

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SUNDAY SCHOOL  
AT A UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:  
A CASE STUDY OF ONE CHURCH'S JOURNEY  
TO BEGIN A SUNDAY MORNING PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN.

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

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2004

UMI Number: 3270681

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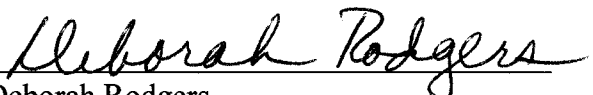
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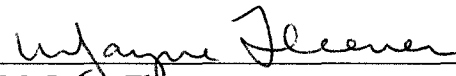
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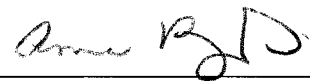
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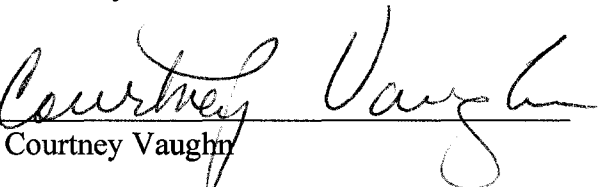
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This process has been both an individual and group effort. The ability to return to school to pursue my Ph.D. was possible because of the sacrifice of many individuals. My family has supported me with their love and encouragement. My husband Don Wheeler read more than his share of papers along the way. My children, Keegan, London, and Brenna have helped me keep my priorities straight and offered their love and laughter along the journey. My mother Marge Long instilled in me a love of learning. She has provided her support through the years and done more than her share of taking care of her grandchildren so I could finish this process. Don's mother Ellen Jayne Wheeler has also shared her time and been an inspiration through her example.

I would also like to thank Dr. Debbie Rodgers who has shared her wisdom and been both a mentor and friend to me. Dr. Courtney Vaughn has provided an ear and continued to encourage my progress during those times I needed a gentle nudge. I appreciate the time, knowledge, and hard work of my committee members; I will not forget them.

This research would not be possible without the participants at Fourth United Methodist Church. I appreciate the willingness of each individual who took part in this study. Everyone who helped plan the new Sunday School also supported me in my research. I applaud their dedication to the process and the many hours of work they gave to creating a Sunday School for children. I would especially like to thank both Cheryl and Dave for their willingness to check my facts and provide input. A word of appreciation is also extended to Gina Payne who gave her time to read through my dissertation, sharing her advice.

I would like to dedicate this work in memory of my grandparents Hazel and Hubert Shaw who laid down the foundation for my Christian faith. Their love of God, family, and neighbor has taught me lessons that will long outlast this research. And finally, I dedicate this work to my friend Cliff Petree who died as I neared the end of this project. His life will forever remind me that my work in ministry does make a difference.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

This is a qualitative study documenting the complexity of starting a Christian education program in a new church. While Christianity provides the foundation for this research, the focus of the study is revealing the role of education as it relates to religion in society. The study utilizes a system approach showing the dynamic relationships between culture, religion, and education. The information gathered demonstrates the work of church participants, including the minister, lay participants, and outside experts. In this chapter I will set the stage for this study by introducing the interconnectedness of religion and education. Next, I will present the function of the local church, the minister, the lay members, and the visiting experts. To conclude this chapter I will share the purpose of the study.

### *The Role of Religion*

The role of religion in human history sets the stage for this research. Religion itself is difficult to define. The term can conjure up images of unknown forces, repeated rituals, and designated followers. Yet, each of these understandings touches only on a part of the vast expanse understood within the label of religion. For this research study I will adopt the explanation of Albanese (1992) who states:

[O]ur religion concerns the way we locate ourselves in space through the arrangement of sacred rites and holy places as boundary markers. It concerns, too, the way we locate ourselves in time through origin stories or theological traditions that also express boundaries. But location is always social. It concerns our place

among other human beings, and it means staking our claim on the landscape of identity (p. 5).

Embracing this definition we acquiesce to the idea that religion is bound by our internal quest for identity. “By searching for identity and finding it, individuals metaphorically establish inner boundaries, discover through testing who they are not, and begin to affirm who they are” (Albanese, 1992, p. 5). Religion also enables individuals to transcend the boundaries of the culture, to move “outside the ordinary circle of society” (Albanese, 1992, p. 7). Through religion men and women encounter otherness, whether supernatural or natural.

Religion finds expression in creeds (i.e. stories, affirmations, highly developed theologies), codes (i.e. rules that govern daily behavior, customs, ethos), and community (i.e. groups of people bound by creed and code, social organization as churches, denominations) (Albanese, 1992). The Christian religious system is no exception. Followers of this religion believe in one almighty God. They accept Jesus as the Son of God and promised Messiah, and the central teachings of Christianity are contained in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

Over the past 2000 years the Christian religion has evolved and spread throughout the world. What began as a small gathering of men and women who followed Jesus has become ever more complex in its makeup. The organizational components of Christianity have changed in response to its own growth. As the Christian religion entered new frontiers it was affected by the culture and beliefs held by its members. Over the years, Christianity has divided into a multitude of denominations and churches. Although each group of believers declares itself to be Christian, understandings can vary from denomination to denomination, and from church to church.

### *Changing Views: A New Emphasis on Christian Education*

The spread of Christianity occurred as people taught the stories of the faith to others. Early Christians shared the history of their faith through oral tradition. As early believers told the stories, many believed, accepting and internalizing the information. This method of education was the earliest used by followers of Jesus. Through this process, parents taught their children, and adults educated one another.

As the Christian faith organized, members assembled together in faith communities to learn. As Church schools were established, formal education took shape. Yet, formal education often remained a privilege afforded to the well-to-do. That attitude changed as the Church faced fresh scrutiny during the period of Reformation. During that era more than any other, the course for Christian education was set. With a new emphasis on the authority of the Bible, replacing the authority of the Church, the need for Biblical understanding grew. Another principle, “justification by faith,” meant that a person was accepted by God, solely on the ground of an individual’s personal faith in Jesus (Sherrill, 1950). Together these two principles demanded universal Christian education. Men, women, and children would need to read and understand the Bible to make a personal commitment to follow Jesus. In light of these changes, the Reformation, lead by Protestant reformers, promoted education for the masses.

Today, teaching remains central to passing on the Christian faith. Parents continue to instruct their children in the home and to involve them in formal Christian education opportunities. The most dominant method of formal education in Protestant churches today is the Sunday School (Benson & Eklin, 1990). Established over 200 years ago, the Sunday School was created with the intent of teaching children. In the beginning, the Sunday School focused on educating poor children in England. Later, it moved

from teaching subjects such as reading and math to strictly concentrating on teaching children about the Christian faith. The teaching methods used in the Sunday School have changed over the years as new information about educational theory and scientific advances unfolded. Today, men and women continue to engage in the education of new generations mixing current understandings with available resources. The use of formal and informal education to share both knowledge and beliefs has ensured the spread of Christianity.

### *The Participants in the Formal Education of Children*

As stated earlier, Christianity has divided into many denominations and church communities. The Methodist Denomination, which began in 1784, provided the backdrop for this research. In order for the reader to comprehend the role of the major participants in this research, I will introduce the function of the local church and the designation of the men and women who are taking part in this study.

### *The Function of the Local Church*

The local church is the central meeting place for most Christian believers. It is a fellowship of believers where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered. As stated in *The Book of Discipline* (2000), "The function of the local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is to help people to know Jesus Christ personally and to live their daily lives in light of their relationship with God" (p. 123). The goal for the church is to minister to people in the community, providing appropriate training and nurture to all.

### *The Minister*

The minister serves as leader of the church congregation to which he or she was

appointed by the Bishop. The duties of a minister in the United Methodist Denomination include developing goals for fulfilling the mission of the church and overseeing all of the ministry of the local church. The minister should give:

(1) pastoral support, guidance, and training to the lay leadership in the church, equipping them to fulfill the ministry to which they are sent as servants under the Lordship of Christ; (2) providing ministry within the congregation and to the world; (3) ensuring faithful transmission of the Christian faith; and (4) administering the temporal affairs of the congregation (*Appendix A - Expanded list of Pastoral Duties*) (*The Book of Discipline*, 2000, p. 217).

The minister often oversees the total education program of the church and encourages the use of United Methodist literature.

#### *The Lay Members*

The men and women who attend a local church and participate in the activities of the congregation are lay members. The commitment made by the laity includes a profession of faith in God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It also involves a personal imperative: "To be loyal to the United Methodist Church and do all in their power to strengthen its ministries; To faithfully participate in the ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, and their service" (*Appendix B - Expanded list of The Meaning of Membership*) (*The Book of Discipline*, 2000, p. 131). The laity are the backbone of the local church. Through their volunteer service, they ensure the work of a local congregation occurs (Hoge, Zech, McNamar, & Donahue, 1998; Penner, 2002).

#### *The Visiting Experts*

The lay participants are equipped for their work in the church by both the pastor and outside experts from the United Methodist Denomination. The General Board of

Discipleship has the preeminent responsibility to: “Provide resources and support services for the development and improvement of leadership in the local church” (*The Book of Discipline*, 2000, p. 508). The Board is also there to assist congregations in developing comprehensive ministries for and with children, including Sunday School programs. Other responsibilities include:

identifying the needs and concerns of children, their families and congregations;  
assessing the status of ministries with children in The United Methodist Church;  
collecting and disseminating pertinent data on issues, models, and programs that  
inform the leaders in congregations and church structures to strengthen the quality  
of life of children (*The Book of Discipline*, 2000, p. 511).

Having specialized training, the men and women who serve on the denominational level are available to help the pastor and lay members to accomplish their task within the local church.

#### *The Purpose of this Study*

Fourth United Methodist Church was a new church that had not established a Sunday School program. The minister and members of this church set before them the goal of designing and implementing such a program for children. In order to understand the complex nature of their labor, I followed the work of church participants from their first planning meeting until the start of the Sunday School program. My hope was to learn about the process of developing a Sunday School. What I learned was more elaborate than I imagined. This study opened a door to view the Christian social system, the internal workings of Methodism, the personal practical theories held by individual participants, the interplay of group dynamics, and the deep roots of history.

The information set forward in this study revealed how Christianity influences our culture because of the interplay that exists between two entities in the social system that are often viewed as separate: religion and education. Broadening my understanding of the work done by members at Fourth United Methodist Church helped me to comprehend for the first time the complex nature of Christian education at the local church level. By watching the participants' involvement in this study I was also able to answer my research question: How does a new church go about developing a Sunday School program for children? Following the process one church engaged in to reach their goal provided new insights into the complexity involved. Observing the work of all the participants gave me a deeper appreciation of their dedication to sharing the faith with new generations. I hope this study will provide future church leaders with a genuine example of how this church conceptualized and developed a Sunday School program. It is my wish that as others read this study they may find information to help them along the way.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Christianity and Christian Education in Historical Context

Christianity would not have expanded without new generations of believers teaching the content of the religious system and new members internalizing the group's meaning system (McGuire, 1981). Religious education exists because of the need to pass on knowledge about the Christian faith. The way followers of Christianity shared religious beliefs evolved from generation to generation. To understand the course of this development I have included a brief history of the Christian religious system, Christian education, and the Sunday School movement. Next, I investigated research that examined Christian education and the Sunday School. Finally, I introduced the framework for how a Sunday School occurs today. Within this chapter my goal was to lay the foundation for this research study.

#### *The Historical Origins of the Christian Faith*

The Jewish faith began with Abraham's (2161-1986 B.C.E.) personal religious experience that led him to believe in a single deity, otherwise called monotheism (Noss & Noss, 1994; Unger, 1980). Until that point many religious systems worshipped many gods, polytheism. Followers of the Jewish faith believe God chose Abraham, and Abraham promised to follow God's direction. This idea of choosing and following became the basis for a covenant made between God and the Jewish people. A covenant was equivalent to a promise which God initiated and established through creation (Fretheim, 1994). Once God established a covenant with the people, God placed certain conditions on those who entered but also promised them certain privileges (Unger, 1980).



The history of the Jewish people is contained in the Old Testament books of the Bible. It includes the story of a people who struggled in both freedom and captivity. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), given to Moses on Mount Sinai, became central tenets to the Jewish faith. The purpose of the commandments was to stress loyalty and obedience to God and decent behavior to other individuals (Hopfe, 1994). These laws became part of the Torah, which included the first five books of the Old Testament, “the center and source of Jewish religion” (Fellows, 1979).

The Jewish people were nomadic; they did not use a permanent temple for worship until the time of King Solomon (961-922 B.C.E.) (Hopfe, 1994). Until that time they worshipped in a “Tent of Meeting,” which was literally a tent that moved from place to place and became the site of worship. Although the Jewish people enjoyed periods of relative stability, they often found themselves overpowered by the political forces of the time. Clans of Jewish people were displaced following the invasion or conquest of Palestine (Knight, 2003). This scattering of the Jewish people was referred to as the Diaspora. Because of the the Diaspora, Judaism moved away from the land of Israel. With the displacement the institution of the synagogue was established. A synagogue existed wherever there were ten adult Jewish males and a copy of the scripture, otherwise known as the Torah (Hopfe, 1994). The synagogue became the local center for study and prayer and could be located in all kinds of places: at a home, under a tree, or inside a building designed specifically for worship (Hopfe, 1994). As the role for the synagogue evolved in the Jewish faith, a need arose for someone, later called the rabbi, to study the scripture (Torah), and teach it to the community. Men who had the time, intellect, and desire to study the scripture assumed the responsibility for interpreting it for the people (Hopfe, 1994).

The Diaspora Jews found themselves in close community to gentiles who did not share their faith. As Diaspora Jews dealt with issues concerning the way they lived out their faith, differences arose among groups. These differences included beliefs about the resurrection of the dead and the authority of the temple and its priest (Hopfe, 1994). Another point of contention concerned the promised messiah, God's anointed one (Isaiah 7:14). Some Jews believed the messiah would be a military leader who would defeat their enemies. Other Jews felt a messiah would gather believers together to live in blessedness forever (Noss & Noss, 1994). Differences in interpretation of the Torah and theological understandings lead Jews to divide into such parties as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and Zealots (Hopfe, 1994, Noss & Noss, 1994). The party of the Pharisees included most of the scribes, rabbis and others in the low order of the priesthood (Noss & Noss, 1994). The Sadducees were the ruling clan of priests who were both wealthy and aristocratic (Noss & Noss, 1994). The Zealots were a group of Jews who believed they should rebel against Roman rule for theological and political reasons (Hopfe, 1994). These three Jewish parties, along with others, existed when a baby named Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem. His birth created an evolutionary change in the religious system known as Judaism.

### *The Man Called Jesus*

The New Testament of the Bible contains the information about the birth and life of Jesus. There are few references, in other historical writings of the period, that refer to Jesus outside of the New Testament (Stanton, 1989). The New Testament yields most of the information about Jesus in the first four books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), called the Gospels. The word Gospel means "good news" (Fellows, 1979). Written after

Jesus' death, the dating of the Gospels is not exact, although historians believe the writing occurred between 65 C.E. to near 100 C.E. (Noss & Noss, 1994).

Two books of the New Testament record Jesus' birth, Matthew and Luke. In the Gospel of Matthew 1:20b-23, it states:

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet [Isaiah 7:14]: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us.'

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, to Mary and Joseph, both followers of the Jewish faith. The town of Nazareth, part of the province of Galilee is where Jesus was raised (Fellows, 1979). Jesus' youth remains a mystery with only one reference, when He went to the Jewish temple at the age of twelve (Bainton, 1987). "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:45-46). Jesus is sometimes referred to as "teacher," in the Gospels, and evidence exists that he knew the Torah and its interpretations (Fellows, 1979). Jesus was able to read (Luke 4:16-20), and it is probable that he could also write (John 8:6), but no proof stands that he kept a written record of his life and teachings (Neill, 1976).

Jesus began his ministry at the age of thirty (Luke 3:23), and it lasted approximately three years, according to the Gospel of John (Hopfe, 1994). During Jesus' life he had a growing number of followers. Jesus traveled the country and spoke to those

who gathered by lake shores, on hillsides, in homes, and in synagogues (Bainton, 1987).

The four Gospels agree that Jesus spent his public ministry teaching and healing.

“Whether it was to a small group of disciples or to a large crowd in a public place, He was a teacher. In the truest sense of the word, He was called *rabbi* by his disciples” (Hopfe, 1994, p. 314).

Jesus often taught using short narrative stories, a literary form identified as a parable. A parable is a short story that uses listener-familiar objects to convey stories about human events and characters (Hopfe, 1994). Parables are imaginative narratives that use figurative language. They are “composed in order to illuminate a subject that lies beyond the literal subject matter of the story” (Tannehill, 1995, p. 60).

Jesus’ teachings centered around two major commandments based on Jewish law: These two ideas, loving the Lord your God and your neighbor, were central to Jesus’ ministry.

‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all of the law and the prophets’ (Matthew 22:37-40).

Yet, Jesus did not always follow the Jewish law and considered the needs of people above the law. He challenged the tenets concerning the Sabbath. According to the principles, followers could not perform work on the holy day; however, Jesus challenged this belief when he healed the sick on the Sabbath and when he did not reprimand his disciples for pulling grain (Matthew 12:1-13). Jesus also warned against the perils of wealth and preached the need for compassion among humans (Hopfe, 1994). Further, he reached out to individuals considered unclean or unsavory by Jewish laws and standards.

In all four Gospels, the writers show Jesus the miracle worker. His recorded miracles include walking on water; calming a storm; casting out demons; healing the sick, the blind and the lame; feeding the hungry; and raising the dead (Hopfe, 1994).

As Jesus continued his public ministry, opposition against him grew. Jesus' ministry challenged the orthodox beliefs of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. In fact, his liberal interpretation of the Jewish Law and his perceived lack of respect for tradition offended the Pharisees (Noss & Noss, 1994). Conversely his ministry attracted many followers. Some followed because of curiosity; others followed to hear his message or to be healed. Some Jews, possibly those called the Zealots, began to see Jesus as a man they could make king. He became aware of the perceptions of the crowds of people who followed him and began to withdraw. His withdrawal "may have been a response to threats or to the fact that Jesus was now so conspicuously controversial as to make his normal mode of teaching impossible" (Noss & Noss, 1994, p. 502). It was at this point that he went off with his disciples to the village of Caesarea Philippi. While Jesus was with his closest disciples, the twelve he had chosen, he asked them a question: "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 9:27b). The disciples answered with what are the clearest statements of Jesus' identification as a Messianic figure, the anointed one of God (Hopfe, 1994). "And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah'" (Mark 9:28-29). Jesus then told his disciples that he would soon have to face rejection and death.

Jesus lived his last week in Jerusalem. When Jesus and the disciples arrived, it was the celebration of the Jewish Passover. Jews from all over the world, representing many of the Diaspora communities, were in Jerusalem to celebrate. On Sunday, Jesus

entered the city and large crowds of people welcomed him (Matthew 21:8-11). Jesus spent time teaching in the temple and debating with his opponents, but many of the Sadducees and Pharisees saw Jesus as a threat to their beliefs and looked for ways to oppose him (Hopfe, 1994). On Thursday, Jesus shared a meal with his chosen disciples. This meal became known as the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, to future followers. At the meal he shared bread and wine with his disciples.

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26-28).

After this meal Jesus went to a place called the garden of Gethsemane to pray. While there, Jesus was arrested by the leading priests and elders of the people (Matthew 26:36-56). They took him before the Sanhedrin, which was the judicial body of Judaism (Noss & Noss, 1994). The witnesses against Jesus did not have testimony that seemed to agree:

Then the high priest said to him, 'I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.' Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?' They answered, 'He deserves death' (Matthew 26:63b-66).

"The Gospel accounts place the responsibility for Jesus' death upon the Jewish leaders and the crowds in Jerusalem who were there for the Passover. But Jesus surely would

not have been executed had it not been the wishes of the Roman authorities” (Hopfe, 1994, p. 318). Jesus went before the Roman governor Pontious Pilate who then passed him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify. Jesus’ death by crucifixion was carried out on Friday. A member of the Sanhedrin offered an empty tomb for the body of Jesus so that he would not hang on the cross during the Sabbath day (Noss & Noss, 1994). Early Sunday morning, after the Jewish Sabbath had ended, several women came to the tomb to prepare the body of Jesus for burial. When they arrived, Jesus’ body was not there; the tomb was empty:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again’ (Luke 24:1-7).

The belief of Christians is that Jesus was crucified, buried, and the third day, he rose from the dead. Christians are those who recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah.

#### *The Expansion of Christianity*

After Jesus’ resurrection and before his ascension to heaven, he commissioned the disciples:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father [God] and of the

Son [Jesus] and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you (Matthew 28:16-20a).

As the disciples taught about Jesus the number of believers continued to grow. The followers of Jesus used the Jewish Scripture and continued to worship in the Temple (Hopfe, 1994). What made them distinct from other Jewish groups was their belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

As the first Christian groups began to form they were “called *ekklesia* in Greek, meaning ‘assembly’ (in English the word is ‘church’ instead of ‘ecclesia’)” (Fellows, 1979, p. 333). The official starting date of the Christian Church is Pentecost, connected to the time of harvest having recently taken place. At this harvest, Jews offered the first of their fruits as a sacrifice for God’s bounty (Unger, 1980). Groups of Jews from many nations, who spoke numerous languages, gathered in Jerusalem. Here Jesus promised his closest followers that they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The disciples who had been with Jesus had gathered together:

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability (Acts 2:2-4).

During this amazing moment the disciples began to speak in languages other than their own; therefore, the men and women present heard about Jesus in their own languages, and according to the Bible over three thousand people received baptism. This symbolically represented a person’s acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah (Unger, 1980). Upon being baptized the new Christians became members of the Church.



### *A Purposeful Approach to Christian Education in the Early Church*

Before the establishment of formal religious education, Christians shared their knowledge by oral tradition. Stories were shared within families, in communities, and at religious rites ceremonies. Very little formal training transpired. Parents, in fact, taught their children the doctrine and beliefs associated with the Christian faith including, religious knowledge, along with morals and social obligations to the family and community (Burgess, 2001).

A more formal means of education began in the Synagogues between the years of 75 B.C. and 64 A.D. when priests accepted the job of teaching boys about the age of six to read and memorize Hebrew Scripture (Sherrill, 1950). The teaching that took place in the Synagogue combined religious instruction with worship, using prayers, readings from Scripture, and passage interpretation in the vernacular. "In time the Hebrews also developed an elementary school (Beth Hassepher) for the study of oral tradition (Mishnah) and the commentaries (Gemara), and a class of scholar-teachers known as scribes" (Nelson, 1989, p. 184). Once Synagogue education began to take root, families still engaged in teaching their children elements of literacy and principles of the Hebrew religion. In the Old Testament teaching was not only an endeavor merely for the transference of knowledge, but also for the goal of wholeness for each person (Bromiley, 1992).

In the New Testament, teaching was one of the main functions of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus relied on oral tradition to share the ideas of faith, and he was a master storyteller. As Burgess (2001) stated, "The most impressive aspect of Jesus' teaching may well be the way in which He seems to have consciously employed strategies that accounted for the developmental stage of the learner" (p. 31). Jesus taught in a way

that mixed story with theology, using brief anecdotes, parables, sayings and even allegory (Harris, 1988; Stanton, 1989). What he used depended on the audience at hand and their personal needs. Education was aimed at the transference of knowledge, Jesus taught in order to bring people to faith.

The role of religious education continued in the Early Church after the death of Jesus. The teaching strategies were unpretentious and based on the Hebrew understandings. While parents taught their children and adults strove to live a life worthy of the Lord, the followers formed a community of believers who served to the best of their understanding (Nelson, 1989). The disciples, along with Paul and others, continued the tradition of teaching and preaching mostly to adults. Christians were a small minority within civilization. New converts assimilating into the Christian faith needed to understand the tenets of the faith and take them seriously because of the possible consequences of claiming Christian identity. Claiming such identity could mean persecution and even martyrdom.

New converts attempted to learn about Jesus and his work on earth, and they also had to struggle with the beliefs they already held. For some this new Christian faith was quite different from teachings they had embraced in the past. For others, like the Jews, they had to wrestle with life long understandings and traditions as they made sense of Christianity. Their education was not only a process of learning new knowledge, but it also involved a high level of personal commitment. Christian believers' were to use their faith to guide how they treated others and responded to their needs.

#### *The Organization of Christianity*

The Early Church was not highly organized for several reasons: its members believed Jesus would return to earth and it remained a grassroots movement. As

eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry began dying off, second-generation Christians needed a written record to preserve the teachings of Jesus and the first disciples (Noss & Noss, 1994). Between 50 and 150 C.E., books were written about Jesus' life and teachings, information about doctrine, leadership, and worship (Hopfe, 1994; Noss & Noss, 1994). The writings that make up the New Testament remained in flux, with many other writings being circulated, until the Fourth Century when they were canonized by the Bishops of the Early Church and became the official documents of Christian believers (Hopfe, 1994; Johnson, 1986). Once canonized the writings intellectualized Christian beliefs. The stories and teachings that had been myths, images, norms, and values became formal religious beliefs (McGuire, 1981). These early writings remain central for teaching the faith to new generations of people who follow Jesus.

The acceptance of official Christian writings created a demand for a more orderly way to bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds. To meet this need a system of catechumenal education began during the Second Century. A catechumen was a person who was learning about Christianity and preparing for baptism. Much of the training took place within the home of the teacher who nurtured and prepared the candidate (Richardson, 1970). The method of education used was a combination of teaching, preaching and discussion. The information from the period offers insights that suggest the following were included in catechumenal education:

- (1) the futility of idol worship; (2) the need to believe in the Creator God who sent His Son [Jesus] for our salvation; (3) the obligation of personally accepting the Gospel; (4) the codification of Christian beliefs through memorization . . . :
- and (5) if not baptized beforehand as an infant: to seal these beliefs in baptism (Burgess, 2001, p. 43).

### *Culture, Power and Economic Influence*

As Christian beliefs continued to take root within society, converts often found their ideas in conflict with others. In this environment Christians faced persecution for their convictions. In order to secure the strength of the Christian faith and prevail against the teaching influences of the pagan school, families instructed their children privately (Osborn, 1991). The role of the Christian school was two-fold, to teach children to read the word of God and prepare them to be members of the Church. All that changed in 313 A.D. when Constantine proclaimed that Christianity would be the official religion of the Roman Empire (Osborn, 1991). With this decree the age of persecution for Christians drastically changed but so did the cornerstone upon which the Early Church had been built. Prior to Constantine, the Church had grown through evangelism without aid or alliance with the state (Bainton, 1985). In Rome, a collaboration between the Church and the Empire began. But with this melding of altar and throne, followers of the Christian faith found themselves at times standing on the side of oppressive power (Groome, 1980). With this union came the means to justify government decisions with the stamp of approval from the Church. Corruption set in as the Church found itself with growing assets of land. "In a culture where all institutions rested on land, the Church found herself an integral part of the feudal system - and she was secularized in the process" (Bainton, 1985, p. 7).

The Church's prosperity did not trickle down to the common people. The disparity between the rich and the poor continued, and it had an effect on the education of children. For example during the Middle Ages religious education faced challenges and transformations. Although the church was rising in power, the education of the laity was almost nonexistent (Sherrill, 1950). With much of the curriculum aimed at the clergy,

attempts to educate the lay people was haphazard at best. Most of civilization was poor, and their lives revolved around basic survival. Few children received a formal education. The skills that had been taught in the ancient world were lost (Osborn, 1991). During the Middle Ages, the one educational force that remained relatively constant was the monastery. Boys entering religious orders and the children of the wealthy could receive a liberal arts education. The core of the curriculum was grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. Along with these, educators added theology, canon law, and medicine (Sherrill, 1950). The monastery provided a place for scholarship to find secure haven, where individuals could retreat to meditate, study and write (Burgess, 2001).

During the Middle Ages opportunities for learning had been mainly limited to the clergy and the higher classes. The Renaissance period brought to the world a revival of learning and a rekindling of the arts. One invention key to empowering more individuals with the tools for studying and intellectual exploration was printing and moveable type. Johannes Gutenberg invented printing and moveable type around 1440 which made books more accessible to the common people. Prior to the time of the printing press, books had to be copied by hand, and their availability was mainly limited to the upper classes, royalty, and the Church.

The Renaissance also brought with it a change in the attitude toward life. During this time cities enjoyed a relative peace and affluence which enabled a broader pursuit of the arts and letters, scholarship, and reflection (Bainton, 1985). The Renaissance was a period of metamorphosis for the individual, with a change of focus from the educational interest of the next world to a closer examination of life in the present. Scholars pursued the practice of Hebrew and Greek and, in so doing, were able to read the Bible in its

original language (Sherrill, 1950). They also studied the history of the Early Church and analyzed the changes that occurred through the centuries. Another course of study that evolved focused on the the development of the whole person, both mind and body. Scholars referred to this new interest in mortal existence with an emphasis on the human experience as humanism. Humanism had an influence on the growth of new types of schools and had an effect on Christian education. Eraumus, who was a well known humanist in the Sixteenth Century, wanted to see "schools awaken the mind and soul of the learner, with maturity as a goal" (Burgess, 2001, p. 49). He believed this type of education would bring around a new commitment to the Christian faith and enhance the needed skills of writing, speaking, and living (Burgess, 2001). Although the Church turned away from many of the ideas of Eraumus and the Renaissance period, it did open the way for both a religious awakening and revolt.

