

Creating Warmth and Fellowship

Today's variant lifestyles sometimes create a world of isolation and loneliness for individuals. This atmosphere creates a deep need within adults for caring relationships with other adults. Adults enjoy sharing ideas, feelings, opinions, problems, and activities with neighbors and friends over a cup of coffee. This "around-a-table discussion" situation may happen at home, at a neighbors', or at work. It should happen in every adult class session.

A warm, accepting class climate encourages a person to feel freer to ask questions, express opinions, and share problems. The teacher, along with other class leaders, has the responsibility for creating the proper class climate. Students in a class tend to follow the leading of the teacher in setting the mood.

Adult programs in church should provide a combination of fellowship and learning opportunities. Adults desperately need the support of Christian friends in successfully encountering secular peer pressure in their daily lives.

Why Do Adults Come to Sunday School?

Some Christians see the morning Sunday school as the major means of gaining Bible knowledge. Because Bible knowledge is so important, some congregations call the Sunday school a Bible school. Even so, gaining Bible knowledge is not the only reason some people attend Sunday school.

Some adults come to class because they feel an intense loyalty to the Lord, the local church, or a particular teacher. They do not really feel the need to learn. It may be a Sunday habit. Adults may even feel obligated to attend to avoid feeling disloyal. This should not discourage us; feelings of loyalty or obligation are basic in Christianity. Christians are expected to do right things because they are right! We do not always perform right acts because they are pleasurable or convenient.

Some adults come to Sunday school because they want to be good examples to their children. Many men begin their first attendance at church because of a wife's insistence. It is well to note that Jesus suggested that we set the example for others. Jesus did not reject followers who had mixed motivation in their desire to follow Him. He accepted persons where He found them. Then He led them to deeper commitment. Not every adult who comes to our classes is fully committed to the Lord's cause.

Still other adults become a regular part of an adult class because they need and enjoy the pleasurable contact it provides with other adults. Recognizing the social needs of Christian adults is a valid ministry in Christian fellowship. Most persons need Christian friends to help them remain faithful to Christ. The Sunday school classes of larger congregations provide a very necessary, sometimes the only, structure in which persons may know each other on a personal basis.

The teacher and other leaders in adult Sunday school classes have an obligation to reach every adult who attends, regardless of his or her initial motivation.

What Happens When a Visitor Comes to Your Class?

We may be able to get people to class for a visit. This is important, but equally important is what happens to visitors when they come. Check your class procedure for visitor acceptance.

VISITOR ACCEPTANCE CHECKUP GUIDE

- | Yes | No | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there someone near the church entrance to direct visitors to the most appropriate classes? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is your classroom clearly marked? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are there enough seats to accommodate visitors? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have your students been instructed to share Bibles and other study materials with visitors? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you always make it a point to introduce visitors to regular class members in such a way that they feel welcome but not embarrassed? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are your students warm and friendly to visitors? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you have a definite procedure for calling on visitors during the week following their visit? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you or your class president use get-acquainted techniques in the beginning of each class session? |

If your answer to any of these questions is “no,” take steps right away to improve the situation. Work and pray that people who visit your class will feel the Christian love your members have for each other and will want to become a part of the group.

Techniques for Getting Acquainted

It is difficult for the average person to get acquainted in an adult Sunday school class without some kind of structured approach.

Some adult classes provide name tags for their members in morning class periods and at socials so that everyone can be called by name and visitors can easily become acquainted.

Your class leaders might introduce two couples each week with a brief sketch. This could be done in a large class for both new and long-term members.

One Midwestern congregation has a quarterly congregational meal called a Sheep Feed to provide an opportunity for the membership to become better known to one another. Every person attending Sunday school and worship that day is asked to wear a name tag, which is provided at the church entrance. This fellowship meal is a deliberate effort to help new and old members alike learn the names of other persons in the church family.

A large California church has prepared name badges for their entire Sunday school staff. This helps adults, parents, and children to recognize the teaching staff by name. It also gives recognition to these workers, while alerting visitors to an information source for the location of classes and departments.

Some adult classes take a few minutes at the beginning of each class period for an activity to help class members get to know each other better. It may be something as simple as asking each person’s favorite hobby or pastime, or it may be an activity related to the lesson for the day.

A lesson on Joseph and his brothers could be introduced by asking each student to tell his fellow students the number of siblings who were part of his immediate family. Adult students always seem to tell more than is asked; often the class will not wish to stop talking. What a grand problem!

A lesson on Dorcas could start with a discussion of whether sending flowers or making a memorial gift is a better way to honor a believer who has died. This will get individuals to speak up and create an ideal setting for the lesson.

Some of your class members will start enjoying Sunday school as never before. They may even say, “I never knew it could be fun to learn!” Plan to use a combination Bible-learning activity and a get-acquainted technique this Sunday.