating, prompted all of us to want to know and love God, the same way that she did.

“Mrs. Minnie” has gone on to be with the Lord now, but her genuine loving and caring spirit is still alive in those of us who God has left to carry on the work.

Rev. W. B. Harris, who is my father, and the Emeritus Presiding Elder of the Tulsa District of the Oklahoma Region, is still, at the age of 85, a regular and active Sunday school attendee. His example as Sunday school Superintendent during my early childhood and his insistence as a Pastor during my teen years, - that he, along with our entire family, be found in Sunday school every Sunday morning, has served me well during my adult life. At this stage in our lives we are both back where we began. He is a member of the Adult Sunday School Class at Pettie Chapel CME Church, Bixby, Oklahoma (our home church). As for me, - *I am perpetuating the legacy of “Mrs. Minnie”, by teaching the Youth and Young Adult Class*

INTRODUCTION

Sunday school has the power to move one's thinking and perception about "God's Word" to a new level. Studying and reflecting with others provides us an open door for a deeper understanding of the word of God and how we are to live our lives. It further gives us an opportunity to grow in fellowship with those with whom we serve. *The results have implications for a more effective and harmonious church body.* This lesson, therefore, is designed to encourage and provoke lay men and women to take a fresh look at their attendance and involvement, *or lack of the same*, in Sunday school. I would like to encourage Lay Leaders to examine the content of this lesson and discuss the same in your Lay Council meetings. Invite, if they do not already attend, your Board of Christian Education Director and President, the Sunday School Superintendent, and certainly the Pastor, to share their thoughts and provide insight. What will follow in this lesson *is not intended to be all inclusive* of "The Power" Sunday school can have in the life and witness of our churches. It is, however, worthy, I feel, of careful thought, consideration and study. As you begin this study, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do those who are already saved need to be strengthened?
- Is our church interested in reaching the lost and misdirected?
- Could our church benefit from new members and increased attendance?
- Would I like to see our church officers move to a new level of caring, accountability, and service?
- Would I like to see more families growing and worshipping together?
- Would I like to see members develop a deeper understanding and appreciation about how the Christian Church and the CME Church begin?

If your answer is YES, to any or all of these and other questions that may lend to the health, growth and well-being of your church, this lesson is for YOU!

“THE POWER OF SUNDAY SCHOOL”

SUNDAY SCHOOL HAS THE POWER TO:

STRENGTHEN THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY SAVED – Regardless of how long it has been since we experienced Christ, we sometimes find ourselves wondering why our spiritual reservoir may be low. It could be that our spiritual diets consist only of Sunday morning sermons. In no way am I diminishing the word of God that is prepared and delivered by dedicated pastors, each Sunday. I would submit to us, however, that to have a balanced spiritual diet, one must consistently explore the Word of God on his or her own, and in doing so, seek the opportunity to study and share with others. Thus, in addition to Bible study, what spiritual vehicle is more natural and consistent than Sunday school? For Sunday school has the power to lift those who are down and to provide spiritual knowledge, direction, and strength to those who are dealing with life’s struggles. Additionally, through prepared and anointed teachers, Sunday school can provide encouragement and confidence for those who are already saved, and continuing to seek a closer walk with Christ. We must know, understand, and remember that our Sunday schools should be constant at providing a growing experience in the Christian faith. For those who have discovered that God is the answer, there still needs to be up close and personal opportunity in how to master life’s challenges. Even for the saved: homes need to be strengthened; marriages need to be made more meaningful; families need to learn how to live together in greater harmony; and individual weaknesses need to be overcome. Hence, those who have professed Christ, still need to grow in how to accept and know him as Savior, Lord, and Friend. Sunday school has the power to assist!

REACH THE LOST AND MISDIRECTED – More times than not, most of us when inviting someone to our church, will center the invitation or conversation on the eleven a.m. worship hour. We may highlight what we feel is most attractive about the service or our church (outstanding pastor and great preaching, a wonderful choir, or maybe a friendly and loving congregation). If the individual to whom the invitation is extended, is one who does not know Christ or seems to be lost and misdirected, why not consider inviting them to Sunday-School. Now of course, in order to invite them, the invitee must or should be involved in Sunday-School themselves. Thus, as Christian believers and Lay men and women, let’s consider allowing our Sunday Schools to be an intricate part of our evangelistic thrust (Seeking) in bringing others to know Christ. Our focus should not be to condemn the lost, but to go out and find them. Thus, the Sunday-School and the Church is charged with teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this case, the *Gospel* literally means “good news.” In their book, “How To Increase Your Sunday-School Attendance”, Charles L. Allen and Mildred Parker, made the following point. “We can say, for example, that diphtheria is a bad disease. That is true, but is not the good news. If we say, however, that there is a vaccine which can prevent diphtheria or cure diphtheria, that is the good news. Accordingly, we can say that people are sinners and that the world is bad and we would be telling the truth, but that is not the good news; it is not the Gospel. When we say that here is One who can save a person from sin, who can make a bad world good, that is the good news and that is the *Gospel*.” So what is my point? The Sunday-School that wins is the same as a great message or sermon; it is one which leaves a positive message of hope and inspiration!