As scholars continued scrutinizing the role of the Church in society, questions arose concerning all types of abuses and corruption. The melding of power that occurred under Constantine had changed the Church. A growing movement among the people began emphasizing the need to return to the original purity of the Early Church. Reformers believed that the "many layers of symbolic and ritual expression that had grown up around Christianity . . . were obstacles to true communion with God" (Albanese, 1992, p. 103). From these ideas the Reformation movement was set in motion. The Reformation brought with it new winds of change and the creation of the Protestant era. During this time two major shifts took place with far-reaching consequences in education:

The first was the authority of the Bible, replacing the authority of the Church, in faith and morals. The second was 'justification by faith,' which meant that the

individual is accepted by God, not in virtue of the sacraments which a priest performs, but solely on the ground of the individual's personal faith in Jesus Christ as his redeemer and Lord (Sherrill, 1950, p. 18).

The Protestant Reformation took off under the leadership and guidance of Martin Luther. The direction the Protestants chose meant that they would renew the emphasis on religious education. Study of the Bible, Biblical preaching, the teaching of Christianity in the family, and the establishment of Christian schools emphasized the education of the laity (Burgess, 2001).

With the authority of the Bible as a central tenet, Church leaders wanted to make the Bible available in the vernacular to as many people as possible. Luther's translation of the Bible into the German language made it available to a broader audience (Dillenberger, 1961). Then, laity needed to read in order to study the Bible. Luther argued that "the right kinds of schools would not only prepare individuals for the tasks of industry and government but they would accomplish the greater goal of teaching every Christian to read the Bible" (Burgess, 2001). Martin Luther in his 1542, "Letter to Mayors and Aldermen of All the Cities of Germany in Behalf of Christian Schools," insisted that schools be established for both boys and girls in every city (Sherrill, 1950).

The Protestant Reformation saw the development of a division between Europe, with many Protestant denominations taking root in the Northern countries while the South remained Catholic. The period of Enlightenment or Age of Reason, which followed the Reformation, gave rise to the human search for understanding. With new discoveries came new questions about human freedom and a continued search for a personal relationship with God. Philosophers during this period believed that humans were unique above all other creatures because of their ability to reason. The philosophical

understanding of the day was that knowledge was power. Education became a panacea for creating a good society, seen as an essential element in producing both “religious piety and social stability” (Spring, 1990, p.6). This emphasis on the importance of education had an impact upon society, with the working classes gaining new freedoms in thinking and expression which lead to a growing appetite for education (Burgess, 2001).

### *The Methodist Movement and Education*

This growing appetite for education found a place in the movement of Methodism. Samuel and Susanna lead the Wesley family. Samuel was the the rector of the Church of England at Epworth, and Susanna was mother, teacher, and religious educator for her children. Susanna taught her children, both sons and daughters, the basics of education and the strength of faith. The balance between preaching and teaching, which were vital ideas for the Methodist movement, were evident in the Wesley home. John and Charles, two of the Wesley children formed the movement called Methodism.

John and Charles Wesley attended Oxford where the seeds of the Methodist movement were planted. It was there that Methodism was born from a young men’s movement, an organized group called the Holy Club. Members of this group rose early for Bible study and prayer. They also engaged in Christian service, especially to the incarcerated and poor. They were labeled “Methodist” by their cynical onlookers for their methodical, disciplined religious practices (Burgess, 2001; Norwood, 1984). This concern for vital faith, lived out through service and strengthened through study, was at the very heart of the Methodist movement. The Methodist revival in England came to life out of the abuses prevalent in the established Church and through what John Wesley saw as a lack of dedication to the faith (Bainton, 1987). “Wesley was deeply convinced that the making of Christians was a process which required devoted and diligent teaching”



(Felton, 1997, p. 92). Further, he believed that education was a means for social reform, a way out for the disadvantaged socioeconomic classes.

In the beginning the Methodist movement remained firmly inside the structure of the Church of England. Wesley's aim was not to begin a new church, but to shape the one he belonged to so it made a difference in individuals' lives. Wesley's fervor caused dissension and soon many leaders closed doors to him and his preaching. Hence, John Wesley began preaching in fields, on street corners, wherever people gathered. It was a ministry to the common people, the unlearned and the poorer levels of English society. The Wesley's worked among those who lived the worst of lives in the mines and the sweatshops. Many children worked alongside their parents, and formal education for both adults and children was lacking. John Wesley believed that Methodist revivalism could only be made permanent if its members could be properly educated. For Wesley, education and evangelism went together. "Education was not secondary to evangelism, it was bound together with it" (Burgess, 2001, p. 61). The Wesley brothers "organized societies, classes, and bands" to provide "their converts with a unique program of association and involvement, which included Christian nurture, discipline, and pastoral care" (Outler, 1980, p. 18). Wesley was also concerned about the state of teaching regarding children; He said it was "shamefully wanting" and proceeded to preach a sermon on the Education of Children in 1767 (Wesley, 1872/1979, vol. 3, p. 270). Education was part of ministry, and Wesley charged his preachers to teach children as well as adults. He asserted that education was three-fold:

First, they were incessantly to urge parents to be faithful in the practices of family prayer and worship, taking care that children were full participants. Second, the preachers were themselves to spend time in teaching children, as well as adults, in

their homes. . . . Third, societies of children were to be formed wherever possible and taught by the preachers: ‘Where there are ten children in a society, meet them at least an hour every week’ (Minutes 1812, 316). (cited in Felton, 1997, p. 103).

In his November 16, 1781 journal entry entitled, *A Short History of the People Called Methodist*, John Wesley writes about the common method that was used for general education and catechism of children.

Our general method is this: A young gentleman who came with me teaches thirty to forty children to read, write, and cast accounts. Twice a day he catechises the lowest class. In the evening he instructs the larger children. On Saturday I catechise them all; as also on Sunday before the Evening Service; and in the church immediately after the Second Lesson, a select number of them having repeated the Catechism, and been examined in some part of it, I endeavor to explain at large, and to enforce that part both on them and the congregation (Wesley, 1872/1979).

Wesley believed that “the goals of Christian teaching must always include both the enhancement of cognitive knowledge and the encouragement of conversion and personal commitment.” (Felton, 1997, p. 104). He also believed the family should take great care to instruct their children in the Christian faith. He understood religious education to be a joint effort by family and pastors.

#### *The Sunday School Movement*

Sunday School began as a reform movement. It started in a society that did not put a high priority on the education of the poor. During this time in England, approximately only one out of every twenty-five children attended any kind of school

(Burgess, 2001). The Sunday School began to advance religious education, in a more structured way for society's children, especially its poorest, who had often been denied the chance to learn reading, writing and arithmetic (Norwood, 1984, Seymour, 1986). Children worked long hours in the factories six days a week. Sunday was the only day they were free to rest (Lynn & Wright, 1980). And although there were schools they could attend that were set up as charity, their long hours each day at work made it impossible. Because of all of these factors Robert Raikes saw a need for Sunday Charity School. Children would generally attend school on Sunday morning from six to ten o'clock and again from two to six in the afternoon (Pulliam, 1987). The Sunday School movement paid teachers to instruct the poor in the areas of reading, writing, and religion and to devote time to helping these children develop proper manners, moral behavior, and good citizenship (Nelson, 1989). The growth of the Charity School that Raikes organized gave rise to his place as the founder of the Sunday School movement. But it is John Wesley whose "influence is commonly judged to have been among the primary reasons for the rapid rise of the Sunday School during the late eighteenth century" (Burgess, 2001, p. 62). Within seven years the Sunday Charity School had grown to approximately 250,000 children (Lynn & Wright, 1980).

Due to the supporters of the Sunday School, it grew. Its beginnings were philanthropic with many a concerned man and woman giving their time and resources "to prevent vice, to encourage industry and virtue, to dispel the ignorance of darkness, to diffuse the light of knowledge, to bring men cheerfully to submit to their stations" (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 26). As time went on, the Sunday School movement became an organized operation. As early as 1785 William Fox and several other influential people decided to support the cause of the movement. They organized the London Society to

teach children how to read, but their main concern was "systematic, universal, scriptural education for the poor" (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 26). Feeling that those who did manual labor did not need to know such things the London Society was not worried with teaching writing or arithmetic. Their main concern was that of literacy, making certain children could read the Bible. Other societies soon arose in the Sunday School movement. Many of these movements put less emphasis on keeping individuals in their stations and included not only the teaching of reading, but also writing and arithmetic.

### *The Sunday School in America*

As the Sunday School movement made its way across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States, it arrived with the same core vision it had in England, to help reform and improve society by teaching religion and general education. In America, seven years after the Revolutionary War, Philadelphia's Sunday School Society began. It marked "the start of a common school system for the children of the city's poor" (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 32). Many like Benjamin Rush, a Philadelphia physician who signed the Declaration of Independence believed:

. . . the only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in Religion.

Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican government" (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 21).

The Sunday School movement was in place in both British and American culture, and although hard feelings existed between the two countries after the war, the connection of support for the Sunday Charity Schools remained. It was not until around the 1820s that real differences in the Sunday Schools become evident. Although the British Sunday Schools continued to cater to the poor within society, in America those leading the

Church began to worry that the schools were not reaching out to church members nor benefiting the more affluent. "From the 1820s through the 1860s, the Sunday school began to exist in a dual form as both mission schools for poor and frontier children and church schools for the children of church members" (Seymour, 1986, p. 9). The Sunday School in America began to gain acceptance among people of differing economic status. Because of this acceptance, it was no longer viewed merely as a Charity School for the poor.

#### *Public Education's Effect on the Sunday School*

The first public schools began in New York State in 1812. Horace Mann created an organized system in Massachusetts, establishing a State Board of Education in 1837 and a training school for teachers in 1839. He also was editor of *Common School Journal* which helped to improve school curriculum, and he worked to consolidate small local schools (Nelson, 1989). Church leaders did not always support Mann in his mission to create a public school system devoid of religious education, but Mann was aware of both the separation of church and state and the conflicts that existed between differing Protestant denominations, as well as Roman Catholics, regarding what doctrines should be taught. The overt teaching of religion was gradually dropped as an approved subject in the public school curriculum. Yet, its influence was still present in the curriculum. For example, the McGuffey's Readers contained stories from the Bible and lessons on moral conduct (Nelson, 1989). The division between the Sunday School and the public school were in place, yet the influence of Christianity could not be stamped out easily.

As the migration of people headed West, the need for schools on the frontier grew. And even though in Massachusetts Horace Mann pushed for the division of church and state in the public schools, such changes would not take place as quickly in the valleys

and plains of the West. Christian missionaries continued to open Sabbath Schools in the West as new communities sprang up. Not long after 1830, a young fur trader from Saint Louis wrote home to his mother in Connecticut:

. . . Sabbath Schools are the only means which the great majority of the people of this State have for the education of their children, and unless these schools are established, books given them, and addequite [sic] teachers found to take charge of them, we cannot expect the children will be any better than their Fathers were (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 51).

The teachers of these Sunday Schools had varied degrees of education. Some were ordained but most were lay people; a few had degrees while others had received only "two or three years of uncertain schooling" at best (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 52). The teachers for the Sunday Schools were often itinerant teachers who moved to the places where there was a need. At times college and seminary students spent their vacations from school teaching in the Sunday Schools throughout the areas of westward expansion. Women were also an important asset to the movement; while less likely to be itinerant, they often taught classes in the community where they lived.

Sunday Schools would continue to fill in the gaps within public education for many years to come. "Henry Barnard, the first U.S. Commissioner of Education, observed that on the western frontier the Sunday school was 'the precursor and pioneer both of the district school and the church'" (Nelson, 1989, p. 188). Some places, like Indiana, encouraged the establishment of Sabbath Schools wherever they were practical, believing that such schools would help pave the way for public or common schools and be a substitute until they were established. In some places in the Western frontier the Sunday School became a near permanent replacement for public education when it failed

to arrive. And some politicians liked the idea of keeping Sunday Schools in place to serve the needs of the poor and for children in sparsely inhabited areas (Lynn & Wright, 1980).

Another important asset the Sunday Schools provided, especially in the West, was a library that was open to the public. "The Sunday school movement managed to provide three-fifths of the American libraries by 1859" (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 57). The Sunday School society entered into book publishing in 1824-1825, offering alphabet primers, spelling books, hymnals, denominational and nondenominational materials, and Bibles. They added to the collection books and tracts about real people and places, many of which were from English publications. They were able to print books economically, and the missionaries who started Sunday Schools offered these books for sale. The library became "the true mark of a bona fide Sunday School" (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 57). The library was often the only place available for individuals to find books they could read. The libraries provided educational resources for many Americans who found themselves in the westward expansion movement.

### *The Changing Identity of the Sunday School*

Free common schools continued to grow in America; eventually general education grew away from the umbrella of the Sunday School movement. As the public school effort expanded, "the focus and structure of the Sunday School as we know it - as the church's means of education - was born and solidified" (Seymour, 1986, p. 9). The identity of the Sunday School was changing, and religious education began to search out its purpose in the world. Its roots were in reform and mission. Its intent had been clear, organized, and ecumenical. Now the Sunday School societies were many, with several of the denominations supporting their own groups. With the continued push for more separation from public education, Sunday Schools would have to find another outlet

for teaching their doctrines. This became a turning point for Sunday School education. What had once been taught in conjunction with public education was no longer viewed as acceptable curriculum in a country that held up the separation of church and state in its Constitution. Doctrines and beliefs that had once had a position with the masses were now in need of an audience:

The denominations, seeing themselves squeezed out of public schools, took over the Sunday school as a department within their organizations so they would have a place to teach their beliefs and practices. Thus in a subtle way over half a century, the Sunday school became the chief agency of education in Protestant denominations because they needed a place to teach their doctrines when public schools, by reason of the Constitution, became secular (Nelson, 1989, p. 188).

The singular aim of the Sunday School became religious instruction. No longer was its goal to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic so children could understand the literature of religion and live a better life. Now the goal was to bring every child and youth to the saving influence of faith (Seymour, 1986).

#### *Religious Instruction and the Sunday School*

Religious instruction was connected with the basic elements of a child's education. The books found in many town libraries were frequently part of a well organized and purposely selected Sunday School library. What had been integrated out of necessity was now being filtered. This separation created an increase in church-sponsored day schools and parochial schools. The change also "compartmentalized religion in the church and made it unrelated to the affairs of life taught in public schools" (Nelson, 1989, p. 188). This prompted church leaders at the National Sunday School Convention in 1859 to raise a concern about the limited time children would now receive faith-based education. Those



leading the Sunday School movement felt that the Sunday School alone could not sufficiently educate children in the areas of faith. Leaders believed the Sunday School would only be effective when related to a context of Christian formation that involved family influence, church life, worship, and preaching (Seymour, 1986).

Another growing concern was the way children received instruction as the Sunday School's focus changed. Concerns arose about the way leaders recruited and trained teachers. Teachers had the freedom to select the materials for their classes in a way that often appeared random rather than standard (Lynn & Wright, 1980). Further, ministers and laity - whoever was in charge of leading the children - determined teaching methods. Two examples taken from the writings and experiences of John Wesley and Bishop Francis J. McConnell show the diversity of teaching that existed. John Wesley wrote in his journal the story of one of his ministers who had been having a difficult time with a number of children:

As he was persuading them to mind what they were about, and to remember the text which he was going to mention, just then a robin flew into the house, and their eyes were presently turned after him. 'Now,' said he, 'I see you can attend to that robin. Well, I will take that robin for my text.' He then gave them an useful lecture on the harmlessness of that little creature, and the tender care of its Creator (Wesley, 1872/1979, vol., XI, p. 334).

On the other end of the spectrum, Methodist Bishop Francis J. McConnell remembered his Sunday School experience as a child in the 1850s. He reports:

Johnny, read the first verse, Jimmy the second and so on down to the little fellow who could barely read. 'Have you any questions?' Nobody had. Then tears

would come into the teacher's eyes because we didn't seem interested. Then came the collection box, into which we each cast a cent (Francis J. McConnell cited in Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 99).

These reflections are two that show the range of teaching that took place in the Sunday School setting. It was John Vincent, a young pastor in the 1850s, who pushed the church to look to the public schools in order to reform the Sunday School. He suggested that the teachers have faculty meetings along with "regional normal schools" to provide training for teachers. He also started "Sunday-school Teachers Institutes" in the early 1860s in Illinois (Lynn & Wright, 1980). Vincent began a magazine in 1865 that pushed, for the first time, the idea of having uniform lesson plans for the Sunday School teachers of all evangelical denominations to follow. His lesson plan "entitled, Two Years with Jesus: A New System of Sunday School Study, featured helpful hints for teachers and a weekly 'Golden Text' memory selection for pupils" (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 100). His work became a stepping stone for other denominations. Seeing Vincent's work the Methodist Church decided they would also pursue the idea of uniform lessons. In 1872 at a convention of Sunday School delegates in Indianapolis, the matter of uniform lessons was passed. The lessons would not only be for children, but also for adults. The principle of uniform lessons met both praise and disdain as the curriculum became reality. Critics argued on both sides of the uniformity issue. Some felt that they were too simplistic, while others complained about their scholarly tone. Another concern was that interest groups put pressure on the publishers of the lessons to represent their ideas. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and advocates for the missionary cause both felt lessons in the unified Sunday School curriculum should address the virtues of their crusades (Lynn & Wright, 1980). The unified Sunday School,

even with its critics and shortcomings, laid the foundation for church Sunday School curriculum.

### *The Changing Role of the Sunday School*

As theological education expanded for those serving and entering into ministry, and as more individuals became aware of the new educational trends within the public arena, Sunday School once again found itself under microscopic scrutiny. Reformers “insisted that passion and commitment were not sufficient for the Sunday School work and new efforts at reform were needed” (Seymour, 1986, p. 13). Therefore, the church turned to full-time professionals to lead the affairs of the Sunday School. Although volunteers remained important as the backbone of the Sunday School, trained leaders who understood the work of progressive educators of the time were more in demand.

Christian educators trained in the latest educational pedagogy examined the progressive movement then influencing education. Leaders of the movement included John Dewey and G. Stanley Hall. Proponents of the "movement believed that classrooms should be child-centered and oriented to the interest of children. They believed teachers should recognize individual differences and allow children to progress at their own rate of development" (Osborn, 1991, p. 77). Graded lessons soon replaced uniformed lessons which addressed the developmental needs of children from infancy to high school. Christian educators moved another step forward and gave attention to the children's learning environment. Relegating children's ministry to whatever space was left and using adult tables and chairs was no longer acceptable to the professional educators.

With educational reform also came a blurring of Sunday School's purpose once more. The purpose of the Sunday School had been clear to the men and women who volunteered to teach: conversion. But with new reforms in education came a new

vocabulary of "righteous living" and "character building" which seemed more illusive to the volunteers who gave only two or three hours each week to the affairs of the Sunday School (Lynn & Wright, 1980). Another challenge surfaced when volunteers did not easily comprehend the features of the progressive movement's specialized education set forth by the professional. Providing an individualized approach, where children had the chance to problem solve and apply their learning, may have seemed natural to the trained educators, but memory verses and round robin reading were often more the norm in most volunteer classrooms (Burgess, 2001; Lynn & Wright, 1980).

As professional Christian educators began to move forward with their progressive methods, attempting to make the Sunday School a "sound" educational institution, disaster loomed on the horizon (Nelson, 1989). Volunteers required no salary, but professionals cost a church money. With the Wall Street crash of 1929, Christian educators saw much of their progress fade away with the stock market. Because churches are volunteer organizations which rely on the monetary support of there participants, the economical ups and downs of the world leave their mark. The Sunday School was facing two problems: a rift between laity and professional Christian educators pertaining to the issue of Sunday School effectiveness and financial uncertainty. Because its efficiency was underfire, a new skepticism emerged. Nationally people raised questions about the weekly hour. Charles Clayton Morrison in a 1946 article in *The Christian Century* magazine "accused the single weekly hour led by volunteer teachers of causing a downward curve in religious literacy and respect for religion" (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 119).

With questions raised about the Sunday School hitting a fervor pitch it is not surprising that advocates for more traditional methods raised their voices. The teachers in

the Sunday Schools had participated in “Old Time Religion,” and as the song goes, “It was good enough for me.” Within the church, concern grew that what was being taught and how it was being taught was off course. According to “old schoolers” the Bible and its message needed to regain centrality in the Sunday School classroom. “Old-fashioned Sunday Schools had no need of professors, proud scientists and new professionals who believed in the permanence of modern liberal culture” (Lynn & Wright, 1980, p. 133). Teachers needed to return to teaching the necessary information. What was essential was accurately and vigorously learning the beliefs of the Christian faith, the history and doctrines of the church, including methods of Biblical exegesis, and doctrines of Christian theology (Seymour, 1986).

This new push for more traditional methods did not eliminate the ideas of the progressive education voice, especially in the mainline denominations (e.g. United Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Disciple of Christ, etc.). The ideas of both groups merged, and by mid-century the mainline model took hold in many churches. More orthodox educators wanted to see a push for Christian theological education. They thought church members needed a more accurate and comprehensive knowledge about the beliefs of the Christian faith. Liberal educators wanted attention given to nurture but did not discount the need for theological education. Under the influence of both voices the Sunday School saw growth during the 1950s, and many felt a new enthusiasm about the role of Christian education. However the gains made in the 1950s did not continue into the 1960s and 1970s. The mood of America was changing, and the Sunday School did not live up to its vision. During this period an attitude about institutions emerged due to the Vietnam Conflict and Watergate. Afterwards, individuals did not view the role of the institution as positively as prior generations. During this period Sunday Schools in

mainline denominations saw a drop in enrollment connected to the current climate in society (Sample, 1990).

Over the years Sunday School has experienced both decline and increase. The current Sunday School model used by many United Methodist Churches evolved over time and continues to be the basis for children's religious education. Volunteer teachers and graded curriculum remain mainstays of Sunday Schools today. The men and women who write the curriculum used in the United Methodist Church consider the theories and research of Piaget when developing graded lessons (Crocker, 2000). More recently, during the 1990s to the present, church leaders have begun to support a new Sunday School model, the rotation model. Rotation Sunday School is a program based on the learning model of Howard Gardner and his theories on ways of knowing and teaching for multiple intelligence (Armstrong-Hansche & MacQueen, 2000). It is still too early to understand the effect this model will have on the history of Christian education and the Sunday School. Although the methods of teaching have changed, the broad aim of the Sunday School curriculum remains set on teaching the tenets of the faith and establishing individuals in a right relationship with God and neighbor. "The teacher's task is regarded as one of entering into a communal relationship with learners for the express purpose of guiding them in their growth within themselves, toward God, and toward others" (Burgess, 2001, p. 114).

#### *Research Findings in the area of Christian Education*

As history has shown us most people who claim Christianity as their religion of choice will learn about the faith from their families and through participation in a community of believers, often in a church setting. Benson, Williams, and Elkin (1990) in their study *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*

examined these two arenas for teaching and passing on the faith. The research analyzed several areas including: “the role of Christian education, pinpointing specific programming factors which are associated with growth in mature faith . . . features of congregational life that promote faith maturity and loyalty. . . and the role of Christian educators, pastors, and other adults” (Benson et al., 1990, p. 3).

Participants in this study were from six denominations: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Southern Baptist Convention, United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. The study involved 11,122 participants representing 561 congregations. Participants in the study included adults, adolescents, Christian education teachers, coordinators of Christian education and pastors. Faith maturity was used as the measure of effectiveness. In the author’s study, they contended:

[Faith maturity] has two major themes running through it: a Vertical theme, defined as the degree to which one has developed a deep, life-transforming relationship to a loving God, and a Horizontal theme, defined as the actions designed to promote the welfare of others. A person with a mature faith embodies both of these dimensions into an integrated whole” (Benson et al., 1990, p. 25).

The study revealed that the two most important factors in promoting greater faith maturity in youth, who had reached adolescence, were family religiousness and Christian education involvement during their childhood (Benson & Eklin, 1990).

Three aspects of family religious experience had the most effect on faith development: talking with a parent about faith; taking part in family devotions, prayer, or reading the Bible; and being involved in a family service project (Benson & Eklin, 1990). The family was also an important component in engaging children and youth in

Christian education opportunities. Seventy-seven percent of the adults participating in the study remembered being involved in Christian education classes and events when they were between the ages of five and twelve (Benson & Eklin, 1990). Formal Christian education includes such programs as Sunday School classes for all ages, Bible studies, family events, music and drama programs, new member classes, and youth groups. "Exposure to effective Christian Education is strongly associated with both faith maturity and [local church and denominational] loyalty. The more effective the Christian education program, the greater is faith maturity and loyalty" (Benson et al., 1990, p. 53).

Effective Christian education programs examined in the research had the following characteristics:

[The programs had] strong, committed, competent leadership by teachers and pastors. Such leadership requires training, skill, and knowledge. Also, the effective program builds on a knowledge of the needs and interest of the people. Effectiveness in Christian education, then, requires planning, training, and significant congregational support (Benson et al., 1990, p. 59).

The effective Christian education programs have teachers who have high faith maturity, know educational theory and practice for the age they teach, and care about their students. Three other factors are also important: the pastor is committed to and involved in Christian education; the pastor understands educational theory and practice; and the church leaders strongly support Christian education (Benson & Eklin, 1990; Roehlkepartain, 1993).

Although there are various types of education programs provided by churches, the Sunday School remains the most prominent form of Christian education. In the research study *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*



(1990), out of the 561 congregations studied, 99 percent of the churches engaged in Sunday or Church School for children kindergarten through the sixth grade. Ninety-eight percent of the churches had Sunday or Church School classes for the pre-kindergarten age. The numbers of churches providing Sunday School programs for adults was 89 percent, and for youth in grades seven through nine the number was 92 percent, but fell to 78 percent for youth in grades ten through twelve (Benson & Eklin, 1990).

Providing Christian education for children has had a greater success rate than providing educational opportunities to high school students and adults (Benson et al., 1990, p. 53). Research shows that churches most often provide Sunday School opportunities for children. Research has also shown that parents with children take a greater interest in Sunday School education and are more likely to return to church so their children will engage in Christian education (Roehlkepartain, 1993). Even with opportunities to attend Sunday or Church School classes, most people spend on average only about 30 to 40 hours a year in Sunday School (Benson & Eklin, 1990). Yet, Sunday School continues to be the most popular form of Christian education that Christian churches provide.

#### *The Sunday School in the United Methodist Church*

The data collected for this research examines a church in the United Methodist Denomination. There are 35,469 United Methodist Churches in the United States (Fishel, Babbitt, & Haralson, 2001). It is the second largest denomination in the United States. The *2001 General Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the United Methodist Church* report statistical information for the calendar year ending December 31, 2000. The United Methodist Church in the United States of America reported a full membership of 8,341,375. A full membership includes youth (usually seventh grade and up, who

have completed confirmation classes, been baptized, and joined the church) and adult members. Full members of the United Methodist Church had a total of 2,552,596 Sunday School participants in the year 2000. The preparatory roles, which include children birth through confirmation age (sixth grade), reported 1,325,270. Children in this same age range that participated in Sunday School classes totaled 1,038,228. These statistics reveal that approximately 31 percent of all full members in the United Methodist Church participate in Sunday School. United Methodist children who attend church participate in Sunday School at approximately a 78 percent rate. While approximately one out of three full members participate in Sunday School, three out of four children in the United Methodist Church in the United States participate in Sunday School.

A statistical review of United Methodist Churches in Oklahoma report there are a total of 552 churches, with 521 providing Sunday School to their participants. Over ninety-four percent of all Oklahoma United Methodist Churches provide a Sunday School program for their participants. There are 25,276 children on the preparatory roles. The average Sunday School participation for children in this category was 19,728 (Perryman & Smith, 2001). Children in the Oklahoma Conference attend Sunday School at a rate of 78 percent, hence matching the national rate. In Oklahoma, Sunday School is a consistent means of Christian education for children who attend United Methodist Churches.

#### *Volunteerism and Collaboration - The Pastor and the Laity*

The United Methodist Church has a denominational hierarchy (i.e. episcopal polity) which structures the way the local church operates. A Bishop represents the highest level of leadership, followed by the District Superintendent, the pastor, and then the laity. When the rules of the denomination are examined, challenged, or changed, the

clergy and laity have equal votes. At the local level the minister serves as the head of the church. The minister, along with the laity, share in the leadership and work of the church.

The structure of the church, although hierarchical, provides the opportunity at the local level for cooperation to occur between the laity and the minister. An atmosphere of cooperation has the potential to empower the church participants as they engage in the work of the church. As group members work together their ideas can influence others within the group, which in turn can affect the decisions made by the participants and create change.

