



Involving the Congregation and Recruiting Good Teachers

Jean Foster

How do we in the church develop the leaders we need for our adult, youth, and children's classes and for the entire educational ministry? There are several key factors. These include pastoral leadership, congregational involvement, successful calling of teachers and leaders, effective orientation, and ongoing support and training.

As has been said in other article in this issue of *Circuit Rider*, pastoral leadership is vital to the educational ministry of the church and for developing leaders for this ministry. Here we want to concentrate on how you can get the congregation involved and how you can recruit teachers and leaders.

Congregational Involvement

In order to have a meaningful and successful educational ministry, it is essential that the entire congregation have some understanding and involvement. They can then serve as a supportive framework for the educational ministry, providing adequate space, staff, and budget resources as well as enthusiastic participation.

This support begins with an understanding of Christ's command to the apostles to "go and teach" (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus spent much time in his ministry

teaching about the love of God and how God's people are to live as disciples. The mandate to teach the gospel and to make disciples is at the heart of our mission as a church.

How can we cultivate such a climate of support in the congregation? Consider these suggestions:

1. The baptism of a child, youth, or adult provides an opportunity to emphasize the way we live out our pledge to nurture one another in the Christian faith. (Some churches use a special program called "Keeping the Promise," to emphasize the importance of the baptism rite and the responsibility of the congregation.)
2. Christian Education Week offers an opportunity to lift up the importance of Christian education for all ages through the sermon, drama, skits, or a witness about the way education has enriched Christian growth in the congregation. Other possibilities include bulletin inserts, newsletter articles, and posters. Free leaflets with suggestions for observing Christian Education Week are provided each year by the General Board of Discipleship, includ-

ing a dedication or covenant service that can be used in worship. (Call toll free 1-877-899-2780 to order.)

3. Include teacher dedication in the worship service, with recognition of new and continuing teachers and class leaders.
4. Encourage church members to become prayer partners for the teachers, praying for individual teachers and giving them words and notes of encouragement through the year.
5. Highlight teachers and classes in your church newsletter. If a teacher is in the hospital or has a death in the family or other crisis, be sure to visit, send cards, and offer other expressions of caring.
6. Offer gifts at the end of the year and tokens of appreciation throughout the year, such as cookies, apples, or handmade cards delivered to the classroom as a surprise.
7. Hold a teacher appreciation event, such as a breakfast, reception, picnic, luncheon, or dinner. Not only will this make the teachers feel special, it will also create a feeling in the congregation that teaching is important and fun.

Calling Teachers and Leaders

Pray for discernment

In his book, *The Ministry of the Volunteer Teacher*, author Charles Foster emphasizes that teachers are called by God and gifted to serve in the ministry of teaching. Invite the entire congregation to pray for those who are involved in selecting teachers and leaders. Staff and committees with direct responsibilities for finding leadership need to pray for God's guidance and discernment in this important process.

Emphasize spiritual gifts

Gift discovery is both an individual and a community process. Offer gifts assessment workshops throughout the year to help people learn more about their gifts for ministry.

As people discover their spiritual gifts and move to serve in these areas, a greater enthusiasm and excitement surrounds their leadership and service. The Holy Spirit is the source of the gifts that enable persons to carry on the work of ministry. When we accept the call to teach, those gifts are lifted up and consecrated for the benefit of the body of Christ.

Form teaching teams

When inviting people to teach, ask them to help find others with whom they would enjoy teaching as a team. It might be a friend in their adult class, a family member, or someone who lives close by so that planning together would be convenient.

Be open and alert to variety of gifts

Define the gift of teaching in broad terms for the congregation. Many different types of gifts can be used in the classroom. Greeting, record keeping, hospitality, and following up on events such as students' birthdays are all important parts of the teaching ministry. The rotational model of teaching elementary children has certainly enlarged our understanding of those who are needed to participate in the teaching role. Do you enjoy helping with computers, showing videos, reading or telling stories, or participating in art, music, or cooking? Great! You can lead one of the rotational model learning centers.

Ask for nominations

Ask the staff and congregation to nominate people who would be good teachers.

Resources for Studying and Assessing Spiritual Gifts

Disciple Bible Study puts an emphasis on helping persons discern their spiritual gifts. At the end of the study, participants have the opportunity to help one another discover and affirm their spiritual gifts, preparing to use these gifts as a part of their growth in discipleship.

Discover Your Spiritual Gifts: A Personal Inventory

by Kenneth Kinghorn

Equipped for Every Good Work: Building a Gift-Based Church

by Dan Dick and Barbara Miller

The Gifted Pastor: Finding and Using Your Spiritual Gifts

by Kenneth Carter

Rediscovering Our Spiritual Gifts

by Charles Bryant

Serving from the Heart: Finding Your Gifts and Talents for Service

(Leader's Guide and Participant's Workbook)

Spirit Gifts

by Patricia Brown

(Leader's Guide and Participant's Workbook)

Help them to consider what makes a good Sunday school teacher. Think about teachers you might have had over the years—what qualities made them effective teachers?

Persons who are nominated might be sent a specially designed brochure or letter inviting them to consider teaching. Follow up with a personal contact.

Invite or call a person to a specific area of ministry

Lift up the opportunity for mission and ministry in your invitation. Don't just say, "Would you like to teach?" Be specific: "We have a group of fourteen seventh-graders who come on Sunday morning. It is a very important and sometimes difficult time in their lives. They really need teachers who care about them. We would like you to prayerfully consider helping to meet this need."

Provide job descriptions and expectations

It is helpful to provide in writing the responsibilities and expectations of a teaching or leadership position as well as the resources and support offered by the church. (See samples in Delia Halverson's *The Nuts & Bolts of Christian Education* [Abingdon Press, 2000], pp. 106-109.)

Invite persons to teach adult classes on specific topics

Get to know people and listen to their interests. (Make notes and keep a file!) Create courses around these areas of expertise or interest. Every time a person teaches, ask that person as well as the class to fill out an evaluation form. Ask:

- What would you like to do next?
- What topics do we need?
- Who would you recommend to teach?

Make the development of good teachers and leaders a priority in your church. □

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