PROMOTE GROWTH IN CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND INCREASE OVERALL ATTENDANCE

Seldom does one witness individuals attending Sunday-School and not attending worship service. Even those churches that have two services (8:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.) will testify to the fact that many individuals begin attending Sunday school after becoming an early (8 a.m.) Sunday worshiper. Thus, Sunday school and Sunday morning worship service go hand in hand. Sunday school leaders and teachers have a unique opportunity Sunday after Sunday, to teach and foster an appreciation for the total church. This in turn can and will promote loyalty and a desire for fuller participation by those in attendance. In addition, pastors who speak in positive, loving and growth oriented terms about Sunday school will, if consistent, see positive change and growth in both worship service and Sunday school. Whether the church is considered large or small, rural or urban, or in a depressed or affluent location, - the pastor's involvement and encouragement is vital. The pastor, however, cannot do it alone! There must be planning with leaders that communicates Sunday school is important to the total life of the church. The congregation will in turn begin to understand that individual and collective spiritual growth is not limited to the Sunday morning worship hour. If an individual begins their attendance through an effective motivating Sunday school class, coupled with a powerful Sunday morning worship experience, there is a great possibility that they will join the church and remain an active member. In other words, Sunday school has the power to bind persons to each other and to the church.

STRENGTHEN AND GALVANIZE ORGANIZATIONS AND AUXILIARIES AND MOVE CHURCH OFFICERS TO A NEW LEVEL OF CARING, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SERVICE –

If the ministry and overall witness and participation of your organization or auxiliary could stand improvement, try uniting around attending Sunday school. Members coming together in a study and teaching atmosphere can provide insight and understanding that is sometimes not sought during meetings. Purposely and positively talk about Sunday school. Use it as a tool to seek peace, understanding and appreciation for the ministry that the group has been called to do and watch it work wonders for the church as a whole. There are few quick fixes to anything worthwhile; organizational leaders, as well as members, must be consistent and committed to the effort. Over time, change can and will take place. At my own Church (Pettie Chapel CME, Bixby, Oklahoma) the Steward Board, Ministry to Men, Lay Council and the Youth have pledged to see that each organization’s members are present in Sunday School on the third Sunday of each month. Collaboration among church organizations provides a wonderful opportunity to make a strong and lasting difference. Seek, along with the pastor, to be strong motivators, as well as enablers and encouragers. Laity concerned with the total ministry of the church can do much to foster, insure, and maintain the harmonious interlocking of the various church ministries.

BRING FAMILIES INTO A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER, CHRIST AND THE CHURCH - All over our connection and throughout our churches there are families

whose attendance in Sunday school and or Sunday morning worship is only represented by one family member. Is there a strategy in place for reaching, encouraging, and convincing family members who don't attend to do so? There are times that if one family member (mother, father, youth, child) is recruited into a class, that the remainder of the family will begin to attend as well. We see it happen relative to Sunday morning worship, so why not Sunday school? If a families' desire is to grow stronger and closer as a unit, regularly studying and sharing Christ through Sunday school would be a wonderful start! The Sunday school, thus, becomes a viable evangelistic arm of the church. Through Sunday school the entire family has an increased opportunity to develop a growing faith and commitment and become part of the total activity of the church. The results that follows provides motivation to remain as productive members and not fall into the category of "here today and gone tomorrow." Many of us have seen family members who have not been regular in their church attendance, become more committed after a life-changing event. Our goal should be to reach them before "a circumstance or event" changes them. *"No one can make the personal acceptance or commitment to Christ for another person. Through the Sunday school, however, we have the opportunity to make the commitment and acceptance, attractive, positive, and complete. One who is involved in Sunday school is more likely to stay with the church and render service in and for the church.*

HELP MEMBERS DEVELOP A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND SUBSEQUENTLY THE CME CHURCH – Throughout the CME

Connection and churches around the world there are individuals who believe in God and have accepted Christ as their personal Savior. Many, however, have little knowledge about how the Church began and many who are CME’s know little about our rich history. The more one knows about what he/she is a part of, *the greater the opportunity* for increased appreciation and commitment. Sunday school provides an excellent time and atmosphere for the sharing of knowledge about the beginning of the Christian Church along with how the CME Church had its very special beginning. Teachers and Pastors can use a portion of the Sunday school hour to share these facts for new, as well as, long time members.

“PLAIN TALK” - FOR DISCUSSION, GROWTH AND MOTIVATION

- ❑ If a church is to grow and prosper, someone must take the time to teach.
- ❑ A growing church is a studying church.
- ❑ Officers must be concerned with the total church.
- ❑ Pastors and Leaders should lead in a way so as not to compromise the trust of “one” person in the church.
- ❑ Grow slow if you must, - but grow.
- ❑ If you value your role as a leader, mentor someone to carry on the work when you are gone.
- ❑ If you are seeking opportunity for discussion and feedback about God’s word, try Sunday-School.