The amount of power the laity has within any given church varies. Although the minister's seen as the leader of the church, research shows that the minister's tenure at the church made a significant difference in clergy jurisdiction (Monahan, 1999). Ministers who had served in their churches for an extended period had more influence over the decisions made within the church. Larger churches also saw a higher level of clergy jurisdiction. Based on these findings the laity in a small church, with a minister who had only been with them for a short time, had a higher level of shared jurisdiction. In this situation, the laity would feel empowered to work and make decisions that affected the life of their local church.

Although the minister is the designated leader of a United Methodist Church his or her duties could not be accomplished without the efforts of lay volunteers because they carry out the majority of the work (Hoge, Zech, McNamar, Donahue, 1998). A church that can secure volunteers has less need to pay individuals to do the work of the church. Yet, organizations often do not invest much in training volunteers (Hoge et al., 1998). This lack of investment contributes to part-time volunteers being inefficient when compared to full-time employees (Hoge et al., 1998; Pearce, 1993).

Penner (2002) found that volunteerism is more likely to occur within an organizational setting. Members of “an organized religion were more likely to be volunteers” . . . and, relative to non-volunteers scored higher on the religiosity measure (i.e., how religious they were)” (Penner, 2002, p. 454). These individuals feel strongly about their work and have a prosocial personality (i.e., other-oriented empathy) and are more likely to show sustained prosocial actions in an organizational setting (Penner, 2002).

The level of an individual’s religious commitment affected both the tenure and the time he or she gave to volunteer work. Men and women who frequently attend church activities volunteered at a higher rate (Hoge et al., 1998). Further, individual’s positive attitude about an organization also affects the tenure and amount of time given by a volunteer. As in previous studies, a person’s income and level of education also affect volunteerism (Hoge et al., 1998, Penner, 2002). The tenure of the pastor, a higher income and education level among the laity, and an individual’s level of participation in a local congregation was shown to influence how much time the individual gives to the church and how empowered he or she feels to contribute leadership.

#### *A New Church Start Leads to a New Sunday School Program*

New church starts are unique within the United Methodist Church. Usually only two to three new churches begin within a conference area in any one year. The borders of a conference area may include a state (i.e., Oklahoma), or there may be two to five conferences within a state, or in the case of smaller states a grouping of states may form a conference. Once a need for a new church is identified, work begins to put into place the necessary components to get the task underway. The decision to create a new church depends on several factors, including the current and predicted future population growth

of an area and the growth and health of other United Methodist Churches that are in the vicinity. The Congregational Development Commission and the Bi-District Board of Missions then determines where to begin a new church.

A new church begins when the Bishop of the conference appoints a pastor to start a church. The minister usually begins a new church with public worship opportunities. Once a core group of laity commits to help the church, the group begins to guide the development of future programs, and often group members establish a course of Christian education. Beginning such a program is the responsibility of the minister and the lay participants. Although each community of faith may follow a similar plan, the influence of participants makes it unique to the church. The aims and understandings of the minister and laity will affect the design and emphasis of the program. This means each programs layout will carry elements of tradition as well as unique traits reflecting the desires of the worshipping community.

#### *In Summary*

Religious education has evolved through the years. It remains an important factor to the continuation of religious beliefs. The Sunday School began in response to the needs of the time, the educational needs of the poor. When it began it focused on both public and religious education. Today the focus of the Sunday School continues to evolve, but its aim remains fixed on teaching believers about the Christian faith. Thus, Sunday School remains an important part of the Christian education system.

Today, approximately 94 percent of United Methodist Churches in Oklahoma provide a Sunday School program. Three out of every four children who take part in the life of a United Methodist Church in Oklahoma attend Sunday School. Research supports participation in effective Christian education as a means to develop faith

maturity, and Sunday School is currently the most prominent medium for carrying out that task in the church. It has stood the test of time. This study will examine the process one church enters to create its own program of Christian education. Members of Fourth United Methodist Church chose to begin a program of Christian education for the children attending the church. They selected to adhere to the Sunday School model used in the majority of church settings. This research will follow their journey to begin such a program.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Interpretive Framework

In this chapter I will explore the cognitive development of individuals using the theory of constructivism. An understanding of a person's personal practical theory will explain how individuals use their beliefs to influence actions. These actions are more fully understood within the dynamic of group relationships. Social systems theory will offer the framework to connect individual cognitive development, social cultural influence, and the physical environment. The historical prospectus from chapter two will link theological understandings with educational pedagogy, providing the reader the opportunity to understand the development of Christian education in the Sunday School setting. All of these insights will provide the foundation for examining the data collected for this dissertation. It is my hope that through the use of these ideas the inception process the church members follow to develop their Sunday School program for children can be understood more completely.

#### *Theory of Constructivism*

The question "How do individuals learn?" continues to drive theory, research, and practice. Researchers and educators continue to explore the many aspects of this question to find and implement learning techniques which are beneficial and suitable. In the attempt to teach Christian education, this same question demands to be addressed. The constructivist perspective provides a way to examine how learning takes place. Understanding how the learner attains new knowledge is a basic step in answering the question stated above.

Through his observations of children, Jean Piaget understood that individuals are affected both by their biological development and their environment. The evolution of knowledge that occurs in people begins from the first days of infancy as they interpret, organize, and use the information from their surroundings to build conceptions of their physical and social worlds (Corsaro, 1997; Greenfield, 2000). To make sense of new information or schemes an individual engages in a process of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation occurs when an individual incorporates new information into current understandings (Piaget, 1976). The person must then accommodate the information to “fit” into his or her current mental structures. Piaget proposed that as accommodation occurs, the individual may proceed down the following paths:

- (1) They might ignore the contradictions and persevere with their initial scheme or idea;
- (2) they might waver, holding both theories simultaneously and dealing with the contradiction by making each theory hold for separate, specific cases; or
- (3) they might construct a new, more encompassing notion that explains and resolves the prior contradictions (Fosnot, 1996, p. 16.)

As they attempt to interpret reality into their existing mental structures, by adapting and reshaping these new discoveries to fit into their present schema, the balancing process of assimilation and accommodation takes place.

Individuals are only able to accommodate moderate discrepancies or intrusions in the events of their lives. Such intrusions of information that do not fit into the individual's current mental structures are disturbances or perturbations and designate a state of disequilibrium (Chapman, 1992; Corsaro, 1997). Perturbations are caused when there is a gap in knowledge (*lacunae*) or a contradiction creates cognitive dissonance for the individual. In whatever way individuals attempt to grasp the information, they



will first search internally, trying to bring together the similarities of the experience with what they already know; then they will deal with the contradictions (Fosnot, 1996). It is during this time of disequilibrium that people engage in problem solving as they try to bring balance back to their lives; this is known as equilibrium (Miller, 1993; Piaget, 1954). Piaget's observations revealed that a person's construction of "knowledge proceeds neither solely from the experience of objects nor from an innate programming performed in the subject but from successive construction" (Piaget, 1977, as cited in Fosnot, 1996, pp. 13-14). The construction of knowledge is an ongoing, dynamic process affected by both maturation and the environment.

### *Personal Practical Theory*

Individuals continue to understand the world through the experiences that occur throughout life. A person's position in the world affects these experiences. Piaget labels this common means of understanding "social knowledge." Social knowledge is information that comes from a culture and is directly transmitted (i.e., vocabulary, rules of conduct, moral codes) to individuals (Forman & Kushner, 1997). This type of knowledge is helpful when persons need to "remember, attend to, compare and otherwise process information" (Forman & Kushner, 1997, p. 39).

The information people are exposed to will influence how they make sense of the world. In the process of living life a person will construct an understanding of the world - a personal practical theory (Rodgers & Dunn, 1997, 2000). "Just as children construct meaning about their world through interaction with objects and other people" adults also construct theories based on their experiences (Rodgers & Dunn, 2000, p. 273). Yet, even when people share many of the same experiences, "different aspects of those experiences will have been salient to each individual based on his or her personal practical theory"

(Dunn, 2001, p. 5). It is from this theory base that personally held understandings and beliefs have the potential to influence the actions and decisions of each individual (Dunn, 2001; Rodgers & Dunn, 1997, 2000). At the same time “personal practical theories are likely to be resilient to change and are visible (in broad terms) in an individual’s activity” (Dunn, 2001, p. 5).

Each participant in this study has constructed, during their lifetime, an understanding of the world. Their personal practical theories have come into existence through their experiences in the home, in school, within their culture, and through their religious upbringing. The lay members participating in this study all bring to each meeting their own personal practical theory base that has the potential to impact the decision made during the course of this research. Examining how their held understandings affect this research provides one component of discernment during the planning and implementation stages.

#### Cooperation and Grouped Operations

Because the work of this research study examines group dynamics and beliefs, it is important to understand how groups operate to reach their goals. Piaget (1995) realized that the acquisition of knowledge involved both organic maturation and physical and social interactions. This means the acquisition of information does not occur in isolation but many factors are a part of its formation. “Each new generation in its turn goes through the same educational process, formed by the pressures of preceding generations and also creating norms and values for the next generation” (Piaget, 1995, p. 57). Piaget believed these values and beliefs are passed on through both cooperation and constraint. Constraint occurs when beliefs and rules are imposed on individuals that are “‘external’ to individuals social realities” and accepted because of the inequality of power among

individuals (Piaget, 1995, p. 219). A child or an adult may accept the given knowledge because of the authority of the person sharing it. When this happens “it is possible to avoid rethinking the situation for oneself. Information gained in constrained situations would be less likely to be integrated into one’s core system of understandings because there would be no need to reconcile conflicting views.” (Rodgers & Dunn, 1999, p. 272).

Cooperation occurs “when individuals cooperate without being circumscribed by the authority of the elders or by tradition, they themselves elaborate social realities and then submit to them in complete willingness” (Piaget, 1995, p. 219). When individuals work in an atmosphere of cooperation (i.e. shared power, equal footing) reciprocity will be possible (Piaget, 1995). “[T]he exchange of viewpoints may encourage those involved to reconsider, and possibly reconstruct, their previous understandings of the concepts, rather than merely accepting the view of others.” (Rodgers & Dunn, 1999, p. 272). In cooperative relationships individuals begin making “sense of the task at hand in new ways” (Rodgers & Dunn, 1999, p. 272). The atmosphere of cooperation is where the transition from action to common operation can occur.

The transition from action to operation therefore presupposes, in the individual, a fundamental decentration as a condition of operatory grouping, which consists in adjusting actions with each other until they can be combined in general systems applicable to all transformations; it is precisely these systems which permit the linking of operations among individuals. . . . [C]ooperation constitutes the system of inter-individual operations, i.e. operatory groupings permitting the reciprocal adjustment of individuals’ operations. On the other hand, individual operations constitute the system of decentred actions which are also capable of being coordinated with each other in groupings which can include the operations of

other as well as one's own. Cooperation and grouped operations are, therefore, one and the same reality. (Piaget, 1995, p. 89).

As individuals work together their actions challenge the equilibrium of those in the group and the grouping itself. As group members reciprocally share ideas, they internalize new understandings and the group members act in response adjusting their decisions to bring balance to the group operations. It is through this very act of operation among individuals that groups arrive at a point of shared logic. Shared logic is reached through the operations of a group and the actions that follow. These actions will constitute overarching systems whose elements are "integrated with each other, then these operatory groupings will also express equally well the reciprocal and inter-individual adjustments of operations, and the internal operations of thought of each individual" (Piaget, 1995, p. 88). As the people work together their ideas influence others within the group, having the ability to affect the operatory system which in turn creates a shared point of understanding that can lead the group to a decision.

### *Social Systems Theory*

The construction of knowledge involves "certain collective interactions and a certain level of organic maturation" (Piaget, 1995, p. 32). The construction of knowledge does not occur in isolation. Individual understandings and knowledge develop through the complex interconnections between people and the environment where they live (Friedman, 1985). Society influences an individual's knowledge construction. In order to understand these connections more clearly social systems theory attempts to explain social complexity. This endeavor observes the guiding differences that exist:

"With the introduction of further concepts (time, meaning, communication, etc.) and distinctions (element/relation, self-reference/external reference,

structure/process, closure/openness, unity/difference, etc.), the initial distinction is elaborated to the point where it re-enters what it distinguishes, and the theory is forced to encounter itself as one of its own objects. Systems theory, in other words, simulates complexity in order to explain complexity, and it does so by creating a flexible network of selectively interrelated concepts that can be recombined in many different ways and thus be used to describe the most diverse social phenomena (Knodt, 1995, p. xix).

The use of systems theory provides a means of examining the complexity that exists. The challenge in using social systems theory is the complex task of organizing observations because this method “defies the linearity of the printed medium” (Knodt, 1995, p. xix). Examining the parts of a system creates the problem of isolating components, which in turn, can create deceptive results. When a part is removed from a system it will act differently than when it exists within a system (Friedman, 1985).

Bertalanffy (1968) discovered that within many scientific disciplines parallelisms or isomorphies appeared as scientific fields and dealt with similar problems and conceptions. Brought together, these isomorphic ideas developed the foundation for “general systems theory.” Bertalanffy’s theory recognized the complex nature of interaction between parts that existed. “It is necessary to study not only parts and processes in isolation, but also to solve the decisive problems found in the organization of parts, and making the behavior of parts different when studied in isolation or within the whole” (Bertalanffy, 1968, p. 31).

In the field of sociology these complex ideas were also being examined. Feeling that culture had not been given independent variable status, Talcott Parsons and later a

student of his at Harvard, Bernard Barber struggled with this idea of social systems theory. Parsons (1954) developed a systems concept:

The essential presupposition of social system theory is that its basic stuff is, to use what has become a technical term, “action”: that is, the exchange of meanings and ideas in social interaction through mutually understood symbols . . . “Action” is the basic stuff of the social world in the same way that “life” is the basic stuff of the biological world and that “matter” is the basic stuff of the physical world. All three of these basic stuffs are ontologically and theoretically coequal. . . All three stuffs are partly independent of one another and each is partly and always interdependent with the other two. . . (cited in Wearne, 2002, p. 94).

Barber went on to formulate his own social systems understanding:

[A]s a set of interdependent independent variables, and the theoretical task of analysis of the social system can be specified as exploring the functional or causative relationships among its categories, as well as investigating social stability and social change that is inherent in any particular society (cited in Wearne, 2002, p. 95.)

The struggle for individuals working with the concept of social systems was not in the basic understanding of interdependence and independence that occurred. The trouble was that such a basic understanding limited the complexity of social systems and did not examine change occurring within the system. In the midst of interdependence and independence within a system, change and new creation take place in response to the action that exists between the parts. Piaget explained these actions within society as activities that reciprocally modify each other “according to certain laws of organization or equilibrium” (Piaget, 1995, p. 41). When these interactions are part of human behavior

they provide a starting point for understanding how interactions in social systems can modify the consciousness of individuals who are connected to them (Piaget, 1995).

Luhmann (1995), understanding the complexity of examining social systems, began to look not at parts and wholes as means of distinction but shifted his examination to see the difference between system and environment (Fleener & Rodgers, 1999). This shift provided a foundation in which to examine social systems that existed, such as organizations and societies (Luhmann, 1995).

Systems are oriented by their environment not just occasionally and adaptively, but structurally, and they cannot exist without an environment. They constitute and maintain themselves by creating and maintaining a difference from their environment, and they use their boundaries to regulate this difference. Without difference from an environment, there would not even be self-reference, because difference is the functional premise of self-referential operations. (Luhmann, 1995, p. 17).

Luhmann goes on to explain that “all communication depends on its environment as a source of energy and information, and every communication indisputably refers via meaning references directly or indirectly to the system’s environment” (Luhmann, 1995, p. 144). Understanding is an essential feature in how communication comes about and how it is comprehended. Communication provides a means by which action proceeds. Communicative action is a test of understanding. Hence, when a person understands a connection he or she is able to comprehend values and signs of the system, meaning that communication is possible because of a self-referential process (Luhmann, 1995).

Luhmann, in binding action and communication, created a means of understanding social systems as communication systems. When those communicating

have a common system where ideas are exchanged, it does not guarantee sameness of understanding but does provide an environment where understanding can occur.

Communication becomes a means for the researcher to look at a system and understand the dynamics of the exchange taking place in order to discover the active values that exist (Piaget, 1995).

### *In Summary*

The theoretical perspectives laid out in this chapter form the overarching framework for data interpretation. The complexity of this case exists in the interactions that occur between individual participants as they work to plan the Sunday School program. Understanding the way individuals construct personal knowledge, work with others, and come to act are elements of this study. The local church setting, the United Methodist Denomination, and the secular culture each affect participants in this study. Recognizing these elements exist, noting their complexity, and studying them from a social systems perspective will help reveal the depth and dimension of this research.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I am presenting the research design and methodology. I will introduce the study with a brief explanation of the context. Next, I will lay the foundation for the use of case study research. I will address the data collection procedures, my method of data analysis, and establish guidelines for this study. Finally, I will share information about the participants, the setting, and brief summation of each planning meeting. The topics discussed in this chapter afford the reader the opportunity to understand this case study in depth.

#### *The Focus of this Study*

Members of the Congregational Development Commission and the Bi-District Board of Missions determined there was a need for a new church on the west side of a growing suburban area. The Bishop appointed Reverend Shaw August 15, 1999 to begin the new church. The Oklahoma Annual Conference paid Reverend Shaw's salary and gave him an expense allowance as he set out to undertake starting a new church. He attended training sessions to help him begin this process. It was then up to Reverend Shaw to devise a plan based on the knowledge he had gleaned from his training and his personal experience in ministry to launch the church.

Fourth United Methodist Church began with a preview service on March 5, 2000. Attendance at this service was approximately 100 people. Half of those in attendance were from a large metropolitan church in the state capital city, where Reverend Shaw had served as associate pastor. They came to support the founding of this church but did not intend to join the congregation. The other people who attended the service came after

hearing about it through word of mouth and two canvassing endeavors in west side neighborhoods. The official start of the church was March 26, 2000. Reverend Shaw sent a direct mailing to a large base of residents in the western part of the city. The official kickoff of the church had approximately 90 individuals in attendance. Sunday worship has continued every week since March 26, 2000. Fourth United Methodist Church averaged 68 individuals in worship during the year 2000.

The congregation met at 9:30 on Sunday mornings at a local elementary school cafeteria, tucked inside an upper middle class neighborhood on the west side of the city. At Fourth United Methodist Church several children attended each week, with an average of 15 on a regular Sunday. At this point the children's program involved time during Worship with the pastor. After this children's moment, many went to the gym for Children's Church. There they met for Children's Church during the second half hour of adult Worship. Children's Church included a lesson, refreshments, and free time. Many of the families who frequented Fourth United Methodist Church were accustomed to Sunday School being a part of the Sunday morning lineup. Because of this the regular participants at the church saw a need for a more intentional program of Christian education for the children. They also believed a strong children's Sunday School would attract other families to the church. With these thoughts in mind, frequent attendants set out to plan and implement such a program for their church.

In May 2000, the District Superintendent asked me to serve as interim pastor giving Reverend Shaw the chance to take the summer off while he dealt with his wife's illness and comforted their three young children. His wife died June 15, 2000. I served as interim pastor beginning June 4, finishing in the early part of August. During the summer, many individuals expressed the need for a Sunday School program. When

Reverend Shaw returned in August of 2000, he began talking about his desire for a new Sunday School program for children attending the church.

After I completed my interim term as pastor of Fourth United Methodist Church I returned to another church in the area. During the following months Reverend Shaw continued to stay in contact sharing his desire to begin a Sunday School program for children. He hoped I might participate in the planning process. After doing some checking, I discovered no research existed documenting the experience of starting a Sunday School for children in a new church. The Sunday School inception at Fourth United Methodist Church provided an untapped research opportunity. After several discussions with Reverend Shaw, he agreed to allow me to attend the planning meetings for the new Sunday School program.

### *Case Study Research*

After securing this research opportunity, I chose to follow a case study design that offers the chance to look in-depth at a particular situation and gather rich information existing within a real life setting (Patton, 1987; Starke, 1995). A case study provides an applicable methodology when interested individuals need detail and depth to understand an issue in context (Creswell, 1998). It is a solid method to use when the investigator has little control over the set of events or when “variables are so embedded in the situation as to be impossible to identify ahead of time” (Merriam, 1998). This approach is useful when little research has been conducted to present basic information in that area (Merriam, 1998). Case Study research enables the reader to “understand processes of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object” (Sanders, 1981, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 33). Case study research involves the study of a “specific and bounded (in time and place) instance of a

phenomenon” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 12). In the area of Christian education the process of case study provides a means for individuals to reflect on ministry issues (Mahan, Troxell, & Allen, 1993).

I chose this case study for two reasons: its uniqueness and its ability to inform (Creswell, 1998). By following the work of only one church, I looked with depth at the detail and complexity of the case (Merriam, 1998). The case study provided the opportunity to explore the inception of a Sunday School program for children. Because of the unique nature of a Sunday School inception, I limited this research to the case at hand, Fourth United Methodist Church. This study took place over a period of nine months, from January until September 2001. The efforts of the participants as they worked together to design, plan, and begin the children’s Sunday School program revealed the complexity of the undertaking. The depth and intricacy of this single case provided a starting place for further research in this unexplored area.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed a structure for understanding a case study which includes examining “the problem, the context, the issues, and the ‘lessons learned’” (cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 36). Following the proposed structure, the problem was the creation of a Sunday School program for children at Fourth United Methodist Church. After identifying the problem, attention turned to understanding the context of the issue at hand. Recognizing the historical context of Christianity, the evolution of the Sunday School and the current situation afforded the reader a broader understanding of the context of this case study. This base of understanding provided the reader a chance to see how men and women responded to the task before them. Examining the context of this research, provides future readers a chance to examine the findings from this study in an

appropriate way. Using this contextual grounding, the reader could then build his or her own understandings of this case study.

The issues faced by participants in this study surfaced as they developed a Sunday School program for children. The work before the group unfolded as they proceeded toward reaching their goals. As the volunteers worked together concerns and problems emerged and evolved. This development of issues engaged the participants to work through the process, depending on one another and the available resources. By analyzing the work of the participants and the problems they dealt with during the inception process, this case study provided new insights and perspectives which became the foundation for the “lessons learned.”

#### *Data Collection*

During my proposal meeting before the members of my doctoral committee, some of the participants expressed concern about my role in the inception process and how it could affect the research data. This concern is one that often arises in qualitative research. Because the members of the congregation knew me from my work at the church the previous summer and understood that I was doing research, my role became one of overt participant observer (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). This familiarity can be an advantage in providing the field researcher with the possibility of collecting his or her best data (Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagaard, 1994). Yet, a researcher must also be careful not to become so involved with the participants that the original intent of the observations and research is lost (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992). In my attempt to find balance as both a minister and a researcher, I laid the framework for participation at committee meetings. Committee members knew they could ask me questions directly, but I would refrain from offering unsolicited advice.

In order to collect data that revealed the complexity of the process, I asked to tape record each organizational planning meeting. I also attended the teacher training session and observed on the day the Sunday School actually began. I received approval to do this study from Reverend Shaw and the laity, my doctoral committee, and the Oklahoma University Institutional Review Board.

I chose to use a convenience sampling for this research because of the volunteer nature of the church and its participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). I had no control over the participants who volunteered to help plan the new Sunday School program. At the January through April meetings, members who took part did so because of their interest in helping plan the Sunday School program. After the April meeting, members of the Nominations committee chose the participants to serve on the Education committee. This process followed the normal church structure set by United Methodist polity. This meant that the participants at each meeting could include the minister, people who attended because of their interest in the children's Sunday School, men and women appointed to serve by the Nominations committee, or guests invited to attend from outside the local church membership.

I obtained permission to tape record each participant prior to the start of the first meeting he or she attended (*see Appendix C, Approval to Tape Record*). Everyone who came to a meeting agreed to be taped. I used audio taping because it was convenient and because I could replay, study, and analyze the organizational meetings with profundity (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). This process also provided a permanent record of events that could be compared to a similar case study, in the future, if so desired. The use of audio tapes also has limits in that they only provide a record of verbal behavior. Background noise and difficulty distinguishing the voices of participants at group meetings also exist

(Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). I addressed these issues with the use of multiple recorders set up around the table where the group gathered. I kept a record of attendance from each meeting, and my familiarity with the individuals within the church helped me to distinguish the voices on the recordings. I personally transcribed all the tapes from the committee meetings. Each meeting provided 25 to 35 pages of typed data.

It is important when doing research to use several techniques for gathering information to create triangulation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Methodological triangulation in case studies primarily refers to observing, interviewing, and reviewing documents (Starke, 1995). The use of various data sources to create triangulation provides a way to see if events being observed and reported convey the same meaning under different circumstances (Lewis, 2003; Starke, 1995). In order to meet this requirement I gathered several data sources. The transcripts from each meeting provided the central data source for this research. The second data source for this research included the minutes taken at each meeting and all handouts. The third data source included interviews with both Reverend Shaw and Ann, the Education committee chairperson.

The individuals participating in this research also provided a means for triangulation. By gathering data from the minister, lay participants, and visiting experts, I secured three sets of information that could be compared. The minister was my first data set. The group of lay volunteers who helped plan the Sunday School were my second data set, and my third set included the visiting experts who attended meetings. These three data sets provided a means to examine the internal validity of the study. By comparing the information I was able to establish that the data sources were consistent and the findings and conclusions trustworthy (Langenbach, et al., 1994).

Another means of data examination I used was member checking. This gave the participants in the research the opportunity to read over and examine rough drafts in order to provide critical observations and interpretations and examine the data for accuracy and palatability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Starke, 1995). Both Reverend Shaw and Ann read over the written material that described the inception process. This type of examination by participants is another means of triangulation (Merriam, 1998; Starke, 1995).

### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis that took place during this research project included an examination of both the participants and the process. After transcribing the tapes from every committee meeting I looked for “coherent categories, patterns and themes” and coded them (Patton, 1987, p. 149). I dissected every meeting separately and in sequential order relating to the whole. Throughout the collection of data, new ideas and insights emerged.

As an overt participant observer, I did not guide the meeting’s flow or focus. My role as researcher was to look at the content and process involved in the Sunday School planning. After the coding, I analyzed the data sources using the short-term and long-term goals of the minister and the evolving concerns of the laity. I scrutinized the data sets to understand the work done by the minister, lay members, and visiting experts. By looking at these sets the historical connections, the effects of current culture, and understandings held about Christianity displayed the social systems link. The categories and themes that emerged assisted in answering the primary question driving this research: How does a new church go about developing a Sunday School program for children?



Because the purpose of this study is to examine how one church formed its Sunday School from inception until implementation, I analyzed the data collected in depth, in parts, and as a whole. The goal of this study is not to judge success or failure but to provide information through data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992).

### *Research Limitations*

As with any research I will address study limitations that exist. The limited ability to make generalizations from one case study is evident. Because of the lack of research in this area, I cannot consistently judge my findings with other research. Hence, the issue I need to address “is not whether findings would be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 1998, p. 206). The use of triangulation methods will also help to show integrity of the data.

While the directive of qualitative methods involves entering into the field and learning about the case study first hand, this can also be one of its greatest challenges (Patton, 1987). Serving as interim pastor prior to this research study opened a door to the people of the church and its infrastructures. Participants in this research were familiar with me. This familiarity could blur the line between observer and participant. Serving in both an observer role, and occasionally being asked to share, might affect both the data collected and the data analysis phase. After looking over the data from each meeting I felt that the guidelines for my participation minimized my effect upon this research study. At three of the meetings outside experts attended to discuss curriculum. At these meetings few committee members asked me questions. At meetings where no expert was in attendance, members tended to ask me more questions because they thought I could provide helpful information. Overall, this framework of providing

answers to direct questions appeared to have furnished guidelines to committee participants. I cannot deny my role as a professional in the field of ministry, but through the use of precautions, such as direct questioning, hopefully my effect on these research findings are minimal.

### *The Participants*

The participants in this study were individuals who attended Fourth United Methodist Church. Members on the staff at the church as well as volunteers made up the participant pool. The criteria for selecting participants for this study included their connection to Fourth United Methodist Church and their presence at planning meetings. Although all of the participants have been cited, I will introduce only the women and men who attended three or more meetings, or were invited guests. I chose to introduce participants in the order of their appearance at planning meetings, changing their names to shield their identity.

*Reverend Shaw* lead the first organizational meeting for the Sunday School planning committee. Reverend Shaw was a single father of four children; three lived in the home. He was in his mid 40s. He had a Bachelor's of Science degree in Communications and a Master's of Divinity degree. Reverend Shaw worked in radio and business prior to entering seminary; he was considered a second-career minister. He was ordained as a Deacon in 1993 and received Elders ordination in 1996. Before his appointment as pastor of Fourth United Methodist Church, he served at two large, multi-staffed churches. At these churches he was in charge of adult education and evangelism. This was the first church the Bishop appointed him to fulfill the role of senior pastor. He had very little training or experience in the area of Christian education with children.

*Mona* attended the first Sunday School planning meeting in January. Reverend Shaw appointed *Mona* to chair the Sunday School planning committee between the January and February meetings. Reverend Shaw asked her to chair the committee for two main reasons: He felt she was a mature person who could accomplish a task of some complexity, and she had two children who were in the age group to participate in the new Sunday School program. *Mona* had a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Masters of Education degree in Counseling Psychology. *Mona* worked full-time as a director in the area of mental health services. She grew up regularly attending an Independent Christian Church. Her family began attending Fourth United Methodist Church during the fall of 2000. *Mona* served as the chairperson of the Sunday School planning committee for two meetings, February 22, and April 5, 2001. Members of the Nomination committee then asked her to take over as the chairperson for the Worship committee. Following her appointment, she attended one meeting of the newly formed Education committee which took over the responsibility of designing and implementing the Sunday School program.

*Ann* attended all of the Sunday School planning meetings except the February 22 gathering. She was a homemaker and married mother of three children. The youngest is a senior in high school. *Ann* had been in the Methodist Denomination all of her life and had taught Sunday School for many years. *Ann* also served as the chairperson of Children's Ministry at a large United Methodist Church in the capital city. When *Ann* took over leadership of the Education committee, she had experience as a lay volunteer. In addition, *Ann* had been a member of several volunteer organizations, serving as President of two such organizations. She attended college where she pursued a degree in early childhood but left college to get married. Members of the Nomination committee asked her between the April 5, and May 31, 2001, meetings to assume the role of chairperson of the newly

formed Education committee. Her family began attending Fourth United Methodist Church in early April of 2000.

*Marge*, a single woman with no children, was in her early forties. She worked in business operations at a local hospital. Marge went to a Catholic Church until she was about eight. Her family later attended a Baptist Church. Before coming to Fourth United Methodist Church she had not attended a church for ten years. She began attending Fourth United Methodist Church during its first month of existence. Marge came to two Sunday School planning meetings. She was then asked by members of the Nomination committee to assume the role of Evangelism chairperson. She volunteered to team teach the second and third grade Sunday School class with Keegan. In August, she attended the Teacher Training session.

*Angela and Don* were married and had three young children. Angela was a homemaker and worked part-time. Before coming to Fourth United Methodist Church, she was part of the Lutheran Denomination. Angela attended three Sunday School planning meetings and the teacher training session. Her husband, Don, accompanied her to one planning meeting and the teacher training session. They came to Fourth United Methodist Church during its first month of existence. Both Angela and Don agreed to teach Sunday School, though neither had ever taught before. Angela taught the kindergarten and first grade Sunday School class. Don taught the fourth and fifth grade Sunday School class.

*Briann*, the Children's Church coordinator, was a college student pursuing a degree in Elementary Education from the local university. Briann grew up as an active member in a United Methodist Church in the capital city. She was also a regular participant at the Wesley Foundation on campus, a college ministry sponsored by the United Methodist

Church. She was the first staff person hired at Fourth United Methodist Church. She led both the Children's Choir and Children's Church. She also agreed to teach the middle school Sunday School class with her fiancé.

*Jenny* was a lay member in her middle seventies. She had worked as both an Executive Secretary and taught secondary education at a Christian School. She grew up in the Methodist Church. Before coming to Fourth United Methodist Church she had taught Sunday School for children and served on several committees. Along with her husband, she had participated at Fourth United Methodist Church since March of 2000. Members of the Nomination committee asked Jenny to serve on the newly formed Education committee. She attended all of the regularly scheduled meetings of the committee after her appointment.

*Caitlann* was a trained Christian educator. She was a Deacon in full connection in the United Methodist Church. One of the roles of a Deacon, as stated in *The Book of Discipline* (2000), was to assist "lay persons as they claim their own ministry" (p. 187). Caitlann is the director of Education, Children, Family and Adult Ministries, a position she had held for nine years, and her responsibilities included being a resource person for local Methodist Churches in the Oklahoma Conference. Ann invited Caitlann to provide guidance and answer questions for the committee. She also led the teacher training session.

*Ellen* was a Regional Curriculum Consultant. Her job was to explain how curriculum resources are developed, to preview curriculum, and to help Sunday School teachers use the curriculum effectively. She was an active lay member of a large United Methodist Church in the eastern part of the state. Ellen was trained through United Methodist sponsored programs to serve in her current position. The Department of

Interpretation and Field Service of the Division of Church Publications, which was connected to both the General Board of Discipleship and The United Methodist Publishing House, sponsored her position. Ellen worked as both a consultant and workshop leader for churches in her region. She met with Reverend Shaw and Ann, July 5, 2001, to preview curriculum samples and answer questions.

*The Setting for the Planning Meetings and Future Sunday School*

The meetings for the inception of Fourth United Methodist Church's Sunday School took place at three different locations. The first three meetings on January 24, February 22, and April 5, were at a local United Methodist Church. The pastor gave permission for meetings to occur in the Church's library, a small room with a table and chairs. The door could be shut for privacy. One meeting, June 21, took place at a room in the local public library. The May 31, July 5, July 21, and August 29 meetings met at Ann's home. She held these meetings in her family room. The last meeting which was a teacher training session met in her formal dining area and entry. She supplied tables for participants' ease while they examined different materials.

The church worshiped in one of the city's elementary schools. The future Sunday School convened in the school gymnasium. The carpeted gymnasium had a stage on one end and no air conditioning. Because the space was open, the Education committee made the decision to secure rolling dividers which they could store on the stage during the week. The dividers create four classroom areas, an area for each of the following groups: three- and four-year-olds, kindergarten and first grades, second and third grades, and fourth and fifth grades. The nursery met in the gymnasium, partitioned off and on the opposite side from the classroom area. An area under the stage was available to store Sunday School supplies.

### *Planning Meetings*

The Sunday School kick-off was on September 9, 2001. Of the eight meetings prior to the kick-off, seven were planning meetings. The final meeting was a teacher training session for the volunteer Sunday School teachers. Caitlann lead the teacher training session. I attended and tape recorded each of these meetings. The following is a summary of each meeting along with a list of the participants and the main topics of discussion.

#### *Planning Meeting - January 24, 2001*

The first planning meeting announced to the congregation included an open invitation extended to anyone who was interested in helping design a Sunday School program for children. Six laity attended the meeting: Mona, Ann, Summer, Marge, Angela, Brenna, and Reverend Shaw. All of the participants in the planning phase, except Reverend Shaw and Don, were women. Most of the participants had children, representing a broad range of ages from infants through high school age.

Reverend Shaw lead the first meeting, where he had members close their eyes and listen as he drew a mental picture of his idea of an exemplary Sunday School.

Participants then introduced themselves to one another. Reverend Shaw asked the participants to think about their experiences in Sunday School. He had them share what they felt were the hallmarks of a good Sunday School ministry for children. Some of the ideas mentioned included: volunteers who are adult role models for the children, the need for two teachers per classroom, and a curriculum that was in accordance with United Methodist theology. Near the end of the meeting, Reverend Shaw suggested attendants select a chairperson before the next meeting; those present agreed.

*Planning Meeting - February 22, 2001*

Between January 24 and February 22, Mona who attended the first called meeting agreed to serve as the chairperson of the Sunday School planning committee. Reverend Shaw and six laity were present at this meeting; they included Mona, Summer, Angela, Debbie, Briann, and Don. Three participants were new: Debbie, Briann, and Don.

Mona reviewed the occurrences of the first meeting. The participants moved to figure out how many children currently attended the church, their ages, and grade-levels in school. They used this information as they looked at how the classes should be divided. They felt it would be helpful to have someone to coordinate Sunday School curriculum, organize teachers, and assemble supplies - a Sunday School Coordinator.

The participants moved toward the creation of an Interest Indicator. The Indicator would show who held an interest in teaching children as either a regular or substitute teacher. Discussion about the role of the parent followed, leading participants to ponder if parents would be required to participate in some capacity. Other topics included volunteer commitment terms, the starting date, and the time for Sunday School.

*Planning Meeting - April 4, 2001*

The April meeting had four participants: Reverend Shaw, Mona, Ann, and Marge. The meeting began with a review of the earlier meetings. The discussion continued concerning the length of commitment volunteer teachers should make. Group members determined breaking the children into four classes would require eight volunteer teachers. Members of the planning committee created and distributed an Interest Indicator. It was determined the church newsletter could be used to get the word out about the need for volunteer teachers. There was some discussion about whether choosing curriculum would make recruitment of teachers easier. The group examined a few samples of curriculum put



out by Cokesbury, the United Methodist Publishing House. They made no decision concerning the choice of curriculum. Before concluding the meeting, the participants discussed talking to children about what they would enjoy in a Sunday School program.

*Planning Meeting - May 31, 2001*

Between the April meeting and the May meeting, a major change happened in the committee formation. Participants in the planning process to this point had volunteered because they were interested in organizing the new Sunday School program for children. Because of the pastor's and church participants' desire to constitute the church in the near future they decided to put into place official committees. The pastor, along with members of the Nominating committee, asked church participants to serve on several committees designated in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (2000). The chairperson, Mona, who lead the Sunday School committee movement during two of the first three meetings, left to spearhead the Worship committee. Members of the Nominations committee asked Mona to lead the Worship committee because of her participation in the church ensemble. The members of the Nominations committee believed that Ann, who had experience working in Christian education in other Methodist Churches, could lead the Education committee. She agreed to serve in this capacity. This committee would continue the work done at the previous three meetings and direct other areas of congregational education as well. This change needs to be noted because the purpose of the committee was altered. The first three meetings had only one goal, the formation of a new Sunday School for children. The committee that met beginning in May was in charge of overseeing the following congregational education endeavors: Sunday School for children and adults, Vacation Bible School (VBS), congregational education, small groups, youth ministry, confirmation classes, teacher recruitment and

training, retreats, elementary and youth camps, curriculum, nursery and toddler classes, Children's Church, newsletter articles, Disciple Bible Study, college ministry, third grade Bibles, supplies, and the education budget. The scope of the Education committee was much greater than the previous Sunday School formation committee.

The Education committee had nine members. Only three of these individuals attended meetings for the previous Sunday School inception committee, Reverend Shaw, Ann, and Briann. Five of the members were lay people who were active at the church, Jenny, Juanita, Daniel, Bob, and Hazel. Four committee members were church staff: the youth minister, Sherri; the nursery worker, Shannon; and Children's Church coordinator. Briann; and Reverend Shaw. After being appointed and agreeing to serve on the committee Shannon, Daniel, Bob, and Hazel never attended a planning meeting prior to the inception of the Sunday School.

Ann led four committee meetings and the teacher training session prior to the Sunday School kick-off. Four individuals were present at the May 31 meeting, Ann, Sherri, Jenny, and Reverend Shaw. Jenny, a newly appointed committee member, had not attended any of the previous three meetings. Because of all the changes that took place, Ann reviewed what occurred at the three prior gatherings. She also spent time visioning with those present as they contemplated the work they needed to do prior to the Sunday School kick-off. Discussion centered around the question: "Why do people come to Sunday School?" The participants discussed the many aspects of the Education committee as compared to the Sunday School planning committee. With so many changes, they decided to push the Sunday School start back from the proposed date of August 19 to September 9, 2001. Changing the date gave the committee members three more weeks to prepare prior to the Sunday School inception.

*Planning Meeting - June 21, 2001*

On June 21, 2001, the eight people present included: Ann, Briann, Jenny, Juanita, Mona, Angela, Reverend Shaw, and Caitlann. Caitlann was an invited guest from the Annual Conference Council of the United Methodist Church. Ann gave Caitlann an update of the work the committee had done to date. They looked over the responses from the Interest Indicators. There were two volunteers to teach, eight volunteers to substitute, and five who said they would help in other ways. Caitlann shared that she believed the aim of the church was to make disciples, followers of Jesus. She stated that relationship was important in planning a children's Sunday School program and saw it as a way that the committee could address the issue of hospitality and reaching out to others. Caitlann then introduced the available curriculum that the United Methodist Publishing House produces and distributes through Cokesbury. She brought samples and information about each curriculum. At this meeting Caitlann shared both her knowledge and her view about Christian education.

*Planning Meeting - July 5, 2001*

The next meeting was July 5, 2001. Four individuals attended this meeting, Ann, Sherri, Reverend Shaw, and an invited guest, Ellen. Many members could not participate because of the date and time. It was an afternoon meeting, set for 1:00 p.m.

Ellen's connection to Cokesbury gave her a deeper understanding of how the curriculum was created, its rotation cycles, and other intricacies. She shared with the group information about curriculum and answered questions about children, youth, and adult curriculum. She left several samples of the available curriculum with the participants. Ellen also addressed the questions raised about recruiting teachers.

*Planning Meeting - July 12, 2001*

On July 12, 2001, Ann, Jenny, Briann, and Reverend Shaw were present at the meeting. Since the last meeting, individuals took home samples of the curriculum to examine. Most of the discussion at this meeting centered around the curriculum. Members shared their opinions and concerns.

*Teacher Training Session - August 29, 2001*

The final meeting was August 29, 2001, a teacher training session lead by Caitlann. Twelve people were present at the meeting: Ann, Reverend Shaw, Angela, Don, Debbie, Keegan, Marge, Jean, Carol, Leah, Helen, and Caitlann. Nine of the twelve were individuals who agreed to teach classes or serve as substitutes in the new Sunday School program. Five of the new teachers never attended a planning meeting for the Sunday School. Caitlann introduced herself to everyone at the meeting and restated her role. Because many of those present had not taught children's Sunday School, they asked Caitlann several questions. The individuals who would be teaching were concerned about several issues right away: how to keep the children's attention if there were only two in attendance; how children would feel if they were separated from their friends; and how one girl would handle a class with all boys. Parents of the affected children raised the last two concerns. Caitlann also shared information about the curriculum each class would use. She gave the teachers advice on how to plan each week so they would be prepared on Sunday mornings.

Ann, knowing the workings of Fourth United Methodist Church, shared information about the room setup, availability of supplies, and the time for Sunday School. Several of the teachers appeared comfortable with what they were to do, while others felt concerned about their new role. There were two teachers for each classroom:

three- and four-year-olds, kindergarten and first grade, second and third grade, and fourth and fifth grade. Each teacher committed to teach for one quarter of a year. They would be responsible for their class through the first of December.

### *In Summary*

The work of Reverend Shaw, the laity, and invited guests, was the focus of this study. The task undertaken by the participants began as they met together to plan, make decisions, and implement their design. Using a case study design helped me to focus on the data sources and data sets in order to discover details that existed. I hope the information provided in this chapter revealed the complexity of the case being studied. The reader, by being introduced to the participants and glimpsing the meeting happenings will better grasp the depth and detail involved in this research. By providing the reader with this context I have afforded him or her the opportunity to look at the information gathered in new ways. With this foundation set, I hope the details and depth provided in this case study will help others understand the complex work involved in creating a Sunday School program for children.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the process that one church goes through in creating a children's Sunday School program from the outset to implementation. One question driving this research is: How does a new church go about developing a Sunday School program for children? By answering this question my aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the process individuals engaged in as they worked together to create a children's Sunday School program.

In this chapter I examined the data that was collected during seven planning meetings and one teacher training session, the process participants followed, the concerns they considered, and the content they addressed during the inception of the program. The data included minutes of all meetings, interviews with participants, and all documents discussed during the meetings. I will study the information from a social systems perspective. The ability to view the changes occurring during the planning process and how such actions reciprocally modify each other reveal the complexity of this research process. Using this approach to analyze the data poses its own set of challenges. The research findings cannot be viewed in a linear way but need to be viewed through complex connections. This means that as the findings unfold in this chapter, they may at times appear unclear because decisions made in the planning process evolve at different points throughout the committee gatherings. Through a careful examination of the entire chapter, the reader will recognize the complexity of the relationships among the pastor, the laity, and the outside experts who helped during the planning process. The development of

these working relationships impacted the way the committee accomplished its task of beginning a Sunday School program. During this study, I was both excited and challenged by the revelations that came from such complexity.

### *Underlying Themes Emerging from the Data*

At the outset, five themes emerged as I examined the data: 1) the desire Reverend Shaw and the lay members had to share the Christian faith with children; 2) the lack of educational instruction Reverend Shaw received prior to beginning a Christian education program for children; 3) the limited knowledge the lay volunteers had (i.e., regarding educational theory and practice, Christian tenets, Sunday School teaching) upon entering this process; 4) the power of an individual's personal experience; 5) and the effect secular culture had upon lay volunteers. Subsequent examination demonstrated how each component within the system was connected to, or could have its own effect upon every other part. These themes are not isolated from each other but are interconnected, creating effects upon the developing social system.

All the individual's who participated in this research joined for different reasons. Reverend Shaw was a seminary-trained, ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church. He both understood and embraced his role as the administrator of the church, accepting the responsibility of making decisions related to worship (i.e., time change), denominational polity (i.e., forming the Nominations committee, constituting the church), and volunteer laity (i.e., asking individuals to lead committees, planning the Sunday School). He was also concerned with "growing the church"; as pastor he accepted his role as evangelist. He believed that in order for the church to grow, programs needed to be in place to encourage participation. For example, Sunday School would draw families with children.

The lay participants also had concerns that began to emerge through the data. The lay members felt the establishment of a children's Sunday School program was important, and they were willing to help plan the program with Reverend Shaw. The laity felt comfortable sharing their ideas and sometimes challenging Reverend Shaw's understandings, but they struggled with their own lack of knowledge about the Christian faith. Because of this, the lay participants felt ill-equipped to teach about the faith. Many agreed only to teach once a training session was planned.

Both the lay members of the church and Reverend Shaw had little training regarding the inception of a Sunday School program for children. However, their desire to create a program pushed them to work cooperatively, bringing together resources (i.e. experts, curriculum) to aid the accomplishment of their task. Hence, their desire to see this program put in place was stronger than their fear and lack of knowledge. Because they wanted the children to learn about faith, they were willing to do what it took to see that a program began.

#### *Reverend Shaw's Vision and Goal Statements*

In August of 1999 when Reverend Shaw was appointed to begin a new church, he wrote a vision statement (*Appendix D - Vision for New Church*). The statement revealed his understandings about the role of the church and its participants. His vision statement included the following section about children:

I see a church that recognizes children are our greatest treasure and that caring for and teaching them are our greatest responsibilities, given us by God. I see a church that looks at the world and sees children being abused, neglected and unloved and weeps. A church that hears God's call to minister to and love all children, both within our community of faith and beyond.



In his vision statement he also wrote a section concerning the role of the laity in the church community.

I see a church with a servant heart that believes *all* laity are called to be ministers, equipped to minister to the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of those within our church, our community and our world. My vision is of a community of believers who recognizes that the work of the church in reaching the lost, and making disciples is the highest calling all of us share. It is that understanding of our holy task that propels us to be willing to take risks in creating ministries. I see a church that is not afraid to experiment, to ‘think outside of the box’ when the task is transforming lives one at a time.

The above statements revealed that Reverend Shaw entered into the establishment of a new church with personal beliefs about both children and adult church participants. Reverend Shaw stated that one of the goals of Fourth United Methodist Church was to teach children. He also believed the laity should be active in the life of the church. He considered it their job to be ministers to others in the church and beyond. He also thought that to serve others involved creating new ministries that could make a difference in people’s lives. In the vision statement, he left open the possibility that the ministries created by the laity of the church did not have to follow a traditional method. He wanted the laity to “think outside of the box” to “not be afraid to experiment” as they planned new programs.

Reverend Shaw as he set the goals for the children’s Sunday School program revisited his vision statement. Based on ideas set forth in the vision statement he then developed his goals for a new children’s Sunday School program. At the first meeting Reverend Shaw shared these goals with those in attendance. The goals stated below

represent the ideas he began with as he moved to call together laity who would help to create the Sunday School program.

*Goals for Children's Sunday School, Fourth United Methodist Church, January 24, 2001*

Reverend Shaw expressed his goals as follows:

In the vision statement I wrote for the church in its inception back in August of 1999, I wrote that, 'Children are the church's greatest treasure and the care and teaching of them is one of the most important responsibilities given us by God.' I still believe that and want our church to design and implement an education ministry for children that is second to none. It won't happen overnight. It won't happen by the time we start this new ministry, but it is something I want us to strive toward and have as a goal. The following is a list of short-term and long-term goals I would like to see the church meet in regards to our children's ministry.

*Short -Term Goals*

- \* Design and implement this new ministry within four months
- \* Heavy involvement in planning and in startup activities by lay persons
- \* Parent volunteer involvement in teaching classes
- \* Differentiate what will happen in Sunday School and Children's Church
- \* Decide what curriculum we will use

*Long -Term Goals*

- \* Confirmation classes
- \* Expanded Vacation Bible School program
- \* Children's mission projects

- \* Teacher training
- \* Mid-Week programs for children

Using Reverend Shaw's short-term goals I examined meeting minutes to understand the impact of these goals on the planning process. Reverend Shaw lead only one meeting before he asked Mona to take over the role of chairperson. When Ann took over as chairperson of the Education committee she also assumed the task of running the meetings. When lay members began leading the Sunday School planning group and the Education committee, Reverend Shaw's involvement in the meetings changed. The responsibility for following the agenda fell to the laity; however, Reverend Shaw continued to raise concerns and take part in group discussions at each meeting. He also participated in every meeting except the teacher training session. At the teacher training session he welcomed individuals, thanked them for their participation, lead a prayer and then left.

#### *Reverend Shaw's Short-Term Goals*

##### *Goal One - Design and Implement This New Ministry Within Four Months*

Reverend Shaw made clear his enthusiasm and desire to begin an educational ministry for children in his first goal: "Design and implement this new ministry within four months." As Reverend Shaw shared his goal the first debate between lay members and clergy took place. Reverend Shaw asked the lay participants their thoughts about a beginning date for the children's Sunday School program. He then suggested a date that would correspond with the one year anniversary of the church in late March or early April. He also stated that, "Whenever we do it, let's make sure we do it as well as we can."

The laity at the meeting agreed with Reverend Shaw about his desire to plan a quality program noting that Briann was at least providing a Christian education experience during worship hour. Consequently they questioned Reverend Shaw's wish to have a program up and running in four months. It was Ann who first questioned Reverend Shaw.

Ann - I see it backwards from your first question. When should we implement this? I think that should be almost the last thing that we should look at right now. I think we should get in place more of: What do we need to implement it? How long is it going to take for us to accomplish that? Then, we can look at a date of when. We don't even know whether we are looking at two teachers, or are we looking at five teachers. How long will it take to get curriculum? How are we going to pay for it? To have your Sunday School class and be creative and fun you need to have supplies. Do we have that in place? To me those are the basics that you have to address before we say, 'Let's do it this day.'

Other laity at the meeting agreed with Ann's assessment concerning the arbitrary date. They also agreed with Reverend Shaw that it was important to begin "it as well as we can." Although Reverend Shaw's goal was to design and implement the program in four months he was willing to listen to Ann and other participants as they expressed their concern about rushing toward implementation. The questions raised by Ann also revealed her own desire to implement a quality program. The willingness of the laity to look at the program in a different way from Reverend Shaw showed that the laity involved in the planning process felt empowered to participate even if it involved questioning the ideas of their pastor.

It was during the second meeting in February that the laity raised the question of the target date for the program again. This time they suggested a date in August corresponding with the start of public school. Reverend Shaw liked the idea of making it a big event - a promotion Sunday. Yet, he also voiced his concern: "Do you think that is too far down the road to wait?" The lay participants articulated their opinion that during the summer months attendance is low, so that would not be a good time to begin. If they waited until after Labor Day, football at the local university would have begun, and some individuals would be traveling to away games. Debbie suggested that Sunday School could begin "the first Sunday after school starts" - August 19th. Participants agreed that parents with children would be in town, and with school starting it was an exciting time for the children.

The laity through discussion decided on a starting date of August 19, 2001. The date for Sunday School startup was determined by three things: the public school calendar, a holiday weekend, and the local university's football schedule. The influence of secular culture was one of the keys in determining the startup date set for the Sunday School program. The ability of the church participants to travel during the holiday weekend and to the university's away football games reflects the monetary status of many in this congregation.

During the planning process a profound change took place in the structure of the planning committee. Between the April and May meetings a more structured design assigned volunteers to serve on set committees. The structure followed the guidelines set by *The United Methodist Book of Discipline* (2000). Mona, who agreed to lead the Sunday School planning meetings upon Reverend Shaw's request, was moved to another

committee. Mona became the chairperson of the Worship committee. Ann became the new chairperson of the Education committee.

Ann lead her first meeting of the committee on May 31, 2001. After the Education committee formed lay members examined the date for the Sunday School startup once more. Although members of the planning group set and approved a starting date, Ann questioned it because the implementation seemed too close, only a few months away, to provide a quality program. Although the earlier meetings moved the committee to deal with several issues concerning the program they had made few formal decisions, so she voiced her concern to the newly formed committee.

Ann - In February that seemed like a good date but we may need to reevaluate. I want to look at this date because we need to find out who the Sunday School teachers will be, and we may need more time than we have allotted with people being out of town all summer. Not only do we need to get those teachers, we need to get them signed on in time to train them with the curriculum. . . . I would rather put it off a few weeks, getting it started, in order to train our teachers so that the teachers feel comfortable.

Rev. Shaw - We are going to have a big kick off on September 9.

Ann - Would you feel comfortable if we went with September 9 instead of August 19? One thing is - that gives the volunteer teachers a couple extra weeks. In the summer you are on vacation so much, and you are gone so much it is hard to recruit and train teachers.

Rev. Shaw - I think what we need to do is pick a date. If it is the ninth, that is just a date I am thinking about, then we figure out how we will push that date and how we are going to market it to get people there. When we get people there we

have things in place and ready to go. I don't want to wait till November or December.

Ann - The ninth gives us almost three more weeks. That is a lot of time.

Rev. Shaw - I think that is fine to do.

Ann's experience as a volunteer in the church and leader of several volunteer organizations may have given her a deeper understanding of the complexity of planning a large program. The questions she asked helped move the early discussion from one concerned with an arbitrary date to a conversation that began looking at the issues that needed to be addressed. Ann pushed once again for a later date, her concern was finding volunteer teachers and training them. Although Reverend Shaw did not want to push the date back too much, he offered an alternative date which would allow the committee three more weeks to prepare. He also appeared concerned about the committee choosing a date and sticking with it. The September 9, 2001, date was acceptable to Ann and other committee members present at the meeting.

The time frame for implementation Reverend Shaw set did not meet the expressed needs voiced by the laity. Reverend Shaw's goal of creating a quality program appeared to be more important than beginning the program within four months. The leadership changes in the planning committee impacted the beginning date for the Sunday School program. Reverend Shaw was willing to work with the lay members to set a date, and later when they revised it. Although Reverend Shaw turned over much of the planning process to the lay members, he continued to have a say in the formation of the Sunday School. He was willing to work cooperatively with the laity, yet as pastor he assumes a major leadership role.

### *Goal Two - Heavy Involvement in Planning and in Startup Activities by Lay Persons*

Reverend Shaw's second goal was to have "Heavy involvement in planning and in startup activities by lay persons." This was an interesting goal because in most cases a minister would assume that lay people would be heavily involved in planning based on the nature of the church setting. After I talked to Reverend Shaw about this goal, he stated that because he had not worked with all of the individuals at the church, he was unsure about their willingness to volunteer their time in the creation of a Sunday School program. He was also unaware of many of the lay persons' backgrounds and did not know if their education and experiences would help in the formation process.

As Reverend Shaw moved towards forming a group of interested individuals, he first made a blanket announcement asking for willing volunteers. He also talked to some laity individually inviting them to attend the first planning meeting. It was his hope that by securing some individuals, others would also join the planning process. Because the church had not been in existence long, Reverend Shaw did not have deep connections with most of the church participants. This lack of connection may have contributed to Reverend Shaw setting this goal. He did not have a proven track record with the individuals who he would be working with to create the Sunday School program.

Entering this process Reverend Shaw worried about the amount of involvement lay members were willing to allocate to this project. Research has shown that lay persons feel more empowered to do the work of the church when they are less familiar with the pastor (Monahan, 1999). The laity involved in the church, for the most part, had high levels of education and higher family incomes which also contributed to high levels of volunteerism (Hoge et al., 1998; Penner, 2002). Many were active in the



life of the church, attending other church related activities, a fact also associated with high levels of volunteerism (Hoge et al., 1998).

The laity who participated in the inception process had varied amounts of knowledge and experience with children's Sunday School. Some of the individuals who volunteered had participated in local church and United Methodist sponsored training sessions. Others had learned during on-the-job training, serving as volunteers in education departments at other churches. Few of the laity had a knowledge of educational theory and practice. Yet, having information in these areas is a key component in providing an effective Christian education program (Benson & Eklin, 1990; Benson et al., 1990).

When the laity came together for the first time they knew the central focus of the meeting was the creation of a new Sunday School program. At the first three planning meetings all of the individuals who participated did so as volunteers who offered their time to serve without being assigned to the task. All the volunteers but one had children. One lay volunteer was a father. He joined Reverend Shaw as the only two males involved in the planning process. All of these volunteers came together because they shared a similar dream, the desire to create a Sunday School program for children at the church. Research has shown that having a clear focus and purpose is an element needed in creating highly effective teams, teams of individuals that can reach their set goals (Sivasubramaniam, Murry, Avolio, & Jung, 2002).

The church continued to grow, with many visiting and, several individuals and families attending regularly. This growth and the pastor's wish to constitute Fourth United Methodist Church led to the formation of set committees. This change in the structure of the planning committee affected lay participation. Four of the seven laity who had regularly attended the first three Sunday School planning meetings assumed

leadership roles in other areas. Mona, who agreed to lead the Sunday School planning meetings upon Reverend Shaw's request, accepted the chairperson of Worship. Ann, who had experience working in Christian education in other Methodist churches, became the chairperson of the Education committee.

Several new individuals joined the Education committee at the Nominations committee's request. The individuals assigned to the Education committee generally were not as active in the life of the church as participants helping on the Sunday School planning committee. Reverend Shaw shared in a conversation I had with him that:

The Nominations committee believed that the individuals who were not as active in the life of the church might become more active if they were part of a committee. Also many of the participants at the first three meetings were very active, gifted, and dependable volunteers who were needed in leadership roles for other committees being formed.

The Nominations committee assembled a diverse group of individuals, a practice encouraged by *The Book of Discipline* (2000), of the United Methodist Church. When the Nominations committee met to assign individuals to the committee, they looked for men and women they believed would take an interest in the program and possibly even share their gifts within its confines. *The Book of Discipline* also encouraged inclusion and diversity among the members of each committee; two men and six women served, plus the members' ages spanned from a senior in high school to a woman in her seventies.

The participation of the laity in planning the Sunday School program dropped tremendously once the new church committees were in place. The volunteers who took a lead in planning at the first three meetings were serving in other roles that limited the time they could devote to helping with the new Sunday School. Ann found herself leading a

committee that had responsibility over the educational ministries of the church and fewer active participants. Three of the members who were asked to serve on the committee, and agreed to do so, never attended a meeting; another individual attended only once, while three others did attend two or more meetings of the Education committee.

The Education committee which replaced the Sunday School planning group found their many tasks daunting at times especially with the limited participation of committee members. Although planning the Sunday School program was a major part of the group's focus, they also dealt with Vacation Bible School and youth ministries. Several things happened that affected participation at the meetings. First, the focus of the committee was not as clear with several tasks instead of just one goal. Second, the first group of participants clearly believed in what they were doing and supported it with their time. The assigned committee members agreed to serve but appeared to be less invested in the work based on their lack of participation. Third, the assigned committee members were not as active in the life of the church as their predecessors. Their committee involvement was erratic or nonexistent, which supports the research findings: those who attended church frequently were usually more active volunteers (Hoge et al., 1998).

Ann's role as chairperson of the Education committee became more intense as she was also responsible for doing much of the behind-the-scenes work an active committee would usually be responsible for executing. As the date for beginning the Sunday School grew near, Ann worked an average of twenty hours each week. Without the work Ann did behind the scenes, it is doubtful the program would have been as organized or successful at implementation time. Ann's family income gave her the ability to give her time freely as a volunteer (Hoge et al., 1998; Penner, 2002). Ann's background in the United Methodist Church, her experience with children's ministry, her volunteer

leadership experience, and her desire for a strong Christian education program for children all seemed to contribute to her willingness and ability to help in the implementation process of the Sunday School program.

Reverend Shaw's wish for "heavy involvement" by lay persons in the planning and startup activities had mixed results. His first group of volunteers who offered their time and energy freely without being asked and because of their interest in the Sunday School program appeared more invested. They were interested, active church participants, with a clear goal of what they were coming together to plan; they also represented a core group of leaders in the church. Most of the men and women who attended knew each other through their participation at various church events. This familiarity may have laid a foundation for the safe exchange of ideas. This group of volunteers demonstrated their willingness to engage in the interchange of ideas as they worked together to process information. The committee members appeared to feel safe in sharing their opinions during the creation of the Sunday School program. Reverend Shaw, as leader of the church, was inclined to take directions from the committee participants; in return the committee participants were open to Reverend Shaw's suggestions. Had this group of lay members continued to serve on the Sunday School planning committee it is likely they would have remained active volunteers.

The second group, the assigned committee, saw limited involvement from its members. Most of the members of this group were not as active in the life of the church and because of this, they were less familiar with each other. The aims of the Education committee were extensive making it difficult to concentrate solely on the planning of the Sunday School program. With more work and less participation this group did not meet Reverend Shaw's desire for "heavy involvement."

### *Goal Three - Parent Volunteer Involvement in Teaching Classes*

The third goal was “Parent volunteer involvement in teaching classes.” As the committee discussed finding the volunteers needed to teach and help in the children’s Sunday School, they considered parents as a resource. During the January meeting, Reverend Shaw shared the knowledge he had about other church situations.

Rev. Shaw - The church in Kansas City we visited asked their parents to volunteer once a semester. They did not necessarily have to teach, but they did something to help. They don’t ask them all necessarily to teach, because not everybody can teach. They might come in and bring refreshments. I don’t think it should be restricted to parents, but I also agree that at the end of the day, that responsibility falls with the ones that have kids there.

Later he refers to the large church in the capital city where he served as associate pastor prior to coming to Fourth United Methodist Church.

Rev. Shaw - I think one of the ways that we demonstrate to our kids, make a statement about our commitment to our faith, is by being involved, both moms and dads. When I was at First Church, admittedly most of our teachers were our women, were moms, although we did have some of our dads participate. In fact, we had one couple that both participated, a dad and a mom, and so I hope that is something we will be thinking about.

Reverend Shaw clearly supported the use of parents as volunteers in the Sunday School program. Although he reflected later that it did not have to be restricted to parent volunteers, he did feel that “at the end of the day, as they say, that is their responsibility.”

The lay participants looked at the issue differently, maybe because many were the parents of the children who would be in the Sunday School program. They questioned whether their children wanted parents teaching their Sunday School class. They considered, “does my kid want to see my face again on Sunday morning?” They felt that it would be better for their children to experience someone else as their Sunday School teacher. They also wanted the opportunity to attend an adult Sunday School class. Parents were apparently concerned about their own faith development when they expressed a need to attend adult Sunday School classes.

Reverend Shaw did not question or comment on the concerns raised by the laity. Although Reverend Shaw was concerned that they would not have enough volunteers without the parents, he did not approach the idea again until the June meeting. At the June meeting he asked Caitlann to share her thoughts about the role of parent volunteers.

Caitlann - I think it is important to remember your parents need to be involved in some form or fashion anyway, in knowing what is going on in Sunday School. Because we have one hour out of an entire week to do Christian education with these children, their parents have them at home all week. Research studies have shown that the most influential factor in the development of strong integrated faith, mature faith, is what happens in the family, and the second is what happens in your Christian education program.

Rev. Shaw - Some churches I understand are now requiring the parents to be involved in some way, not necessarily teaching but volunteering on some level for a period of time.

Caitlann - I think parents can resent being required to be involved. When I think about involving parents I think more about keeping them informed about what is

happening in the class and offering suggestions for something they can do during that week when they are home, to help bring it back to life during the week. You can encourage them to have a devotional where they rehash the lesson again. The pamphlets the children take home from the more traditional curriculum can be used for that purpose.

Reverend Shaw continued to hold a different opinion about the role of parent volunteers. When Reverend Shaw asked Caitlann's opinion he appeared to have been looking for support for his ideas or alternatives that would address his staffing concerns. Caitlann did not support requiring parents to work in the children's Sunday School program. She understood parents were an important component for their children's faith development, but she saw their participation as an extension of the Sunday School program. Parents were an important element in their child's Christian education at home. Reverend Shaw did not receive support for requiring parents to participate from either Caitlann or the parents.

Reverend Shaw never mentioned faith development in the context of the home setting. It may be because he had never seen a church engage in any active ministry of this type. Most of his understandings about education ministries were based on personal experience. This limited experience base also appeared to have kept him from "thinking outside the box." He continued to approach this issue from the angle of staffing and setting a good example. He felt that without the parents, the Sunday School would not be as successful.

The issue of faith development was an underlying concern that continued to be intertwined with the idea of parent volunteers. Reverend Shaw felt that when parents volunteered it made a statement about personal faith commitment. Children would see

their parents putting their faith to work when they experienced them teaching. Caitlann knew from research that Sunday School class alone would not build mature faith in children. She knew parents were an important part of their children's faith development. Parents needed to continue to learn about the faith and develop deeper levels of faith maturity, because their own growth would likely affect their children. Research shows that parent involvement was important in developing greater faith maturity in their children (Benson et al., 1990; Benson & Eklin, 1990). Parents who had a strong faith were more likely to engage in the activities that promoted faith development in their children (Benson & Eklin, 1990). Parents who could talk to their children about faith and shared faith experiences (i.e. prayer, devotion, reading the Bible, a family service project) helped children develop deeper levels of faith maturity (Benson & Eklin, 1990). There was no research found that examined how parents' participation in teaching their children in Sunday School could help to support the faith development of their children. Although teaching Sunday School might provide an opportunity for talking with children about faith such an opportunity would be limited by time, as Caitlann pointed out. A parent who taught his or her children's Sunday School class would have a knowledge of the content of the lesson. Yet, this could be dealt with through good parent-teacher communication.

#### *Goal Four - Differentiate What Will Happen in Sunday School and Children's Church*

Reverend Shaw had the committee work to "Differentiate what will happen in Sunday School and Children's Church." Because he felt Children's Church had served the function of Sunday School he believed the group needed to decide if change was necessary. This goal pushed the participants to examine their own understandings and



beliefs about Sunday School. They also worked to define the aims of both Sunday School and Children's Church.

*The group's vision for Sunday School.* As participants of Fourth United Methodist Church met to make plans for the implementation of the children's Sunday School, they reflected on what such a program should include. Reverend Shaw had the participants share what they felt were important elements in a children's Sunday School program.

Marge - Instead of learning [memorizing] Scripture A and B, it is more important if you give them a firm foundation. I think it needs to be more a principle of right and wrong, a principle of what you are supposed to do and that sort of thing. By all means teach them the Scripture but relate it to life. . . I think kids really need to have this basic, the bottom line of God loves you. That way when the world hates you and everything is going wrong, you are always firm in that foundation.

Ann - I want my children to know the basic stories in the Old and New Testament. I want them to know who Moses and Abraham were.

Mona - I love the idea of service, the missions, the service learning. I think that has a real role in Sunday School. Anymore we teach our kids about what they can get not a lot about what they can give. So there is certainly a place for that.

Angela - I think Sunday School should teach children about the things we learn about in our faith, like praying. You know, why we say these prayers, what they mean, a simple background.

Jean - The children need Sunday School to help with the week school.

Don - It is important to be with people their own age to study church.

Ann - I think it ought to be a way to help children learn to make wise decisions during school, at home, with their peers, things like that.

Carol - To learn about God.

Debbie - I think it is important for children to understand the importance of church, and I think at their age, I am talking about children's Sunday School, at their age it is difficult for them to glean much Bible education out of Worship service, so it gives them an age appropriate way to hear the same stories we hear in church at a level they understand and grow into and add to the rest of their lives.

The individuals who participated had varied notions concerning what they wanted in a Sunday School program. The adult participants believed that it was important for children to learn about God, which meant learning the stories in the Bible. They also wanted them to learn about their faith and how worship contributed to it. Another important aspect of learning was relevance. This meant that not only did children master the stories from Scripture, but also they learned to live them out in the world through their actions; examples included mission work and daily decision making. They believed that fellowship with other children with similar beliefs would strengthen and support Sunday School attendees. This desire to pass on their beliefs and to empower children to live according to Christian values in a secular world drove the adult participants to support a Sunday School program.

Reverend Shaw also shared his ideas about what a Sunday School program should encompass.

Rev. Shaw - I think Sunday School has to be exciting, has to be creative; we have to think outside of the box. It's got to be something creative and fun. It also has

to be relevant. What does that Scripture from 2500 years ago, have to do with us today? Teach them the stories and what does this have to do with you, when you are at school or you are at home, or with your brother and sister?

Reverend Shaw's ideas about Sunday School were similar to those expressed by the laity. With similar ideas about what a Sunday School program would embody there was potential for strong support from both the pastor and laity which is one factor that contributes to an effective Christian education program (Benson & Eklin, 1990; Roehlkepartain, 1993).

*The group's vision for Children's Church.* Children's Church provided the main source of Christian education for the children. It also provided a place for the children to go before the preaching of the sermon. Reverend Shaw stated his understanding of the purpose of Children's Church.

Rev. Shaw - Some churches believe kids should be there the whole service, and they ought to sit there and that is the way to teach them. In other churches they don't want them in worship at all. I am right down the middle, I think it is important to have the kids come to Worship initially, to learn that Worship is important, to learn to sit there and be a part of it, but not expected to sit there the whole time. I think you should expose them to big people's church but when they go it should be to something that relates more on their level. . . . Once we get our children's Sunday School going I envision Children's Church becoming an extension of Worship. Have the kids learn some of those things, you know, this is what the adults are doing in Worship. I think a lot of us who are adults would probably admit we don't always understand everything that happens in Worship. Why do we have this color for the paraments? Why do you wear this color stole?

What does the creed mean when it says this? You know if we don't understand it, the kids won't. Children's Church may be a vehicle for learning some of that. The laity supported the way Reverend Shaw involved children during the Worship service. They supported the inclusion of children into the life of the church.

Marge - I think that the way you are doing it now is good. The kids are in there, they feel involved and right about squirming time, when they are like 'get me out of this chair' they get to go to Children's Church.

Ann - I really like how you have involved them in saying the Bible verses and reading things. I think that when they are involved it makes them feel big, feel important. During the last five or ten minutes of Children's Church they could have children volunteer to take part in Worship the next week, they could do the offering. Then you could talk about the meaning behind the offering in Children's Church. They see the money and you can talk about where it goes.

Other committee members also shared their ideas about Children's Church. Martha thought it should be like Worship with "a sermon directed at the children." Debbie thought Children's Choir practice could be incorporated. She also thought Children's Church was supposed to be a time when children "would be learning and growing to understand how to sit through church for an hour but in a children's sort of atmosphere." Don wanted to know if it might become a play time since the children were usually only in there twenty or twenty-five minutes.

Reverend Shaw felt it was the job of the committee to decide what they wanted and to then have Briann help them accomplish the task. He felt Briann had some talent in working with the children and wanted the committee to take advantage of it. Because Briann was enrolled at the local university and was pursuing a degree in Elementary

Education participants believe she can help them carry out their aims for Children's Church. Reverend Shaw shared with the group what had been taking place in Children's Church. He felt that it had provided the children with some Christian education. Briann had been using United Methodist curriculum with the children, and, at times she continued using his children's sermon idea in Children's Church as a springboard for discussion.

The participants decided that Children's Church would become an extension of adult Worship. Children continued to participate in the Worship service and then joined Briann for separate activities in the gym. The activities would be geared to the children with the purpose of teaching them about the elements of Worship: the creeds, the prayers, the offering. Sunday School would aim to teach children the content of the faith and how they could use this knowledge in their daily living. At this time the committee did not analyze in-depth how Briann and lay volunteers would teach these concepts.

Although the discussion did not push them to question what was important about their Worship, they did express a desire for their children to understand it. The lack of knowledge of child development appears to limit their understanding of how children would learn best. As they shared their own ideas concerning Children's Church, several opinions about what they believed to be the best method for teaching the children emerged. The participants and Reverend Shaw believed that by using Children's Church as an extension of adult Worship, children could further their understanding about the Worship service. Such an understanding has merit when we examine how children learn. Their exposure to the Worship service and the opportunity to use the information from their physical and social worlds are a means of knowledge construction (Corsaro, 1997; Greenfield, 2000). Involving children in the customs, symbols, and language of Christian

Worship afforded then the opportunity to learn the beliefs, values, and knowledge shared within the community (Miller, 1993). Children's Church had the potential to provide the children a place where they began internalizing adult skills and knowledge and then appropriated the information to address their own concerns (Corsaro, 1997). Children's Church could provide children a place to make sense of Christianity as they participated within it.

#### *Goal Five - Decide What Curriculum We Will Use*

The last of Reverend Shaw's short-term goals was to "Decide what curriculum we will use" for the new Sunday School program. At every planning meeting the topic of curriculum was discussed. Most of the laity helping in the planning process knew very little about Sunday School curriculum for children. Reverend Shaw shared with the individuals at the first meeting his basic knowledge and requirements for a good Sunday School curriculum. He reported the information he had about Cokesbury, the official Methodist Publishing company. He wanted the group to look seriously at the curriculum published by Cokesbury "because they certainly write it with an eye towards our tradition, who we are as Methodists." He wanted the curriculum to be theologically sound. The committee participants agreed with Reverend Shaw that they would consider Cokesbury curriculum before all others. Reverend Shaw had little knowledge about the available curriculum for children, stating he "had never been directly involved in choosing children's curriculum." Because of the lack of knowledge held by both the pastor and the laity concerning curriculum two experts, Ellen and Caitlann, came to share information with the participants.

Although Reverend Shaw was unaware of all the curriculum available from Cokesbury Publishing he knew about a new curriculum trend - the rotation model. His

previous church in the capital city was now working to put this model in place. This church was in the middle of an elaborate remodel of their Sunday School facility, and he was excited about the rotation model because it gave Sunday School a new look. Children studied the same idea for several weeks as they rotated among different centers: art, computers, science, music, games, video, storytelling and drama. Teachers taught in the same center each week, and the different children's classes rotated to different stations. Usually, churches who adopted this program remodeled classrooms to meet the needs of the centers. Some churches spent thousands of dollars to create an inviting atmosphere that might excite the children. Many churches that followed this model were seeing a new excitement in children's Sunday School. Cokesbury now published a curriculum which supported the rotation model - *Power Express*. Reverend Shaw thought this model might set Fourth United Methodist Church apart from other churches in the area. This model appealed to his desire to "think outside the box." He felt this type of model provided a chance to attract new individuals to the church through its novelty.

The information Reverend Shaw shared excited the individuals who heard it. They liked the idea that children might get excited about going to Sunday School. Ann liked the idea of doing something new. She felt this might help parents and children participate in Sunday School on a regular basis.

Ann - I believed that there are a lot of families out there who are caught in a situation they are fighting every Sunday to get their kids to go to Sunday School because their kids are bored stiff. Eventually, they just give up the fight and say, 'Forget it.' If we are able to offer something that is an alternative to traditional Sunday School that would excite children, but still they would receive the lesson.

Other lay persons also thought that teachers might be easier to recruit if they could match their talents to their teaching. Someone inclined toward art could teach the art rotation which might help him or her feel more comfortable teaching children's Sunday School.

As the discussion continued several questions surfaced concerning how they could use the rotation model in their current situation. First, they did not have a permanent space; everything they required on Sunday needed to be put in place that morning prior to the children's arrival. Second, the budget available for the new Sunday School was about one thousand dollars. It appeared to committee participants that this model would need to be funded at a higher level than the church was currently capable of doing. Although members of the committee were interested in the rotation model for Sunday School, they did not see how it could be used with the restrictions they initially faced. Reverend Shaw continued to voice his support for this model as a tool for evangelism.

It was not until the April meeting that Reverend Shaw and the committee participants had their first glimpse of curriculum samples. Many saw children's Sunday School curriculum for the first time. The samples they examined were from the *Exploring Faith* series which, at the time, was the most widely used of all the children's curricula in the United Methodist Church. The curriculum included a teacher book, student pamphlets, and additional activities packets. After examining the curriculum the participants expressed relief:

Mona - Under hints for the teacher it talks about developmentally what this group is like.

Rev. Shaw - I think that if some of our folks saw that there was material like this I think they would go, 'Oh, I can do this.'



Marge - This is neat. Oh yeah, this makes me feel a whole lot better.

Mona - It even has hints for being a substitute. This is nice.

The curriculum became the first concrete tool they saw which might help them accomplish their goal. It also presented volunteers with information about children possibly reassuring those who had reservations about the actual teaching. Most of the lay persons who helped during the planning process were parents but not trained educators. For all their willingness to help plan the program, they appeared to feel inadequate in teaching children's Sunday School. These feelings of inadequacy could have affected how they assessed the children's Sunday School curriculum.

When Caitlann met with the group in June, she presented other curriculum options, answered questions, and encouraged the group to take samples home and analyze them further. She told the group that they should choose a curriculum based on the needs of their congregation. She did not try to influence the group to choose one curriculum or another; however, she did encourage them to examine their options in depth.

While looking over curriculum samples in the June meeting, Ann expressed her concern that most teachers would be novices.

Ann - Well, what I believe we are really going to have to do is find a curriculum that is very easy for teachers to follow and gives many ideas, tells them step-by-step what to do, because I do not know whether we have had anyone come forward that is an experienced teacher. We will start with either many inexperienced teachers or teachers who have not taught in a long time.

Rev. Shaw - That is a good point; we have many novice folks in a lot of different areas who are learning to do things for the first time.

Caitlann - Yes, one of the biggest things that you need to do is make teacher training a high priority.

The lay participants and Reverend Shaw were viewing the curriculum based on a user friendly understanding. This perspective shifted their examination from one focused on what they would like the children to learn to one centered around the needs of the teacher.

Caitlann suggested teacher training, one of Reverend Shaw's long-term goals, as a way to address the needs of the teachers. Reverend Shaw, in fact, had mentioned teacher training as something he felt necessary but did not know whether a new church could accomplish it. The lack of confidence showed by the lay persons planning the Sunday School and the revelation that most of the people who would teach had little experience supported the need for teacher training. The curriculum alone, even with teaching guides and information on child development, may not be enough to alleviate the concerns of novice teachers.

Earlier, parents stated two reasons for not wanting to teach their children: the desire to pursue adult Christian education opportunities and their feeling that children did not want to have their parents as teachers. Now a third factor warranted consideration, their personal uneasiness about teaching. This factor may also have been connected to their desire to participate in adult Christian education. Were their concerns based on doubts about their ability to teach children? Did the parents feel uneasy about their own Christian knowledge base? Although these questions were not directly addressed, they needed further examination in order to understand how parents' apprehension might impact their involvement as teachers in the Sunday School and at home.

Another revelation that appeared during the examination of curriculum was the real desire the participants had for supporting Christian education in the home. As the

lay persons on the committee looked at the curriculum samples they liked the take-home pamphlets included in *Exploring Faith*. They also appreciated the fact that all children studied the same lesson on any given week. They felt that if the children all focused on the same subject each week then parents had the opportunity to engage in family discussions.

Marge - Are we going to use age appropriate material, but where they are all studying the same thing? I think that it needs to be, because if you have a brother or sister at home you can talk about it and discuss it.

Ann - If when brothers and sisters come home they could discuss the same subject then they are each adding their own perspective on what they learned about the same subject. They will learn more about it, and it will be more meaningful than if one is over here studying one thing and another is over here. I think that would be a good idea also.

Later when Ann voted to support the use of the *Exploring Faith* curriculum, she based part of her decision on the possibility that families could use the pamphlets to continue Christian education in the home.

Ann - It had the take home pamphlets that we all believe are very important. The children continue to get teachings throughout the week at home with their family. And the family has something they can continue to look at throughout the week and not be scared to use. They will know what subject to talk about and reinforce what their children learned in Sunday School.

Parent involvement was a theme Caitlann shared at an earlier meeting to promote further opportunities for Christian education in the home. Research had shown that both family religiousness and Christian education involvement during childhood promoted greater faith

maturity in youth (Benson & Eklin, 1990). The limited period of time children spent each week in Sunday School would make family involvement throughout the week essential in the education of their children. The pamphlets represented for the participants a tangible tool for encouraging Christian education in the home.

In early July, Reverend Shaw and Ann met with Ellen to talk to her about the curriculum. Ellen discussed several possibilities. Ann had examined the curriculum in depth and had new questions to ask Ellen. Ann wanted to know which curriculum was the most popular with United Methodist Churches. Ellen responded, “*Exploring Faith* because teachers feel it is easy to teach.” Ellen’s comment may have influenced Ann as she shared her opinions about the curriculum. Yet, it did not appear to be the only factor influencing Ann’s feelings.

Another tangible in deciding what curriculum to use came in the form of a program for new United Methodist Churches. The group discovered, because they were a new church, Cokesbury Publishing offered some curriculum for free if they chose *Exploring Faith*. If they agreed to use it for one year, they would receive one quarter free. This would save the committee approximately \$250 or one-fourth of their education budget. Although this was not the only driving factor behind the committee’s choice of *Exploring Faith* it was a plus. However, choosing *Exploring Faith* tied them to a year’s use.

After looking at the data it is clear that one factor alone did not influence the group’s decision to select the *Exploring Faith* curriculum. What is apparent is that the curriculum choice set the tone for the Sunday School program. By choosing *Exploring Faith* the group followed a Sunday School model that was more traditional in scope. Their concern with meeting the needs of volunteer teachers outweighed their concern for providing a less traditional Sunday School for children.

### *Pursuing Reverend Shaw's Short-Term Goals*

The vision Reverend Shaw had for the laity at Fourth United Methodist Church was that they would be people who were part of a church community “not afraid to experiment, or ‘think outside of the box’” when they engaged in the task of transforming lives. He also envisioned a children’s Sunday School that was not traditional. He liked the concepts of the rotation model, where children learned about the faith in an environment that engaged their senses and addressed their diverse learning styles. Eventually, he followed the lead of the lay members and accepted a more traditional curriculum. Reverend Shaw did continue to push them to consider changing to this model when they found a permanent space. He still believed this model would be a “great model” to attract families with children to the church.

The laity wanted a Sunday School experience for the children that was relevant and prepared them to live in the world empowered to make good choices in their daily lives. The lay members wanted the children to learn the stories of the faith, to engage in mission work, to know that God loves them. They felt that this could be done in a Sunday School setting where the main emphasis was not memory verses. They wanted to provide a Sunday School program that was not “boring” but one that children would like to attend. This task was a complicated one. The impact of their decisions began forming the Sunday School program they would implement for children. The power of their personal practical theories about Sunday School often came into conflict with their desire to create a new type of Sunday School program. Although they did not like many things they had experienced in Sunday School, it was hard for them to move beyond these experiences. Their lack of training in child development and educational theory and practice meant that most of their decisions were experience based. Because of their

limited experiences and training, they struggled to “think outside the box.” Although the laity knew what they wanted children to learn, they did not share many suggestions for accomplishing the task. They appeared uncertain designing a program to address their purpose. The group had goals and desires for what the program would be when they completed their task, but the decisions they made did not always support their long-term wishes.

### *Reverend Shaw’s Long-Term Goals*

All of Reverend Shaw’s long-term goals dealt with aspects of Christian education in the church. Committee participants discussed only one of the minister’s goals during the Sunday School planning process - teacher training. As stated earlier, Reverend Shaw considered teacher training to be a goal that was not attainable before the Sunday School startup. He believed it was important but not essential for teachers. Caitlann was the first to encourage the committee participants to consider teacher training before the Sunday School began. In June she spoke to the committee and said, “One of the biggest things that you need to do, I think that you identify training as really important.” As the Education committee looked over their small list of possible volunteers and realized that many were novice teachers this idea gained acceptance.

Reverend Shaw said that the church where he worked in the capital city made an effort to train people, but he did not know whether it was very successful. Ann and Reverend Shaw asked Caitlann about what training was available for teachers. Caitlann shared information about a lab school in Tulsa at a United Methodist Church. The school held annually cost about fifty dollars per attendee. Ann wanted to know whether the church could send one person to the training who would then return and train other teachers.

Caitlann - Well, a person going there and going through the training could come back and probably do some stuff. But, part of what they are doing there is a lab school experience, and there is input from a master teacher. There are teams of teachers in training that actually prepare and give a lesson to an age level of children, youth, adults, whatever and then they go through an evaluation process where they look at what they did, how they did it, what worked, what did not work, and how can I improve what I am doing here? So they go through that whole process and it is most beneficial for the person who is actually doing it. But, if you have gotten somebody that has some good gifts as a teacher they can bring some of their learning back.

After they listened to Caitlann they decided the lab school training might be too expensive for the church and not meet the needs of their teacher base. Ann wanted to know if local training was available. Caitlann told her she could lead a training or some other Christian educator from the area might be available. During the meeting Ann made the executive decision to offer training to the teachers she would recruit. Near the end of the meeting she said:

Ann - We have got to get the teachers recruited. We need a couple of weeks to do that because people are out of town quite a bit and that is still going to have to leave us enough time to get some training done and all so that they don't walk into a classroom September 9, cold and everything.

Ann assumed the responsibility of recruiting teachers. The committee members had brainstormed a list of men and women who they felt would be good teachers. Ann called identified individuals and asked them to teach. She told them there would be a

training session before they entered the classroom. In a later conversation with Ann, she felt that some of the teachers agreed to try teaching because training was available.

Teacher training took place on August 29, 2001, at Ann's house. Caitlann lead the training. All of the individuals who agreed to teach were at the training including persons who signed up to be substitute teachers. Caitlann introduced herself to the team of teachers. She gave participants the chance to share any concerns they had and then began the training.

Caitlann - Teaching Sunday School is a very significant commitment that you have made. Your willingness to make this commitment is really great, and we appreciate it. . . . Sunday School is one of many ways in the church that we go about trying to fulfill our task of making disciples. It is one of many ways, but it is in Sunday School where we really encompass the whole task of discipleship making. In Sunday School we have to make an effort to invite people. When they get there we have to be sure our environment, that the atmosphere is welcoming and we are present there to the children and their needs when they come in. As the children gather you will begin to build a relationship with each individual child as with your co-teacher, and this relationship will grow through weeks as you continue on this journey of teaching. . . . The relationships include not only the relationships with other people but the relationship you are trying to help establish between your students and yourself, and God through Christ. So all dimensions of this relationship are critically important. As we begin to build new bonds and become a group within our classes, we also through Sunday School can take that extra step that brings us full circle and puts us back out into the world, where we can be of service to others who do not yet have a relationship with



Christ, or to others who are in need. Some sort of helping hand or assistance that we might be willing to offer. So I really like to look at the Sunday School as a small example of a microcosm of the whole church and the whole process of making disciples. The foundations element in this whole process, in everything we do, is relationships. . . . The longer that I have been involved in Christian education it seems to me the more important relationships become. I really feel like we could probably be very effective Sunday School teachers if we just threw away the books and met in a room with a group of kids to share our faith through stories, through games, through just living together, through things that we do. Curriculum is an aid; it is a guide. It is something that we use to set up markers, touchstones. In the curriculum that you have chosen to use, one of the benefits is that every Sunday, every age level is covering the same story. So that gives children an opportunity when they leave your class to go home to be able to share with each other what they have learned in Sunday School about that particular story. Parents can be informed of what is going on - the story they talked about today. They can be encouraged, and I certainly hope that you would encourage them to find ways to talk about the Sunday School lesson somehow through that day or through the week. It is the parents and what goes on in the home life that is really the most critical way that faith is developed and built in children. It is what happens in the family. Christian education experiences are number two, but we are number two, and we need to be as good as we can be. And we want to offer very quality Christian education through our Sunday School experience. But we also want to make use of number one, the parents, as we encourage them to also be spiritual advisors for the children.

Two building blocks that I believe are vitally important in relationships are number one, the stories that we share. Number two is the things that we do together. . . . For you to be able to build relationships with your Sunday School classes and to help keep the kids interested in being there, those are the kinds of things that you need to do. The relationships will be the string that keeps pulling them back, because they know they belong; they know people will miss them; they know somebody will be waiting for them next week if they are not here this week and that just gives them a real sense of belonging. And the doing together helps to solidify, to build that, so those are two things that we also want to keep in mind.

Caitlin's beliefs guided the direction of the teacher training. Caitlin's strong support of a relational approach and her understanding that families are a crucial component in a child's faith development guided the presentation to the teachers. The relationship, as she stated, is central to making disciples. Later, children will remember the fellowship, time spent together more fully than the curriculum. The relationship theme is central to the Christian faith. Caitlann shared earlier about the relationship aspect of Jesus' ministry. This was her model for Christian education. This model corresponded with the positive memories shared about Sunday School by the committee members at earlier meetings.

The second half of the teacher training session addressed the "nuts and bolts" of teaching. A few of the teachers had taught Sunday School, but none had backgrounds in education. The teachers were given a Teacher Mission Description (*Appendix E, Teacher Mission Description*) as a guide. Caitlann walked the teachers through the expectations. She gave them guidelines for preparing a lesson (*Appendix F, Steps in Planning*) and a

worksheet that they could copy and use for lesson planning each week (*Appendix G, Lesson Planning Worksheet*). As she talked to teachers about being prepared she connected each idea to its effect on the teacher-student relationship. By being present, punctual, and prepared, teachers could stop being worried about the little details and focus on the children themselves. Caitlann then had them take out the curriculum and began walking through the book setup with them. They first looked at the table of contents and teaching guides. The teacher's book listed the supplies needed, age level characteristics, substitute guide, and the weekly lesson plan. Each lesson plan contained a list of activities, the necessary resources (i.e. Bible, cassette/CD, Class Pack), the supplies (i.e. yarn, crayons, pencils), and if pre class preparation were needed. The curriculum was forthright and written for novice teachers. As stated in an earlier section, the committee felt less fearful after seeing the *Exploring Faith* curriculum. Caitlann then walked the group through lesson preparation using the *Lesson Planning Worksheet*. She wanted individuals to find the main idea of the lesson so the point did not get lost in the activities. She explained how each teacher, after identifying the main idea, should then choose activities that supported it. She then provided strategies to guide them:

Caitlann - Determine specifically what you want to accomplish; that is the main idea. Then select teaching activities that facilitate this learning. Identify and secure your resources, develop your strategy. . . . Organize your information in an easy-to-follow outline so you can quickly reference it. Go teach. And then, after you have taught sit back and say what worked and what did not work. How can we do it better next time?

Caitlann asked the teachers if the children in their classes knew one another. Most had been together for over a year, and several attended school together. Once again she

addressed the need for children to feel connected, to be known. The teachers asked only a few questions about the curriculum and teaching preparation. Their main question concerned planning: how could they determine how many activities to plan each week? Caitlann told them that over planning was better than no planning. Caitlann then shared a sheet that contained creative activity ideas. There were six categories listed: art, group activities, music, writing, drama, and visual arts. Under each of these sections was a list of items the Sunday School teacher could use (i.e. painting, role play, rhythmic movement). At 9:00 p.m. when the training ended, the volunteer teachers appeared confident. The only questions they asked concerned details. Where could they find the extra curriculum? Did they have plugs for the CD players?

The teacher training was important for the Sunday School program at Fourth United Methodist Church. When Ann recruited teachers, she used it to convince individuals who were unsure about teaching that they would not be “thrown in the class” without a knowledge base. It demonstrated to teacher volunteers that the church took their work seriously enough to train them. Research shows that often volunteers do not receive much training because organizations often have low expectations for them (Hoge et al., 1998). It also showed parents that the church took the job of educating children seriously. Based on all of these statements the teacher training opportunity was effective.

From an educator’s perspective the training was basic. Caitlann did connect to the teachers by introducing concepts that they seemed to understand. She gave them tools they could apply on their own when using the *Exploring Faith* curriculum. It included information that helped the teacher plan activities that fit his or her children, giving approximate times for each exercise and listing all the needed supplies. Most teachers

could use this curriculum to plan and carry out activities. Caitlann also wanted Sunday School to be more than activities, and she emphasized being in relationship with the children in their classroom. Because of the nature of the church, some children will attend the same church until they graduate, and possibly even longer. These individuals become part of a community - a church family. Teaching information and engaging in activities alone do not address the relational aspect of religion and church attendance. Individuals may choose a church based on the quality of the activities, but they stay at a church because they feel connected.

Caitlann empowered the volunteers to teach in two ways: first, she connected teaching to discipleship through the ideas about relationships. Second, she helped the teachers by guiding them through a basic lesson plan design. She did not give them information about child development but instead referred them to the curriculum which had a page that addressed age level characteristics. The characteristics examined physical growth (i.e., their bodies), cognitive growth (i.e., their minds), emotional and social development (i.e., their relationships, their hearts). When teachers showed concern about what would happen in the classroom, Caitlann provided them with a plan they were capable of executing.

The parents in the group seemed comfortable with the creative ideas and the age level characteristics. Although they may not have taught Sunday School before, they could make child development connections to their own children. Their experience as parents became their foundation for teaching. Their commitment to passing on the faith was the motivation for them volunteering. These two connections appeared to have helped individuals overcome their fear of teaching. The adults who helped also put aside their own wish to take part in adult Sunday School. Finally, some of the parents were

even willing to teach their own children. Although they had disagreed with Reverend Shaw about the role of the parents in teaching classes, their actions supported his idea that “at the end of the day, as they say, that is their responsibility.” The needs of the children took precedence over the needs of the adults.

At the first meeting she attended in June, Caitlann emphasized the importance of parent involvement. During the teacher training she again shared with the group the importance of parent support in the Christian education process. Although she mentioned this when sharing her ideas about Christian education, she never gave the teachers strategies for following through. Maybe because of the time constraints she did not address it directly. She might have felt that because a majority of the teachers were parents they would figure out ways to share the information with other parents. Obviously, she believed this was an important connection that needed to occur between teachers and parents. Because she did not address connection strategies teachers did not plan ways to involve parents.

This was the only training offered to the new teachers. The teachers were receptive to a training session that helped them in the classroom. It would be interesting to see whether the teachers would attend further training sessions that emphasized child development and parent involvement.

#### *Pursuing Reverend Shaw's Long-Term Goals*

When Reverend Shaw listed his goals for the Sunday School, he had teacher training under his long-term goals. He felt that training was necessary but did not know whether the church could provide it. Reverend Shaw did not have the background to provide the training to the laity by himself. Because he had not worked with Children's ministries in any of his previous church appointments, his awareness of available

resources was also limited. Ann took the lead in securing a training session for the teachers. After Caitlann mentioned the importance of training Ann pursued this idea. Ann's concern for finding teachers and equipping them was one of her personal priorities. Ann's own beliefs about providing children a strong program of Christian education appeared to have driven her to pursue this idea even when Reverend Shaw did not know whether it was possible. She wanted teachers to be ready when they entered the classroom. Her strong support of Christian education was apparent in her previous church work, her personal goals, and her willingness to attend to Reverend Shaw's long-term goal.

#### *The Laity at Work - Emerging Issue*

Obviously, Reverend Shaw's short-term and long-term goals did not outline all the work of the committee. Other concerns evolved as the committee did their work. The laity who helped were willing to listen, analyze, and act upon the request made by Reverend Shaw. During the meetings they frequently voiced their own ideas, identified concerns, and guided the content of the meetings. At times, the lay people held different opinions from Reverend Shaw. As they worked together change occurred as they revisited goals, and made decisions in an atmosphere of cooperation. Three areas not listed in Reverend Shaw's goals that evolved from the committee gatherings included: determining the length of time teachers would be asked to commit, examining Sunday School grouping, and setting a time to begin and end Sunday School.

#### *Evolving Concern - The Length of Time Teachers Would be Asked to Commit*

During the January meeting Reverend Shaw asked the participants to think about how they "would organize the teaching." He felt that as a church they needed to decide what would best fit their needs.

Rev. Shaw - I think the consistency is important, that we have the children see familiar faces there for a while. It is important to be able to tell the volunteer, the teacher, this is the commitment you are making. . . this is how long it will last.

He raised two concerns the committee needed to address: the length of time volunteers would commit and how their term would provide the children with a reliable person they could count on - their Sunday School teacher. The laity also voiced their own concerns.

Marge - We need to do it for a short enough period of time that we can actually do it. But for a long enough period of time that I think the kids feel like there is this person who will take time to be with me. I think that is really important they need that, instead of 'okay who is it this week?'

The laity discussed several commitment models. Reverend Shaw shared an experience he had at one church where "one parent would teach one month and then the other parent would teach another month."

Angela - Even if you have a three month revolving period, where you have two people in January, one person stays in February, you've got a new person in February, that person stays February. You know so you are there two months at a time, but it is rotating where there is always a same person for two months at a time.

Debbie - When I was at my old church we did a year commitment with one month on and one off. I was very involved in my [adult] Sunday School class, and I didn't want to be out of my class for an extended period.

Mona - I like team teaching because you could rotate, but there would be a person they could have some attachment to.



Debbie - We did September to May, and in the summer we did monthly rotations because it was really hard to get people during the summer.

The volunteers liked the idea of having consistency for the children, but deciding on how much time individuals would be willing to commit to was difficult.

Rev. Shaw - I would say we need to chew on this after we find out how many volunteers we are getting. What type of term are we asking people to teach? Are we going to ask teachers to rotate on a monthly basis? Serve for a semester? Serve for a year?

Mona - You probably need to get your volunteers before we make those decisions.

Debbie - I think once you have the volunteers it is fair to ask them whether they would rather do it a month on and a month off or semester by semester. They don't all have to do the same thing. You know if we could get some volunteers for kindergarten and first, and they want to do it every other month that is okay. At the church I grew up in we had a teacher who was willing to teach first grade everyday all year round.

A real struggle appeared to exist between consistency and commitment. The financial freedom many of the church members enjoyed provided them with the opportunity to be away from church many times during the year. As members struggled to find a middle ground between their own feelings of duty to their faith commitment (i.e. both personal and collective as they pass on the faith to the children) and the pull secular culture exerts in their lives an interpersonal battle commenced.

The committee members did not settle upon teaching commitment terms until they made the connection with the curriculum. Caitlann proposed that once the group

choose the curriculum they should examine it and determine length of commitment. She suggested to the participants that the layout of the chosen curriculum might help them make a more informed decisions about teaching terms. The curriculum they chose, *Exploring Faith*, used a quarter system. The committee participants decided to follow the curriculum schedule asking teachers to volunteer on a quarterly basis.

*Evolving Concern - How will Sunday School Groupings be Made*

Near the end of the January meeting participants began listing topics that needed to be discussed at the next meeting. During the discussion Mona mentioned the matter of Sunday School groupings. She felt that the gathering needed to know how many children currently attended and their ages in order to make an informed decision. In response to Mona, Reverend Shaw shared that he thought they would “probably have a younger group and an older group. Then we will have our nursery.” Ann immediately began questioning Reverend Shaw’s groupings. She had several concerns.

Ann - I think you may need more than one break, if you can get teachers for it. I think that is a big group. I think you will have eight-year-olds in there with four-year-olds. You are not going to be able to address a four-year-old the same way you are an eight-year-old. An eight year old will say, ‘This is crazy’ or the four-year-old is going to say, ‘I have no idea what she is talking about.’

Several in the group agreed with Ann. Mona felt they should also consider the reading ability of children. Marge agreed, stating that reading could be a “good definer” of groupings.

The laity recognized a need for an intentional division of children based on maturation and cognitive development (i.e., age, understanding, and reading ability). The reason for Reverend Shaw’s suggested groupings was unclear. His response indicates that

he had given some thought to the subject; however, his ideas were quickly put into question by several of the laity. The lay members' response demonstrates that they continued to hold different views from Reverend Shaw, and once again were not afraid to question the suggestions made by their minister (Monahan, 1999).

At the February meeting the lay members, with the help of Briann, determined how many children currently participated at Fourth United Methodist Church.

Briann - We have about thirty children. Fifteen or twenty come regularly. We have five babies. There are six three- and four-year-olds. There are four kindergartners and five in first grade. There are seven in second grade and three in third or fourth grade. In fifth and sixth grade we have two or three.

After determining how many children participated, the committee then discussed what grade levels should be grouped together.

Mona - So what are your thoughts about breaking up the groups?

Don - Do you have to do it by grade or by age like six and seven?

Debbie - It is really going to be better if we do it by grade because eventually we will be doing it first and second grade, I think.

Briann - And you would have some first graders who are six and some who are seven and some who are second graders and reading more advanced.

Debbie - If you are talking about about putting eight-year-olds together, well there are a lot of eight-year-olds in third grade now. My son happens to be in second grade. I would hate for him to be in third grade in Sunday School and second grade at school because that would just create confusion for him.

Angela - I like the grade level division.

Rev. Shaw - It makes sense, and I would think we would hope to eventually break this out into individual grades as we continue to grow.

The group decided to use the public school divisions as a guide to class groupings. The number of children in each grade grouping varied. The committee participants determined they would need to analyze the numbers and decide how many grade levels to put together to form a single Sunday School class.

Briann - If [early] elementary includes kindergarten, first and second, that is a huge group.

Mona - It would probably be first and second grades.

Don - Well, Shane and Boe are reading [they are both in kindergarten], so I don't know if that is where we divide them or not. Because I think they would be totally bored with three- and four-year-olds. You have some six-year-olds in kindergarten, and you have some six-year-olds in first grade. You would have some six-year-olds with three-year-olds.

Debbie - How about kindergarten, first and second? Where will the transition students go? The schools treat transition as first grade, so that is what I would do if that was an issue. Then they would go to first grade twice, but that is going to happen.

Mona - The only thing is that my second grader is much more articulate. She would do better with older children than she would with kindergartners. I think she would be bored.

Don - How about grouping second, third, and fourth grades?

Mona - We need to think about who reads. Do you like Don's suggestion better based on the kids we have?

As the group discussed class divisions parents raised concerns about their own children. One parent had held her child back, so he was older than other children in the second grade. Another parent knew that her child was articulate and would relate with older children better than younger ones. The laity mentioned a child's reading ability as another factor the group should consider. Although few of the participants had knowledge of child development, they recognized differences that existed between the children. It was this personal knowledge about individual children that had the most influence on class division. In the end, this knowledge carried more weight than the number of children in each group.

The participants decided to determine the class divisions and then find teachers. There had been some discussion that the number of classes would be based on the available volunteers. The needs of the children took precedence over this idea. The committee members decided to divide the elementary level into three class groupings, kindergarten and first grade, second and third grades, and fourth and fifth grades. They were able to find enough volunteers to teach each grade.

After discussing the children who were in kindergarten and above, the topic of preschool children emerged. Briann shared with the committee that there were six children in the three- and four-year-old age range. The group felt that based on the number of children it would be important to consider providing a class for them.

Angela - You almost have to have a pre-k.

Briann - We always had a class for them. They did worksheets and dittos and stuff like that and little learning things, story time and stuff. Putting them in the nursery is too much like playing.

Mona - They could have their own class.

Debbie - I think when I have taught the kindergarten in Sunday School before we didn't really have three- and four-year-olds in Sunday School. It was more like a child care; I mean they did a little bit of stuff. But, we actually started having Sunday School at the kindergarten level. It was a full hour of Sunday School.

Rev. Shaw - At my other church pre-k had a class; they may not have had a curriculum, but they did something separate from the nursery.

The committee participants were aware that other churches provided classes for all age levels including preschool. Their lack of background in the area of child development appeared to hinder their understandings about what a preschool Sunday School class would include. They were unclear about what was appropriate for children this age to do in a Sunday School class. This lack of clarity lead them to fall back on personal experience. Although dittos and story time were suggested as appropriate, participants did not understand play to be an important component of a Sunday School atmosphere for preschool children. Reverend Shaw was also unclear if children in this age range had any type of curriculum.

Personal experience had a strong impact on the committee participants. They did not question the varied approaches to early childhood education. From the varied experiences they shared about other churches' preschool classrooms, it appeared Christian education for young children was inconsistent. This diversity may express the struggle other church communities have with determining what is suitable for young children. This struggle may reveal that experience, not research in the area of the child development and learning theory, holds the strongest influence on the lay members. Once participants identified children as kindergartners by the public school system, the laity

had a clearer understanding about what Sunday School class would include (i.e., curriculum guided activities). This understanding may be based on the type of work they saw the children bring home from the public school setting. The lack of knowledge both Reverend Shaw and the lay participants had about early childhood development and educational theory and practice had the potential to impact the effectiveness of the Christian education program they were attempting to create (Benson et al., 1990). In May the committee made their final recommendation for class groupings which included a class for three- and four-year-olds.

One of the goals of a new church is to grow. They addressed the issue of future growth by providing a class for every age group regardless of the number of children who were currently taking part. The participants hoped that other children would eventually be a part of the Sunday School program. In September the Sunday School began with six children in the three- and four-year-olds' class, two children in the kindergarten and first grade class, nine children in the second and third grade class, and three children in the fourth and fifth grade class.

#### *Evolving Concern - Choosing the Time for the Sunday School Program*

In January, Marge raised a question pertaining to the time they would hold Sunday School.

Marge - I think times need to be determined. Are we going to do it parallel to regular church? Are you going to do it at the very end [after Worship] or before? Are you going to do it while the adults are having Sunday School?

Currently, the adults met after Worship for Sunday School. The children who remained were singing in the Angel Choir which Briann led. Reverend Shaw set the current time schedule for Worship and adult Sunday School. With the addition of a children's Sunday

School program, the lay participants examined the times and discussed them in depth at the February meeting.

Mona - So when will Sunday School be held?

Rev. Shaw - That is the thing that I think we need to think carefully about.

Children's Church obviously will continue as it does now during Worship, the kids will leave. The question is what do we do with the choir? I think that is becoming, if it isn't already, an important part of what we do. But, I think my first thought would be that we will have to move that.

Mona - Can I ask why we have Sunday School after church instead of before because all the churches I have ever gone to had Sunday School and then church.

Rev. Shaw - We did that because it was a little 'outside the box' and might attract folks. Most of the folks I have talked to do seem to like that time for Worship.

Debbie - So if we change it is that going to be a problem for people?

Rev. Shaw - I think probably the alternative would be to add another worship service at 11:00 eventually. That will not happen now.

Debbie - So Sunday School do we flip it or do we have Sunday School after like we do now? See, I think we lose a lot of people.

Rev. Shaw - We do.

Angela - Having Sunday School later?

Debbie - Well yes, because after Worship service people are used to leaving.

Rev. Shaw - We do have folks that like the 9:30 service. They like it so much because they are done early, and they get to leave. But, eventually, if we keep that Worship service I think we have to decide, we have to have folks in the



church decide, especially parents of kids, are we going to be a one hour church?

A two hour church or what?

Debbie - We may need to take a poll about that. I think we would have better time savings if we came and set up, and then we chatted with people once we started Sunday School, and then we immediately went into Worship service.

We wouldn't have as much wasted time between, because the reason you are standing there talking to people is because you are presuming most of them will leave. You stand around and talk to them for thirty minutes then we don't start Sunday School. Whereas if Sunday School were over we would go right into Worship. I don't know; I am not necessarily pushing to change it because I am a big proponent for being there. It is hard for me because when church is over I am ready to go. I have to twist my arm to stay for the Sunday School hour where I never did that when Sunday School was before Worship. Maybe we could split the thirty minutes. Start Sunday School at 9:00 to 9:45 and Worship 10:00 till 11:00.

Don - That is not a bad idea really.

Rev. Shaw - That is something I might consider.

Debbie - Just move Worship time back thirty minutes.

Don - Let the kids go in the choir from 11:00 till 11:30 while we are cleaning up and breaking down.

Angela - Then go to lunch at 11:30. I think that is great. I think 9:00 to 9:45 for Sunday School because that doesn't put a strain on families. We are only knocking thirty minutes off; that is not bad.

Debbie - I don't think you would lose people changing it by thirty minutes.

Rev. Shaw - I don't think that is too early that we wouldn't get folks there for Sunday School. And you are right if we could still do the music and do it all in that same time.

Mona - We could have coffee at 9:30. If they want to get their coffee they could. A social time that is probably not the right word, a fellowship time.

Don - You've got to hurry, but you can get there. I think that if you use the aspect that we now have thirty-one kids and that it is very imperative that we get them in Sunday School then maybe we have to compromise thirty minutes. I don't see anybody standing up saying, I object to that.

Rev. Shaw - Okay, I need to pray about that and think about it. I like the idea though.

The committee participants were concerned with both the starting time of Sunday School not being too early and the ending time for Worship not being too late. Another concern was moving Sunday School in the slot before Worship. Mona questioned why Reverend Shaw had Sunday School after Worship. Debbie always attended Sunday School first and then Worship. She found it hard to stay after church to attend Sunday School. The laity agreed they liked Sunday School first - a more traditional approach. In the end, the committee liked the idea of beginning Sunday School at 9:00 a.m. The discussion moved the participants towards a time frame, however, members did not make a final decision at the February meeting. Reverend Shaw's comments to the participants gave evidence of his place of leadership in the administration of the church. When Debbie suggested a time for Sunday School and Worship from 9:00 to 9:45 and 10:00 to 11:00, respectively, Reverend Shaw stated, "That is something I might consider." Reverend Shaw wanted to pray and think about the times the committee

suggested. It was evident from Reverend Shaw's comments that this was his decision to make and he felt comfortable doing so.

The planning committee did not discuss the times for Sunday School and Worship at any later meetings. Reverend Shaw made the final decision based on the laity's suggestions. At the teacher training event Ann stated the time for Sunday School would be from 9:00 to 9:50, a time she verified with Reverend Shaw. This would give participants the chance to move into Worship at 10:00. This still provided church members the opportunity to finish worshipping earlier than others in town. Everyone at the August training session agreed this time would work.

#### *The Other Tasks Involved in Creating a Sunday School Program*

Some of the tasks of creating the Sunday School fell largely upon the laity, especially Ann. The laity decided on what space to use for Sunday School and prepared it. The participants used the gymnasium believing it was the only viable location for the program. The gymnasium was a large heated space with restroom facilities and a stage area on one end; however, it was not air-conditioned. Ann located several large partitions that could be used to create classroom space in the gym. She received approval from the school to store the partitions on the stage during the week. Ann worked with the teachers to create a space that would meet their needs.

Ann - For a few weeks we will be located in the gym. We will use partitions and have a place to store them on the school stage in the gym. I will have it set up for you when you get there. I will get there around 8:15. Everyone will be in the gym, but you will be separated by partitions. You can use push pins to stick poster boards up and use them as a bulletin board. Right now we do not have chairs and tables for you, but we will have the carpet squares, or you can

just sit on the carpet. The main thing we need to worry about is the air flow; we will try to keep it as cool as we can.

Although the room provided challenges, Ann was willing to try to offer the best working environment within her means for the volunteer teachers. She told the teacher volunteers in August, "You just need to let me know because I know we can work it all out. I just may not be aware of the situation." Ann, as leader of the Education committee took on the responsibility of preparing the space and working with the teachers to meet their needs.

Ann also took on the responsibility of purchasing and organizing the supplies. The church had very few supplies when they began planning the Sunday School program. Most were donated by a large church in the capital city where Reverend Shaw had been an associate pastor. Ann suggested a wish list be created and distributed to the congregation.

Ann - We need to get a wish list together so it can be circulated through the congregation. We can ask folks to donate a box of crayons, old material samples cotton balls, things like that.

Ann created this and distributed it to church participants. She also published it in the church newsletter that went out to church participants at the beginning of each month. The committee gathered some supplies through this method. Ann purchased the rest.

In August at the Teacher Training session, Ann shared how supplies would be purchased, organized, and stored.

Ann - I am purchasing the supplies. Each section will have a tub of supplies, and we do have some storage space under the stage at the school. I have not seen it so I do not know how much is available. I have made copies out of all

the books regarding the supplies that are needed for the curriculum. Most of the supplies will be in the tub, or we will have one main tub that will have supplies. . . . We will be getting each classroom area a CD player or tape player so that you can play your tapes and things like that. If there is anything that you need or want me to get give me a day or two notice and I will get it. If you need to buy something for yourself, you can turn in the receipts to me and we will get you reimbursed. If you need a TV and VCR, you need to call me ahead of time. I can get them there, and I have a TV that will play a videotape but you need to let me know.

Ann provided the Sunday School teachers with the supplies they needed and assured them if they did not have something they could get it. She contacted the school to secure storage space, found storage tubs that would hold the supplies, and organized them based on the class curriculum list. Ann's experience working as the chairperson of Children's Ministry at another Methodist Church provided her with experiences that helped her as she dealt with this church situation. Her financial status provided her the means to give on average twenty hours a week of volunteer time to the church as the deadline for beginning the Sunday School neared.

#### *The Evolution of a Children's Sunday School Program*

The work of developing a Sunday School program for children was a shared effort between the lay members of the church and Reverend Shaw. All of the women and men involved in planning and implementing the Sunday School brought to the process their own personal experiences, training, and beliefs. Their understanding and knowledge of a children's Sunday School program was based on experiences they had in various settings. As individuals engaged in conversation with other participants, each

encountered ideas that had the potential to modify their personal understandings of children's Sunday School. It was through these modifications that the members at Fourth United Methodist Church designed a Sunday School program.

*The Work of Reverend Shaw in the Development of the Sunday School Program*

The Bishop appointed Reverend Shaw, an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church, to lead Fourth United Methodist.

Elders are ordained to a lifetime ministry of Service, Word, Sacrament, and Order. They are authorized to preach and teach the Word of God, to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and to order the life of the Church for mission and ministry. The servant leadership of the elder is expressed by leading the people of God in worship and prayer, by leading persons to faith in Jesus Christ, by exercising pastoral supervision in the congregation, and by leading the Church in obedience to mission in the world (*The Book of Discipline*, 2000, p. 209).

Throughout this research Reverend Shaw viewed himself as leader of the church. He was the one who began the planning process for the new Sunday School. The committee members used Reverend Shaw's goals to direct the early formation process. He asked Mona to serve as the chairperson of the Sunday School planning group, and helped to form the Nominations committee so that the church could begin the process of constituting. Reverend Shaw recommended Ann for the position of Education chairperson.

Reverend Shaw's influence on the committee was mixed. At times, as in the case of setting the time for Sunday School, he listened to the volunteers but made the final decision. When the group continued to struggle with when to begin the Sunday School

program he was willing to listen to the concerns expressed by the laity but pushed them to make a reasonable decision and stick with it. Reverend Shaw and the laity made a majority of the decisions cooperatively. Several times throughout the planning process, the laity modified Reverend Shaw's suggestions. His desire to begin the Sunday School in four months, his idea about requiring parents to be involved, his desire to use the rotation model, and his belief that teacher training might not be possible for their church were a few examples of ideas that the committee modified after discussion. After deliberation, the laity supported Reverend Shaw's understanding of the goal of Children's Church and Sunday School.

Reverend Shaw, having very little training in the area of Christian education, based his understandings and decisions about the Sunday School program on personal experience. Repeatedly, he shared information he collected through his observations of other church settings. Not once did he base a decision on research findings or educational training. The quality of his knowledge was dependent upon the experiences he internalized. He did not have the necessary educational training to examine the experiences in an informed way. Reverend Shaw's input was hit-and-miss without a knowledge of educational theory and practice for the age children the program served. Based on research findings Reverend Shaw's lack of understanding concerning children could impact the quality of the Sunday School program he was attempting to create (Benson & Eklin, 1990). This puts to question the effectiveness of the Sunday School program Fourth United Methodist Church was trying to establish. Will the program help children learn about the faith and develop a "deep, life transforming relationship to a loving God" (Benson et al., 1990, p. 25)?

The second question that needs to be addressed is whether Reverend Shaw fulfilled his role as teacher of the “Word of God” as stated in his description of duties. Without a background in child development, it would be difficult for Reverend Shaw to know how to teach children appropriately, which put into question whether his role as an Elder addressed the teaching of children or adults. Examining the historical context, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism believed that the preacher was to teach children as well as adults. He was concerned with the state of teaching children saying it was “shamefully wanting” (Wesley, 1872/1979, vol. 3, p, 270). Yet, most United Methodist pastors do not receive seminary training in child development and have little knowledge about how children learn. For the most part their seminary education equips them to teach adults.

Reverend Shaw, like many ministers assigned to serve a United Methodist Church, was on his own. Although Reverend Shaw had some part-time staff, none worked more than ten hours a week. All of them were college students. This made Reverend Shaw’s leadership in the area of Christian education an important component in the formation and implementation of a Sunday School program for children. Yet, his understandings of educational theory and practice might hinder the Christian education program at Fourth United Methodist Church (Benson & Eklin, 1990; Roehlkepartain, 1993).

#### *The Work of Lay Participants in the Development of the Sunday School Program*

In order to become a member of a United Methodist Church an individual must be baptized and pledge to support the local congregation “with your prayers, your presence, your gifts and your service” (The United Methodist Hymnal, 1989, p. 48). Because the church was not constituted yet, the laity who attended were not official



members. Like others who choose a church, they had a wide range of reasons for participating at Fourth United Methodist Church. The lay membership participating in any local church community are diverse. This means a congregation may have in attendance many individuals with advanced education in child development and learning. The possibility also exists that no lay members have this knowledge.

At Fourth United Methodist Church there were individuals who had some educational background in child development. Mona, who lead the Sunday School planning group, did have a Masters of Education degree. She worked in counseling. Ann, the chairperson of the Education committee had limited university training in the area of early childhood education, local church training, and experience that helped her make decisions about the children's Sunday School program. Jenny had taught secondary education for a few years. The rest of the laity who took part in the planning process worked in other fields.

The laity did have more educational background than Reverend Shaw. The lay participants throughout the inception process were willing to share their own ideas and understandings about children's Sunday School. They were often influential in modifying Reverend Shaw's goals and ideas. Ann, with the support of other laity persuaded Reverend Shaw to give the committee more time to plan the Sunday School program. The parents serving on the committee questioned Reverend Shaw's idea about "requiring" parent participation. Their input about the curriculum helped move the group to choose the more traditional model that appeared easy to use for novice teachers. The laity were also influential in determining the Sunday School class divisions. The participants pointed out the needs of the children who would be in the Sunday School program. Their understandings pushed Reverend Shaw to examine his suggested class groupings.

Although the laity as a group did not have an extensive knowledge of child development and learning, they could use the information they had to examine goals and ideas differently than Reverend Shaw, calling into question several of his beliefs. His willingness to listen to them and use their ideas exhibited Reverend Shaw's openness to applicable solutions. It may also demonstrate his own lack of confidence with his knowledge base concerning children.

Another issue that faced the laity as they worked to plan the Sunday School involved commitment. The work of the laity was essential during the creation of the Sunday School program. Without their commitment to share their "gifts and service" the church would not exist. Although the first Sunday School planning group had solid support from church participants, the Education committee did not. Even after the breakdown of the Education committee, lay members offered their time and energy. Many individuals taught in the Sunday School program, and Ann provided an array of support for the participants. Yet, with fewer members attending the meetings the opportunity for cooperation as a group broke down. As the Sunday School deadline grew near more and more decisions were made by Ann and Reverend Shaw. This change in group dynamic modified the way the Education committee functioned and could lead to constraint within the system.

#### *The Work of the Experts in the Development of the Sunday School Program*

Caitlann was a trained Christian educator. She met with the group on two occasions, a meeting in June and the teacher training session in August. Ann and Reverend Shaw invited her to enter into their planning process. The participants used the knowledge she shared as an asset to help them in their planning process. Caitlann's knowledge base became a tool in the planning process, and eventually her ideas influenced

the group in several areas: curriculum selection, teacher training, parent participation, and the length of time teachers served.

When Caitlann came in June, she introduced several curriculum options available through Cokesbury Publishing. She answered questions raised by the participants about the curriculum and encouraged teacher training. She recognized that the church would have many novice teachers and encouraged them to use training as a tool to support their work in the classroom. She saw the role of the parent as one of support, and she understood that Christian education alone would not develop mature faith in children. Caitlann also helped the group find a reasonable commitment time for teachers, encouraging them to look at the curriculum schedule as a guide. Caitlann's knowledge lead her to look at the larger vision of Christian education for the church. She could support her beliefs and understandings with a personal knowledge base (i.e., university training, Christian education certification, and research). She also had many years of experience working in churches and with lay volunteers.

In August when Caitlann lead the teacher training she talked about the aspect of the relationship that exists between children and adults. She encouraged the teachers to communicate with the parents so that they knew what their children were studying. She emphasized the fact that the parents' leadership in the home was the "most critical way that faith is developed and built in children." She understood from research the importance of family support in Christian education. Caitlann also gave the teachers a basic strategy for preparing and implementing a lesson.

Caitlann's role as visiting expert was important. She addressed the questions raised by the laity and listened to their concerns. Her ability to link together the ideas that the committee shared with practical methods of implementation provided another

means of knowledge construction as the laity prepared to enter the classroom situation. Finally, she was able to share basic educational tools to help the participants feel more prepared as they entered the classroom.

Ellen's role as visiting expert was lesser. She did share curriculum samples with Ann and Reverend Shaw. She also supported the use of *Exploring Faith* curriculum in the Sunday School. Her backing of a more traditional model for Sunday School could influence the participants but it was not the sole factor. Because she never met with the entire group her impact was limited.

Both the visiting experts invited to participate in the planning process entered the group in a spirit of cooperation. They presented themselves as resource people, letting group members ask questions before attending to any personal agenda they might have. This attitude afforded the planning groups the opportunity to guide the work of the committee even when experts were present. By entering the group in this way the experts created an atmosphere where equal footing was possible and reciprocity existed - one outcome was the scheduled teacher training session. After listening to Caitlann's viewpoint, Reverend Shaw reconsidered his earlier opinion and support the training. This action occurred in response to Caitlann's suggestion and the groups discussion.

#### *Fourth United Methodist Begins a Sunday School Program for Children*

The Sunday School began on September 9, 2001. Ann arrived early, and, with the help of three volunteers, divided the gym into classrooms for four classes. There was no real plan for the setup, so they made it as they went along. Each class received a large rolling supply box for its area. Each box contained general items (i.e., paint, paper, crayons). Ann asked two teachers to work in each classroom. All except one classroom had both teachers in attendance. The teachers arrived early and were in place when the

children began to show up. A sign was hung on the outside of each partition to identify the classroom. In three of the four classes, parents were teaching their own children, a concept many had questioned during the planning period.

I had the chance to walk around and observe the children entering their classrooms. Most children entered without problem. Many children were familiar with the adults who were teaching their Sunday School class. In the three- and four-year-old classroom only one teacher was present. There were five children in the class. The teacher appeared unsure of her teaching ability and stated that, "The other teacher was the one that had taught young children." Other teachers appeared comfortable instructing the children. After teaching the lesson in the second and third grade class and the fourth and fifth grade class, teachers met and verbally evaluated what happened. They appeared to be pleased with the students who were in attendance and the overall subject matter in the curriculum. I did not observe the kindergarten and first grade classroom.

In December of 2001 the congregation moved to a rented space in a strip mall. They had approximately 2400 square feet available for Worship and Sunday School. Three Sunday School classes were moved into one room. The partitions were in place, but the noise level made teaching difficult. The three- and four-year old class meet in the nursery area. Although the church was beginning to grow, the number of children attending Sunday School had not shown an increase.

#### *Changes in the Sunday School Program*

The goal of the participants, to start a Sunday School program for children was met. After the Sunday School inception, the work of the Education committee members remained important as they dealt with brand-new concerns. The committee itself faced changes throughout the planning process. When Reverend Shaw and the laity first began

the committee was focused and active. The members selected to attend the group planning sessions. After the Nominations committee assigned members to the Education committee lay involvement dropped. This created two significant effects, Reverend Shaw and Ann began making more decisions for the group and the committee members became less and less active. One example occurred when Reverend Shaw and Ann decided she would work with a new curriculum during the summer - *A One Room Sunday School*. She felt that the number of children attending each week in the summer would vary because many were traveling. It was harder to find adults willing to commit to teach in the summer. They were also hearing from the children that Sunday School was boring. Ann not only changed the structure of the Sunday School for the summer but she also taught.

Reverend Shaw and Ann discussed changes for the Fall 2002 term. During the planning process, the lay participants along with Reverend Shaw contemplated the possibility of using one Sunday School model for a year and then changing. Reverend Shaw liked the rotation method because he felt it made Fourth United Methodist Church distinct from other churches in the area - "thinking outside the box." After talking with members of her committee informally and parents of the children in the program, Ann and Reverend Shaw decided to change from the traditional *Exploring Faith* curriculum to the rotation model - *Power Express*. They made this choice because teachers were becoming harder to recruit. If the church used the rotation model then the teacher would only be asked to teach three Sundays. They would teach the same lesson, adapting it to the different age groups of children rotating into their class each week. There would be three groups: preschool through first grade, second and third grades, and fourth and fifth grades. Each class would also have a shepherd who stayed with them from September to May. The shepherd's job was to build a relationship with the children by welcoming the group

into the class, caring for their needs, and dealing with any discipline issues that might arise. The shepherd did not teach the class. Reverend Shaw and Ann also believed the change might create a new enthusiasm among the children.

During the summer of 2002, the church rented additional space in the mall establishing an area that they could use for children's Sunday School. Over the summer volunteers remodeled and painted the new space with colorful murals (i.e., Biblical scenes, the desert, a garden, the sea with a fishing boat, a large sun, a sky blue ceiling with clouds, and a stage area) in preparation for Fall Sunday School Kick-Off 2002.

In Fall 2002, the church began its rotation model with *Dig into the Bible*. Ann lead an informal teacher training session prior to the first Sunday. Several of the individuals who agreed to be shepherds and teachers had taught in the Fall of 2001. The environment and the types of activities the children engaged in as they began the rotation format added a new excitement to the Sunday School. Since the Fall 2002 Sunday School Kick-Off, Fourth United Methodist Church has continued using a rotation model. The church membership has grown and so has the children's Sunday School. Several families have stated that "They joined the church because their children enjoy it [Sunday School]." Yet, enthusiasm has begun to wane once more.

The Education committee continues to deal with new and old challenges in the Sunday School. The current concern is whether children are learning the lesson from the curriculum. With the limited amount of time, many teachers are so involved in teaching the activity, the children miss the aim of the lesson. The children are not connecting the activity to the Bible story. The committee members are currently discussing new arrangements for teacher training to address the issue. No training has been held since the Fall of 2002. Another problem has been finding shepherds for each class. The length of

commitment appears to keep many individuals from volunteering for this job. It is the shepherd's job to be in the classroom each week to provide continuity and build caring relationships with the children. Finding teachers willing to commit for three weeks has not been as difficult. The short commitment term appears to meet the needs of the church participants. They can teach and still be free to travel as they want.

### *In Summary*

The goal of Reverend Shaw and the participants at Fourth United Methodist Church was to create a Sunday School program for children. Reverend Shaw along with the laity designed and implemented a Sunday School program but not in four months. Reverend Shaw's short-term goals were met, with some modification. Participants chose the curriculum, planned the program, and volunteered as teachers. The lay participants struggled to balance their Christian commitment with their secular obligations. Yet, the laity stepped forward volunteering to teach the children despite their concerns and conflicting obligations. In the end, Reverend Shaw and the lay members met their goals when the Sunday School program started in September 2001.

The process of creating the Sunday School was a group effort. When Reverend Shaw wrote his goals, the aims did not include all the tasks that developed as planning and implementation happened. The work of the committee evolved through conversations among the laity, visiting experts, and Reverend Shaw. In the discussions that took place among participants, ideas unfolded; needs evolved; beliefs modified. Fourth United Methodist Church's Sunday School developed from the personal experiences and held beliefs of the participants who helped plan it. The members of the church continue to make modifications as they examine the needs of the children and the church. The program they started is still evolving. The social system has taken "its own course,



developed its own regularities, collective values, and signifiers” (Rodgers & Dunn, 1999, p. 287). As the church participants continue examining and altering the program to meet the changing needs of the church members, their actions challenge the equilibrium of those in the group and the grouping itself. It is through their work that the operatory system reflects the varied needs and understandings of the members of Fourth United Methodist Church, and with a continued atmosphere of cooperation, the Sunday School will have the opportunity to go on changing to meet the needs of future participants.

In looking at these findings it is clear that another group of individuals might choose other roads to follow, discuss different needs, modify ideas, or conclude with other results. That is the nature of a social group; its actions reflect the collective values of its participants (Piaget, 1995; Rodgers & Dunn, 1999). But, this research is not about them; it is about the complex task Reverend Shaw and many dedicated laity shared in order to reach their goal - a Sunday School at Fourth United Methodist Church.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim remains the same as it did when Christianity began - to share the faith with new generations. The complex process of teaching children about the faith requires the dedication of many people: family members, church leaders, and lay volunteers. Members of Fourth United Methodist Church took this task seriously by supporting the development of a Christian education program for children. They worked diligently to make this a reality at the church.

Christianity is shared through education. Accepting this idea, I analyzed the research data to understand more completely what affects educational endeavors at Fourth United Methodist Church. I also used my data to answer the research question: How does a new church go about developing a Sunday School program for children? In this chapter, I highlighted three predominate themes that emerged after inspecting the data. First, I looked at the need for more educational training to support the work of the minister and the laity. Second, I checked the impact secular culture had upon the faith community. Third, I deliberated the effects of both ideas upon the system itself. This study, in turn, revealed that the lack of education and the pull of secular culture can impact the children's Sunday School within the church. I have drawn preliminary conclusions about how other church communities might use this study as they examine Christian education for children. Finally, I made suggestions for further research in the area of Sunday School and Christian education.

#### *Christian Education Began at Fourth United Methodist Church*

When Reverend Shaw moved to create a Sunday School program for children in

the church, he knew little about how children developed or learned. His seminary education had not prepared him to teach children or train those working with them. He had constructed his own personal practical theory about Sunday School education as he experienced other church programs. With this foundation, Reverend Shaw wrote a vision statement, set goals, and invited lay members to help him plan. Many of the laity who joined him were professionals in the secular world, but had never taken on the task of creating a Sunday School for children. Few had any formal education that could help them understand the complexities of teaching children. Because of this, participants invited visiting experts to help the group design and implement the Sunday School. Ellen introduced them to curriculum options. Caitlann challenged them to examine their held ideas differently. The training and information provided by the visiting experts was beneficial, yet it did not have stayed power, and over time the effects began to wear off.

Another issue facing the laity was the pull between their religious commitment and secular culture. Many felt the need to know more about Christianity, yet were only ready to allot a limited amount of time to the church. As Christian believers, they wanted to share the faith with their children. They were willing to help plan and volunteer as teachers to ensure their children knew about the faith. Yet, as the laity volunteered to help children they often neglected their own faith formation. They struggled to bring balance between the obligations pulling upon their time. Although they wanted children to have a faith foundation, they themselves struggled with being ill-prepared. As planning moved forward, their lack of comfort with the task appeared to affect attendance at meetings. They might have selected the familiarity of their secular obligations over the work of the church.

These elements came together to reveal a third theme, the breakdown of the system. In the beginning, the lay volunteers came together to plan the Sunday School. As the task of organizing the Sunday School proceeded, the participants appeared uncomfortable with the challenge, and participation dwindled. As the months went by Ann and Reverend Shaw made more decisions for the Sunday School. Yet, this did not necessarily demonstrate volunteers' apathy toward the process. When Caitlann was present sharing new information, the adults in this study took time from their secular obligations to attend. This exhibited the lay members' desire for helpful information that they could apply to the task of educating children. Because of the interconnectedness of the system, the new information shared had the potential to directly affect the adults and children within the church. When new information was introduced within the system, it became a part of the system, having the potential to cause it to act differently.

#### *Creating an Effective Christian Education Program*

Research indicated that a mature faith in children depends on two main factors: the family and the church. Mature faith involved developing "a deep life-transforming relationship to a loving God," and "promoting the welfare of others" (Benson et al., 1990). When a family's faith was strong, lived out in action, and children took part in a program of Christian education, their chances of developing a mature faith improved (Benson & Eklin, 1990; Benson et al., 1990). The research also showed that to attain an effective Christian education program in the church required "strong, committed, competent leadership by teachers and pastors" (Benson et al., 1990, p. 59). It involved planning, training, and significant support from the church participants (Benson et al., 1990). The teachers in highly effective programs had high faith maturity, cared about their students, and knew about education theory and practice for the age they taught.

I used the above research findings to comprehend the components at work in an effective Christian education setting. Understanding the elements of an effective Christian education program provided guidelines in the examination of the work done at Fourth United Methodist Church. I observed that Reverend Shaw and the lay members were committed to creating a Sunday School program for children. Reverend Shaw in his vision statement for the church had stated clearly that he valued children and felt the church had a responsibility to care for and teach them. Accepting this charge, he began the planning process although he had never attempted the initiation of a Sunday School program before.

Several lay volunteers stepped forward offering their time and knowledge to help design the program. The participants in this research were willing to plan, provide training for volunteer teachers, and support efforts in the classroom with needed supplies, demonstrating their hope that a program of Christian education would begin. Participants realized that teaching Christianity to children involved more than students recognizing the stories of the faith and regurgitating scripture on demand; it involved helping them to have a life-transforming relationship with God, one that promoted the welfare of others (Benson et al., 1990). Through their conversations, the participants shared their wish for the children of Fourth United Methodist Church to know God's love and to reach out to others engaging in missions. They believed by providing such a program they would share the faith, caring for the children of the church.

The final element of an effective program of Christian education included having participants involved who understood the educational theory and practice for children in their care. This component proved to be weak for the participants in this case study. Very few participants, including Reverend Shaw, had training in this area. Their lack of

accord affected the system, making it difficult for the participants to achieve their final goal as fully as they might have liked - creating an effective program of Christian education.

### *The Need for More Education*

Understanding how individuals construct knowledge and arrive at their own personal practical theories revealed the power experience had upon women and men when other training and education were absent (Rodgers & Dunn, 2000). People use the cognition they have available to make sense of situations they come up against (Corsaro, 1997; Fosnot, 1996; Piaget, 1977). By depending on their previous knowledge to inform them, they act in response to what they understand. With this in mind, training of church leaders and volunteers takes on new meaning. Because most ministers and lay volunteers receive very little instruction in educational theory and practice with children, their knowledge base is inadequate. Training provided by the church can enable participants to begin constructing new theories and understandings about teaching children. The introduction of fresh ideas challenges individuals to assimilate new information into their current understandings, encouraging them to construct new understandings (Fosnot, 1996; Piaget, 1976). The benefits of training will be explored further as I examine the work done by Reverend Shaw, the laity, and visiting experts.

*Reverend Shaw* - Research indicated that competent leadership by the minister involved three things: the pastor was committed to and involved in Christian education, had the support of church leaders, and understood educational theory and practice (Benson et al., 1990). Reverend Shaw's actions demonstrated his commitment to creating a program of Christian education, further, he had the support of church leaders to begin the program. Yet, Reverend Shaw entered this process without an understanding of

educational theory and practice, and his lack of knowledge appeared to affect both his decisions during the planning process and eventually his personal involvement in the program. This lack of information meant that Reverend Shaw depended heavily on personal experience. Reverend Shaw revealed his held understandings as he set goals and discussed ideas with the laity concerning class groupings, preschool education, and the use of curriculum.

Before talking with the laity, Reverend Shaw had determined two classes would serve the needs of the Sunday School program - an early elementary and older elementary class. After sharing his ideas the laity responded with their feelings and quickly questioned his suggestions. Many of the lay volunteers present expressed concern about their own children's various reading levels and their children's ability to comprehend ideas and focus on task. The laity used personal experience with their children, their limited training, and their knowledge about public school groupings to inform their opinions. After a lengthy discussion, Reverend Shaw constructed new ideas about class groupings. He evaluated his earlier understandings and chose to follow the recommendations of the laity and divide the elementary students into three classes. The Sunday School program the group planned was different from the one Reverend Shaw imagined. As the group worked together, they integrated ideas demonstrating the ability to affect the operatory system which in this case could lead to a shared point of accord and to a group determination (Piaget, 1995).

Further discussion occurred as participants attempted to deal with the needs of children in preschool. Again, the power of personal experience is obvious. Participants used examples from other churches to help them determine what children in these age groups were capable of learning. The discussion revealed that they knew little about child

development; for example, participants were unsure if play or dittos were more appropriate. They struggled with whether children at this age should receive childcare or actually engage in some type of Sunday School program. Again, Reverend Shaw resorted to and shared his memories from past church settings. Lacking instruction about child development, Reverend Shaw and the laity made choices for the children's Sunday School program based in large part on knowledge constructed from experience. Finally, the group settled on providing a class for three- and four-year-olds. This class was short-lived. After the church moved to rented space, the children in this age range entered nursery care. This change may reflect the ambivalence of the laity and the minister in dealing with early childhood education. Without clear examples or a solid educational background, the participants were ambiguous about the aim of an early childhood Sunday School classroom eventually leading to its demise.

Reverend Shaw's lack of knowledge about educational theory and practice revealed itself again as he examined curriculum. He wanted a theologically sound, less traditional curriculum. He believed that the novelty of a less traditional curriculum would set Fourth United Methodist Church apart from other churches in the area. As the group looked over samples and the laity voiced support of a more traditional curriculum model that appeared "teacher friendly," he accepted a curriculum that did not meet all his criteria. Like the laity, he began considering the curriculum from the view point of the teacher. He contemplated the sample lessons to see whether novice teachers could use them in the classroom; however, he did not have the ability to evaluate the curriculum samples based on the developmental needs of the children who would participate in the Sunday School program. If Reverend Shaw had a deeper understanding of how children learn, he could have examined the curriculum to determine whether or not it was



developmentally appropriate for the children in his church. Though the goals of the Sunday School, according to Wesley, were to “include both the enhancement of cognitive knowledge and the encouragement of conversion and personal commitment” (Felton, 1997, p. 104), the focus was not on the children’s learning. Instead, the ease for the teachers to deliver a lesson took precedence.

*The Laity* - Research showed that teachers in effective programs of Christian education needed a personal knowledge and “life-transforming” relationship with God and a desire “to promote the welfare of others” (Benson et al., 1990, p. 25). The teacher should also care about his or her students and have a knowledge of educational theory and practice for the children he or she taught (Benson et al., 1990). The laity by volunteering time to plan the Sunday School program demonstrated their ability to promote the welfare of others. Yet, because the church was new, Reverend Shaw and the lay members did not know each other well, making it impossible to determine the faith level of each volunteer. Because the church was small and the pool of volunteers limited, finding women and men who had a knowledge of educational theory and practice was difficult. Few lay members at Fourth United Methodist Church had any formal training that would inform them as they planned the Sunday School program or taught in the classroom. As laity volunteered, they were accepted based exclusively on their willingness to help.

The laity were instrumental in designing and implementing the Sunday School program. The lay volunteers were given the responsibility of both helping plan and later teaching in the children’s Sunday School. They entered the planning process with various levels of knowledge and were willing to share what they knew from their own experiences. Despite their willingness to help, at times they struggled with personal feelings of inadequacy as they planned and talked about teaching children in the

classroom. They felt an obligation to pass on the faith but did not have a strong knowledge base to help them. Several wrestled with volunteering to teach children or attending adult Christian education opportunities. They had a personal desire to continue learning more about the faith in adult education classes. By accepting a volunteer teacher placement they would remove themselves from adult Christian education opportunities.

The planning committee members attempted to support the teacher volunteers by choosing a curriculum they conjectured would be easy to use in the classroom and by providing training. As they chose the curriculum, they selected an option that they felt they could personally put to use. This was important because many of the individuals planning the program would eventually teach in it. It also meant that the adults who viewed the curriculum options made their selection with heavy emphasis on adult usability rather than on how it would fit the needs of the children. Because the participants on the planning committee had little training and the pastor could not provide information about the curriculum that would address its applicability to teaching children, individuals had to rely heavily on their own personal practical theories. The laity did not have the cognition they needed to extensively challenge each other's beliefs about the developmental appropriateness of Sunday School curriculum. Caitlann, the visiting expert, encouraged the members to look in-depth at the options and to consider the needs of the congregation. Yet, because of her limited time with the lay participants, the information she shared produced only small perturbations within the system and appeared to cause little change in the laity's understandings.

All of the laity who volunteered to teach attended the teacher training lead by Caitlann. The two hour training was the only preparation many of the men and women received before entering the classroom. It introduced teachers to lesson planning and

began helping volunteers reconstruct held understandings about children and teaching. The training alone did not ensure that teachers were prepared to enter the classroom, although it was a start. The teachers would still have the task of taking the information learned and putting it to use as practitioners (Rodgers & Dunn, 1999). This was a challenge made more difficult by the lack of trained church participants to support the volunteers, introduce new ideas, and to continue confronting the held beliefs of the members. With such an exchange, individuals might be encouraged to reconstruct their previous understandings rather than resume the patterns that were familiar (Rodgers & Dunn, 1999).

The Church did not adequately deal with the issue of teacher preparation. The Church addressed the issue of curriculum, creating standard issue items that satisfied child development standards; yet volunteers continued to struggle to create a classroom environment they felt met the needs of the children (Burgess, 2001). As church participants contemplated new models for teaching they needed to consider the concerns of the women and men who entered the classroom each Sunday (Armstrong-Hansche & MacQueen, 2000). With adequate support through group training and by providing available experts to challenge the held beliefs of teachers, new knowledge construction was possible. By empowering the laity with new knowledge and opportunities for cooperative interaction, they were encouraged to “possibly reconstruct their previous understandings of the concepts,” rather than simply accept the views of others (Rodgers & Dunn, 1999, p. 272). In this way, individuals working in the church began building their own knowledge base for teaching children the Christian faith.

*Visiting Experts* - Both Reverend Shaw and the laity supported the inclusion of outside experts to help during the planning process. They invited Ellen and Caitlann to

spend time with members from the planning committee. The ideas shared by both experts presented new information to the participants. The assistance from trained specialist provided an opportunity for staff and volunteers to construct new understandings about such subjects as curriculum, parent involvement, and Sunday School teaching.

Ellen met with a small group in July to share information about the curriculum distributed by Cokesbury Publishing. She presented the many curriculum options, explaining in-depth each one and answering any questions raised by the participants. By the time Ellen visited with the participants, they were familiar with the options available. She was able to answer more in-depth questions about the curriculum, and she expressed her support for *Exploring Faith*. Her limited time with the group and the small number in attendance made her influence minimal.

Caitlann met with the group on two separate occasions, during the planning stage and during her teacher training session. Caitlann's influence on the committee participants was more extensive. Her training in Christian education, her understandings of educational theory and practice, and her knowledge of research examining effective programs of Christian education gave her the ability to share sound ideas with the participants. Because of her training she often challenged the beliefs of Reverend Shaw and the laity. One opportunity occurred when Reverend Shaw suggested parents be expected to volunteer in the Sunday School. Caitlann knew parents were an intricate component in mature faith development as they provided Christian education support in the home. She encouraged Reverend Shaw to construct new understandings about how parents could support faith maturity in the home as well as in the church setting. Although Reverend Shaw stopped pushing for mandatory parent involvement, it is

unclear if his held beliefs on the subject changed. He ardently supported the role of parents as participants in the church's Christian education of children. Reverend Shaw did not explore the role of the parent in the home, demonstrating Caitlann's information did not affect Reverend Shaw in this area.

Caitlann encouraged Reverend Shaw and committee members to pursue a course of teacher training prior to the implementation of the Sunday School. She observed the struggle lay participants experienced as they evaluated the curriculum. She understood the need for teachers to feel comfortable with the curriculum so they could engage in a relationship with the students in their charge; she pushed them to offer training. The information the laity brought to the classroom came from their own parenting experiences or other opportunities they had with children. Few had any training to help them understand how children learn best. Because Reverend Shaw did not have a strong background in Christian education, the laity depended on Caitlann to help them prepare to teach children.

By providing a two hour teacher training session, Caitlann helped prepare the volunteers as they entered the classroom. Although the training was basic, it initiated an understanding within the church that teachers needed instruction to work with children (Benson et al., 1990). During the training, Caitlann introduced participants to lesson planning and guided them to information about child development. She addressed basic child development, examining motor development, cognitive development, and social development. She explained the importance of the teacher-child relationship during the learning process, and she supported the teachers' desire to engage the parents in Christian education during the week. Although Caitlann's time was limited, she introduced volunteers to the curriculum and provided strategies for preparing a lesson to teach. The

information she put forth pushed participants to begin constructing new ideas. Further, she entered the group with an attitude of cooperation which made the exchange of ideas possible (Piaget, 1995). Yet, as an outsider she did not have a strong relationship with the members of the church; therefore, the group may have accepted her knowledge only because of her authority. If this were the case, then members would be less likely to integrate the information into their own core system of beliefs (Piaget, 1995; Rodgers & Dunn, 1999). Had Caitlann continued developing a relationship with members in the church, spending more time with them, her ideas might have had a stronger effect upon the individuals participating in the formation of the Christian education program, giving her ideas more stayed power. The availability of a trained expert to engage in an ongoing relationship with the church participants could pose the possibility of a stronger effect upon the system as a whole.

#### *Equipping the Pastor and the Laity through Training*

Understanding the basic requirements of designing an effective program of education and revisiting some of the struggles members of Fourth United Methodist Church faced are reminders of the significance of training. The strength of a Christian education program depends on the people who are a part of it. With this in mind it is important to reflect on the training most ministers and laity have as they work within the Sunday School.

As leader of the church, the minister takes on the role of ensuring children are taught about the faith (*The Book of Discipline*, 2000). Yet, most ministers do not receive extensive instruction in this area. The training a United Methodist minister receives to help him or her provide effective Christian education needs to be examined closely. The majority of United Methodist Seminaries call for only three hours of Christian education.

Although seminary training appears to prepare women and men to lead worship and teach adults, it does not instruct them to teach children. *The Book of Discipline* (2000) states clearly that “ministers are authorized to preach and teach the Word of God” (p. 209). John Wesley believed his ministers had the responsibility to teach all people, no matter their age. If the United Methodist Denomination accepts this belief then Seminary education should be scrutinized.

Women and men entering ministry who have a solid understanding of how children develop and learn may become more effective pastors to the families in their churches. Their leadership in the area of Christian education could benefit the lay volunteers working with children and the church as a whole. Ministers who receive instruction in the area of educational theory and practice would have knowledge to share with the laity in their churches. Because the pastor is accessible to the laity, his or her leadership in this area would be readily available to meet the specific and changing needs of the lay volunteers. This type of ongoing teaching could be an asset to church participants, fostering an atmosphere where individuals could exchange viewpoints and begin reconstructing their held beliefs. Such a continuous exchange would have the possibility of stayed power unlike the brief encounters with visiting experts. If visiting experts were used in conjunction with an informed minister then church participants might build even stronger understandings about the Christian education of children.

Currently, it appears that United Methodist ministers are not adequately trained to deal with the educational needs of the children in their churches. Until changes are made, the educational opportunities provided by visiting experts are essential, ensuring church participants are exposed to new ideas. By introducing new concepts to the

participants, training has the potential to enrich the programs of Christian education in the church.

The lay members in this study demonstrated their interest in training; when Caitlann joined them attendance spiked. During these encounters when Caitlann presented new educational ideas, laity examined their own beliefs and constructed new positions regarding Christian education. As members of the church worked together their actions challenged the equilibrium of those in the group and the grouping itself (Piaget, 1995). It was through this sharing of ideas that the group internalized new understandings, and the group dynamic changed. Only by confronting the held ideas of the participants and allowing them to struggle together to bring meaning to the situation could the operatory system itself be impacted (Piaget, 1995). Hence, the participants could begin building a foundational understanding of child development and educational theory and practice as they conceived the complexities of Christian education (Benson et al., 1990).

Training for the church participants held the potential to help them in practical way. As they used the curriculum, they felt equipped to choose activities that met the learning needs of the children. Furnishing training to volunteers may have raised their comfort level in the classroom, creating an environment that encouraged them to continue teaching children. Teachers who are willing to teach for longer terms begin building stronger relationships with the children in their care, supporting an environment where effective Christian education is possible. They also build an expanded knowledge base from their education and experience enabling them to be “active agents in the learning process” (Rodgers & Dunn, 1999, p. 286).



Finally, another benefit of providing training to teachers is what it conveys to volunteers. If teachers feel they are being prepared by the church to teach Sunday School, then it speaks of its importance in the life of the congregation (Hoge et al., 1998; Pearce, 1993). It also communicates to parents that their children's Christian education is something the church community takes seriously.

### *Faith Commitment and the Influence of Secular Culture*

Because Fourth United Methodist Church was new, participants were not official members who had taken any vow of membership. However, participants in this study had attended other Christian churches during their lifetime and through their baptism had accepted the universal responsibility of Christianity to make disciples. By accepting this obligation, they consented to help design the Sunday School. They demonstrated the belief that Christianity should be shared and children should be taught the tenets of the faith.

It is true that participants felt a Christian education program was important and that they were willing to dedicate time and energy to plan the Sunday School program; however, participants still struggled internally. They lived active lives dedicated to work, family, church, and various other activities. Most had enough money to travel and enjoyed an array of weekend activities that at times conflicted with their church attendance. The lay members wrestled with their dedication to the programs in the church and their secular existence. As they set the date for the beginning of the Sunday School program and as they dealt with the length of time they would ask teachers to pledge, they struggled with the commitment issue.

During the initial planning stages Reverend Shaw expected the Sunday School program to begin quickly. The lay volunteers determined that such a course of action was

impossible. They worried about the many tasks that still needed to be accomplished and quickly questioned Reverend Shaw's goal. Later, as discussion continued the laity revealed their concern about the time they had to offer. They had set obligations, church work being only one of many. Although they were willing to help, they needed to make it work with their busy lives. As Christians they felt an obligation to be faithful stewards in the church, but it was obvious, church was not always their first or only priority.

The laity also struggled with teacher commitment terms. Participants wanted a strong Sunday School program for their children. They felt that children would be better prepared to deal with their lives if they received a Christian education. They believed Christian education could promote social concern as children engaged in mission opportunities. With these beliefs, participants continued to contend with time commitments. As the laity discussed teacher commitment terms, there emerged concerns about an extended obligation. The planning committee initially agreed on a three month commitment for teachers. After only one year, participants evaluated this term and changed it to three weeks. Teachers were easier to locate once the obligation was reduced.

The conflicts the lay members faced affected the Sunday School program in many ways. As they struggled to allocate time for faith development, they wrestled with how significant the church was in their daily lives. Although they were willing to teach, this commitment affected the time they engaged in adult Christian education opportunities. To develop a mature faith they needed to engage in Christian education themselves. Hence, volunteerism in the children's ministry excluded them from participating in adult education opportunities lessening their potential for growth.

Since the church relies on volunteers, the growing obligations that conflict its members also impact its programs. Church members who feel overwhelmed by their

outside obligations appear less willing to commit long-term, but shorter commitment terms can affect the teacher-child relationship. During group discussions, the laity shared the significance of early relationships in their own lives. Although many could not remember the content of the Sunday School lessons they experienced, they did remember special committed teachers who had nurtured them in the faith. Christian fellowship with other believers is one way religious understandings are shared. The relationship model is central in the life of Christians (Burgess, 2001). When Caitlann met with committee members, she emphasized this idea as central to the child's Sunday School experience. She underscored this model at the teacher training, emphasizing it was not just the lesson that the teacher taught that was important but the relationship between teacher and child.

The need for a larger pool of volunteers surfaced as another conflict between secular life and church life. Shorter individual commitment terms demanded a considerable group of church volunteers, creating the need for more training. Another problem for busy volunteers was the amount of time they spent preparing to enter the classroom. Teachers who are not prepared to teach may feel less comfortable as they enter the classroom. In turn, the teachers may choose not to volunteer in the future.

The secular entrenchment of individuals at Fourth United Methodist Church revealed another aspect of this research and the system. Although educational opportunities were important for passing on the Christian faith, secular obligations existed for church members. Women and men participating at Fourth United Methodist Church chose how to treat the commitments they accepted. When the church offered information that was viewed as helpful (i.e. teacher training) participants put aside secular obligations. Yet, when a task was assigned to the laity to accomplish without adequate training (i.e. planning the Sunday School for children), attendance waned. These findings

may reveal another aspect of the importance of quality educational opportunities in the church community. When men and women are equipped to accomplish the task assigned them, they are likely to support it. If individuals are asked to do work within the church they are not comfortable accomplishing, then secular obligations may take precedence.

### *The Sunday School and Social System Theory*

The interconnectedness existing between the many participants within this research and the vast components has made this study more complex than I first imagined. What I discovered within this research is that each part of the system is connected to, or can have its own effect upon, every other part (Friedman, 1985; Knodt, 1995). Factors from both education and culture influenced the faith community of Fourth United Methodist Church. I also observed in this research that as the participants communicated, sharing ideas, their conversations had an effect upon the system as a whole (Luhmann, 1995; Piaget, 1995). The interactions between and among individuals within the church, whether clergy, laity, or outside experts, had the potential to affect the larger whole (Friedman, 1985; Luhmann, 1995; Piaget, 1995).

Using systems theory to look at the findings from this study revealed that as each component came together to create the effect (i.e., a Sunday School program for children), they were not independent forces themselves but interdependent. The information each individual contributed, the work of the group as a whole, and the final compilation revealed the interconnectedness of the system. To understand the complex nature of the social system that existed, I will review the contributions of various components, hoping to uncover unforeseen outcomes.

Prior to entering into this study, Reverend Shaw, the laity, and the visiting experts, constructed their personal practical theories. Many elements influenced the

participants, including the culture they existed within, their families, churches they attended, people they had connected with, the education they received, and the many things they experienced throughout their lives. Each participant had experienced life differently, and because of this each brought to this study their own experiences, beliefs, and reactions. As each church member joined in planning the Sunday School, they exposed the group to their held understandings. In turn, the social interactions that became part of the group process held the potential to affect others who were taking part. The women and men participating in this case study could potentially effect change upon the system itself. By sharing their unique viewpoints and working together in an atmosphere of cooperation, the participants could create a shared point of understanding, leading to group decisions and possible action. In turn, the Sunday School composition would reflect the understandings, cognition, and experiences of members from Fourth United Methodist Church.

As stated earlier, the individuals in this study approached their task with little preparation. As they worked together they did so with the hope of creating a program that would be effective in teaching children about the Christian faith and enjoyable to the children present. The volunteers who met early in the process supported the program with their attendance and giving of time. As the task continued, the committee formation changed; attendance waned. This created a situation in which fewer individuals shared their understandings, views were challenged less, and a small group's personal practical theories guided the decisions for the church. Six laity attended in January, February, and June (Caitlann attended this meeting). Following the first two gatherings, only the meetings Caitlann participated in were well attended by the lay participants. At the remainder of the meetings, three or less laity accomplished the work of the committee.

During the final stages, Reverend Shaw and Ann were left to make many of the decisions for the group. As Reverend Shaw and Ann made more decisions concerning the Sunday School formation they made choices for the group based on the knowledge they had constructed from previous experiences. This created a situation where Reverend Shaw and Ann's ideas were less likely to be confronted. The decisions they made on behalf of the Education committee represented their understandings about Christian education in the church setting, but may not have represented the collective ideas of the group as a whole, weakening the social system.

Lay participants' feelings of inadequacy in preparing a program of Christian education may have attributed to their lagging attendance, and to the breakdown of the system. Because few of the lay members had experience to help them, they began to fall from the planning process. It is here that the pull of secular culture exerted itself strongest. When they did not feel supported to do the task at hand, they selected secular obligations over church-related endeavors. Yet, when information was available they showed their support with their attendance. This combination of complex components demonstrates the way the system was affected in diverse ways. Education and training showed the potential of strengthening the social system, preparing members to actively participate. By not adequately equipping members to do the work of the church, they pulled away, weakening the system.

When a social system weakens, ideas are less likely to be shared in a reciprocal manner, and the activities within the system settle into a pattern. Unchallenged these understandings may lead church participants to accept without question their validity. When this occurs, members may sustain the activities set forth at the church, yet distance themselves from the events by not participating. Without available leadership that

challenges the system, the church may experience dips in attendance. With strong, informed leadership who can work in cooperation with other church members, programs within the church can be scrutinized, ideas exchanged, new knowledge constructed, and the social system strengthened.

### *Answering the Research Question*

How does a new church go about developing a Sunday School program for children? Participants at Fourth United Methodist Church answered that question as they designed and then implemented a program of Christian education for children. In many ways their plan was straight forward. They set meeting dates, gathered interested individuals, set goals, dealt with evolving concerns, and eventually began their new program. Along the way participants dealt with Sunday School traditions, held beliefs, new insights, feelings of inadequacy, and complicated personal schedules. They worked through their concerns together, discussing the needs of the church, exploring their understandings of children's Sunday School, struggling with unforeseen obstacles, and finding workable solutions.

Contemplating the research data, and following the progression of the member's work revealed that through their discussions they sometimes changed their views and at other times held fast to their understandings. When new information was shared with group participants and applicable solutions introduced, they discussed the information and often arrived at a group determination. It was during the exchange of ideas that individual members of the group had the opportunity to begin constructing new understandings about Christian education at Fourth United Methodist Church. As individual worked together they formed a Christian education program grounded upon personal experience and newly formed understandings.

### *Lessons Learned from this Research*

If the work of the church is to remain vital to the membership, training is essential. First, clergy should be trained in the areas of child development and Christian education. As leader of a local congregation, the minister remains the most accessible source of knowledge for the laity. The information he or she can share with the lay participants in the local church remains a valuable resource. The minister can build an atmosphere of cooperation between himself or herself and the lay participants. The combination of a strong educational foundation and a setting where cooperation occurs can affect the social system within the church. The minister and laity can work together, confronting held ideas, and in turn make decisions that meet the needs of participants more fully.

The second lesson from this research involved the training of lay members. Providing relevant training to lay members is an essential component in enabling them to do the work of the church. Laity who feel prepared may dedicate more hours to church work. Church commitments might take precedence over familiar secular obligations. This case study demonstrated that lay members will attend training to help them prepare.

The third lesson from this research revealed the importance of trained experts. Trained experts utilized on a regular basis can support the work of church participants. Their ability to bring in new ideas can help both the minister and laity to construct new understandings. When the church invests resources in training volunteers to do the work of the church, it has the potential to strengthen the entire social system.

### *The Need for Further Research*

This study has brought to light several areas of research that could be pursued further. First, a similar case study experience would provide the chance to begin forming a substantial theory base in the area of new church starts and the Sunday School.



Comparing similar case study research to this study would reveal emerging themes and novelty. This research base would then lend itself to new insights in a more meaningful way.

Based on the findings in this study, further research to examine the effects of teacher training on volunteers Sunday Schools teachers could prove informative. Teacher training has the potential to affect individuals and church communities. It would be interesting to discover if lay members were willing to engage in advanced training to prepare them to teach in the Sunday School. Continued educational opportunities for the lay participants could establish a stronger program of Christian education within the local church.

Training for parents would also be an area where additional exploration could be informative. Knowing that parents and the church community play a vital role in developing mature faith in children, parent education at the local church level may prove beneficial. Exploring how the local church can assist parents through local church programs supports another component for the development of mature faith.

Finally, more research needs to examine the role of the pastor in the faith development of children. Seminary education needs to be scrutinized to understand its affects upon the ministers who graduate. How does a minister's educational endeavors influence his or her understandings of church leadership in the area of Christian education? Do ministers feel it is the lay members' duty to attend to the Christian education endeavors in the local church? Are ministers distancing themselves from programs of Christian education for children because they feel inadequately prepared? Leaders who feel ill prepared to work with children or lead programs of Christian education may invest less time working in these areas. Research examining both the education and attitudes of

local pastors could shed light on these questions. Research in these areas could provide information to the United Methodist Denomination and local churches helping them to build stronger programs of Christian education.

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## APPENDIX A

### Expanded List of Pastoral Duties

Responsibilities and Duties of the Pastor - The pastor(s) shall oversee the total ministry of the local church in its nurturing ministries and in fulfilling its mission of witness and service in the world by: (1) giving pastoral support, guidance, and training to the lay leadership in the church, equipping them to fulfill the ministry to which they are sent as servants under the Lordship of Christ; (2) providing ministry within the congregation and to the world; (3) ensuring faithful transmission of the Christian faith; and (4) administering the temporal affairs of the congregation. In the context of these basic responsibilities, the pastor shall give attention to the following specific duties:

*1. Ministering Within the Congregation and to the World* - a) To preach the Word, oversee the worship life of the congregation, read and teach the Scriptures, and engage the people in study and witness.

b) To administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper and all the other means of grace. It shall be the duty of all appointed pastors, before baptizing infants or children, to prepare the parents and sponsors by instructing them concerning the significance of Holy Baptism, the responsibilities of the parents and the sponsor(s) for the Christian training of the baptized child, and how these obligations may be properly discharged (see paragraph 225.1). All appointed pastors may select and train lay members with appropriate words and actions to immediately deliver the consecrated communion elements to members confined at home, in a nursing home, or in a hospital.

c) To encourage reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant and renewal of baptismal vows at different stages of life. The practice of re-baptism does not conform with God's

action in baptism and is not consistent with Wesleyan tradition and the historic teaching of the church. Therefore, the pastor should counsel any person seeking re-baptism to participate in a rite of re-affirmation of baptismal vows.

d) To give oversight to the total educational program of the church and encourage the distribution and use of United Methodist literature in each local church.

e) To provide leadership for the funding ministry of the congregation and to encourage giving as a spiritual discipline.

f) To lead the congregation by teaching and example in a ministry with people with disabilities.

g) To be involved and to lead the congregation in evangelistic outreach that others might come to know Christ, be baptized, and become members.

h) To encourage people baptized in infancy or early childhood to make their profession of faith after instruction so that they might become professing members of the church.

i) To perform the marriage ceremony after due counsel with the parties involved. The decision to perform the ceremony shall be the right and responsibility of the pastor. Qualifications for performing marriage shall be in accordance with the laws of the state and The United Methodist Church.

j) To counsel those who are under threat of marriage breakdown and explore every possibility for reconciliation.

k) To counsel bereaved families and conduct appropriate funeral and memorial services.

l) To counsel with members of the church and community concerning military service and its alternatives.

m) To counsel persons struggling with personal, ethical, or spiritual issues.

n) To visit in the homes of the church and community, especially among the sick, aged, and others in need.

o) To participate in community, ecumenical, and interreligious concerns and to lead the congregation to become so involved through ministries of service and advocacy, relevant to specific and diverse community contexts; and to pray and labor for the unity of the Christian community.

p) To search out from among the membership and constituency men and women for pastoral ministry and other church-related occupations; to help them interpret the meaning of the call of God; to advise and assist when they commit themselves thereto; to counsel with them concerning the course of their preparation; and to keep a careful record of such decisions.

q) To give diligent pastoral leadership in ordering the life of the congregation for discipleship to the world.

2. *Equipping an Supervising* - a) To give diligent pastoral leadership ordering the life of the congregation for nurture and care.

b) To offer counsel and theological reflection in the following:

(1) The development of goals for fulfilling the missions of the congregation, the annual conference, and the general Church.

(2) The development of plans for implementing the goals of the congregation and a process for evaluating their effectiveness.

(3) The selection, training, and deployment of lay leadership within the congregation and the development of a process for evaluating lay leadership.

c) To lead the congregation in experiencing the racial and ethnic inclusiveness of The United Methodist Church and to help prepare it for participation in the itineracy of all ordained men and women.

d) To participate in denominational and conference programs and training opportunities and seek out opportunities for cooperative ministries with other United Methodist pastors and churches.

e) To be willing to assume supervisory responsibilities within the connection.

f) To lead the congregation in the fulfillment of its mission through full and faithful payment of all apportioned ministerial support, administrative, and benevolent funds.

3. *Administration* - a) To be the administrative officer of the local church and to assume that the organizational concerns of the congregation are adequately provided for.

b) To be responsible for the process of goal setting and planning through which the laity take responsibility for ministry in the church and in the world.

c) To administer the provisions of the *Discipline* and supervise the working program of the local church.

d) To give an account of their pastoral ministries to the charge and annual conference according to the prescribed forms. The care of all church records and local church financial obligations shall be included. The pastor shall certify the accuracy of all financial, membership, and any other reports submitted by the local church to the annual conference for use in apportioning costs back to the church.

## APPENDIX B

### Expanded List of The Meaning of Membership

When persons unite with a local United Methodist Church, they, or, if unable to answer for themselves, their parent(s), profess their faith in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; in Jesus Christ his only Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Thus, they make known their desire to live their daily lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. They covenant together with God and with the members of the local church to keep the vows which are a part of the order of confirmation and reception into the Church:

1. To renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil of the world, and repent of their sins;
2. To accept the freedom and power God gives them to resist evil, injustice, and oppression;
3. To confess Jesus Christ as Savior, put their whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as their Lord;
4. To remain faithful members of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representative in the world;
5. To be loyal to The United Methodist church and do all in their power to strengthen its ministries;
6. To faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, and their service;
7. To receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

*Growth in Faithful Discipleship* - Faithful membership in the local church is essential for personal growth and for developing a deeper commitment to the will and grace of God. As members involve themselves in private and public prayer, worship, the sacraments, study, Christian action, systematic giving, and holy discipline, they grow in their appreciation of Christ, understanding of God at work in history and the natural order, and an understanding of themselves.

*Mutual Responsibility* - Faithful discipleship includes the obligation to participate in the corporate life of the congregation with fellow members of the body of Christ. A member is bound in sacred covenant to shoulder the burdens, share the risks, and celebrate the joys of fellow members. A Christian is called to speak the truth in love, always ready to confront conflict in the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation.

*The Call to Ministry of All the Baptized* - All members of Christ's universal church are called to share in the ministry which is committed to the whole church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, each member of The United Methodist Church is to be a servant of Christ on mission in the local and worldwide community. This servant hood is performed in family life, daily work, recreation and social activities, responsible citizenship, the stewardship of property and accumulated resources, the issues of corporate life, and all attitudes toward other persons. Participation in disciplined groups is an expected part of personal mission involvement. Each member is called upon to be a witness for Christ in the world, a light and leaven in society, and a reconciler in a culture of conflict. Each member is to identify with the agony and suffering of the world and to radiate and exemplify the Christ of hope. The standards of attitude and conduct set forth in the Social Principles (Part IV) shall be considered as an essential resource for guiding each member of the Church in being a servant of Christ mission.



## APPENDIX C

### Approval to Tape Record

*Informed Consent Form For Research Being Conducted Under the Auspices of the  
University of Oklahoma - Norman Campus*

You are invited to participate in a study entitled "The Inception of a United Methodist Sunday School Program. The principal investigator is Leslie A. Long, doctoral student in early childhood education. The faculty sponsor for this study is Dr. Debbie Rodgers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the process that occurs during the inception of a new United Methodist Sunday School program. The principal investigator, Leslie A. Long will attend organizational meetings and interview the pastor and volunteers as needed during this process. The goals of the church committee will be examined and followed from inception to practice. The study will provide information about how a church begins and moves towards implementing a new Sunday School program. It will also explore how the church then evaluates the fledgling program. This study will begin in January 2001 and conclude on/or before December 31, 2001.

The only risk involved in participating in this study is privacy. This risk will be minimized by confidentiality procedures. The names of all participants will be changed for purposes of confidentiality in the published research.

The expected benefits from participating in this study will be the advantage of a well documented process which participants can examine as they continue to make adjustments and improvements in the Sunday School program for the future.

All participation in this study is voluntary and any person involved in this study may discontinue participation at any time. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older.

Meetings and interviews will be audio taped in order to collect research data. Audio taping can only be used if all participants at the organizational meetings agree to be taped. Subjects participating in this research have the right to refuse to allow such taping without penalty or prejudice.

If you have questions regarding this study please feel free to contact the investigator at xxx-xxxx. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant please call the Office of Research Administration at 325-4757.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I will participate in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

### Vision for New Church

I have a vision of a church that aggressively seeks to win new people for God and especially reaches out to those who are not active in another church. This is a church that understands God really cares about lost people. Changed lives will be the fruit of our efforts.

I see a church that welcomes all people. A community of encouragers that believe in simple human decency for all that promotes forgiveness, a place where Gods healing of the soul happens. I see a fellowship where we gather to build one another up not to tear down.

I see a church that promotes the making of disciples just as much as winning new ones. I see a church that believes becoming a true disciple of Jesus Christ is a life-long process requiring intentionality. An intentional process the church takes the lead in promoting for the benefit of its members and for the development of God's Kingdom here on Earth. I dream of a church where everyone is a part of a small group where fellowship, discipling, ministering to one another and mission can naturally occur.

I see a church that recognizes children are our greatest treasure and that caring for and teaching them is one of our greatest responsibility, given us by God. I see a church that looks at the world and sees children being abused, neglected and unloved and weeps. A church that hears God's call to minister to and love all children, both within our community of faith and beyond.

I see a church with a servant heart that believes *all* laity are called to be ministers, equipped to minister to the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of those within our

church, our community and the world. My vision is of a community of believers who recognize that the work of the church in reaching the lost, and making disciples is the highest calling all of us share. It is that understanding of the holy task that propels us to be willing to take risks in creating ministries. I see a church that is not afraid to experiment, to “think outside of the box” when the task is transforming lives one at a time.

I see a church where worship is the central place we gather to praise God and to be inspired and challenged. I see a worship service that communicates the good news in a contemporary way with messages that are culturally relevant and biblically grounded. Messages that apply biblical principles to the problems of our lives. I see a worship service where media (video and drama) is an important element; a worship service that is both user friendly and meaningful for both believers and the unchurched.

Finally, I see a church that insists on excellence in all its ministries; a church whose ministries are all backed by clear biblical purposes. I see a church which, while driven to create new ministries to serve God’s family, always values people more than programs. I dream of a church where it is understood that the church is not just a building but is primarily a group of people who show their love for God by loving and serving others.

Reverend Shaw - August 1999

## APPENDIX E

### Teacher Mission Description

Teaching is a high calling, a ministry. As you respond to Christ's call to teach, Fourth United Methodist Church covenants with each teacher that:

*You will receive:*

- \* Curriculum and basic resources required in curriculum
- \* Training for the task
- \* Moral and prayerful support through the Education committee and pastor
- \* A feeling of contributing to the kingdom of God through the education of God's people and being a part of the work of ministry
- \* A sense of being a part of something extremely significant in the lives of your students.
- \* Opportunities for personal Christian growth

*With the aid of a co-teacher, we ask you:*

- \* Spend time preparing
- \* Be in the classroom by 8:50 a.m. if at all possible
- \* Attend worship and be a part of the total church
- \* Know persons in your class and recognize their needs
- \* Attend and participate in planning and training when possible
- \* Show and share your faith
- \* Use curriculum approved by the church
- \* When possible, make contact outside of classroom with students, birthday cards, "we miss you" cards, phone calls, and so forth

*For Substitutes call:* Hazel Frank, Lucinda Maris      ANY QUESTIONS: Call Ann.

APPENDIX F  
Steps in Planning

I. Consider situational factors

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| a. amount of time                           | b. number of students                |
| c. space and furnishings available          | d. equipment and resources available |
| e. abilities/interests of students/teachers | f. season of the year                |

II. Prepare yourself personally

- a. take time for personal study, reflection and meditation
- b. pray for guidance and support for yourself, your co-workers and your students

III. Read the curriculum materials and resources

- a. scripture references
- b. teacher guide and resources
- c. student materials

IV. Identify the main idea or purpose for the lesson

V. Determine specifically what you want to accomplish

VI. Select teaching activities that will facilitate this learning

VII. Identify and secure resources

VIII. Develop a teaching strategy

- |               |               |              |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| a. opening    | b. presenting | c. exploring |
| d. responding | e. closing    |              |

IX. Organize information in an easy to follow outline

X. After teaching, evaluate what you did

## A PLANNING TIME LINE

Immediately after teaching	Evaluate how things went; what worked and what did not; what could be improved
5 or 6 days in advance	Review the lesson in the scriptures and teaching materials. Note things needing advance preparation and make plans.
In between time	Reflect on the lesson material and consider how it could best be taught. Meet with co-teachers to share ideas.
2 or 3 days in advance	With co-teacher finalize plans and assign responsibilities.
Day Before	Finish collecting materials and polishing plans.

## APPENDIX G

### Lesson Planning Worksheet

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson title \_\_\_\_\_

Key Bible passage \_\_\_\_\_

Main idea \_\_\_\_\_

At the end of the session, students should be able to:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

TIME	ACTIVITY	RESOURCES	LEADER
	Opening		
	Presenting		
	Exploring		
	Responding		
	Closing		