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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE;
A MEASUREMENT FOR SUNDAY SCHOOLS
AMONG THE CHURCHES IN OGBOMOSO
WEST BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

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on the Standard of Excellence Questionnaire and their Growth as measured in composite church membership.

Conclusion

The churches in Ogbomosho West Baptist Association are not meeting 100% of the criteria of the Sunday School Standard of Excellence. The overall average score of the Association on the Sunday School Standard of Excellence Questionnaire was 74%. This was below the 100% rating expected. The overall average score was based on the total score from the ten different areas of the Standard of Excellence Questionnaire.

There is evidence that the churches are concentrating on areas of the Standard that bring about more organization in the school. The result reveals that the score on the use of Sunday School literature had the highest score of 98.33%. This was followed by church relationship with a score of 92.08%. The churches are perhaps more concerned about organizing and sustaining the Sunday School organization, than using it to bring about growth in the church. The areas of the Sunday School Standard of Excellence that are related to outreach and growth, such as grouping and visitation were rated lowest (see figure 1 in Chapter Four and Appendix E).

The second null hypothesis, that there is no significant relationship between the total rating on Sunday School Standard of Excellence Questionnaire and Church Growth as measured by growth in composite membership, was also accepted. However, there was a

significant negative correlation between the enlargement area of the Standard of Excellence and composite church growth.

The literature has suggested that when the Sunday School is enlarged, many people are brought into the church.¹ Beginning new classes and units has proved very valuable to the growth of the Sunday School and the church.² Members of the new class or unit or even the new church will look for more members to join them. This brings about an increase in the size of the class, unit or church.³

There was a near significant negative correlation between the training area of the Standard of Excellence and composite church growth. Training can be a very important avenue of bringing about growth in the Sunday School and the church.⁴ When the teachers and officers are trained, they perform the work of the Sunday School better. As the Sunday School grows the church should also grow.

Visitation in Sunday to prospects, absentees and regular class members is supposed to increase and bring about growth in the school and church.⁵ The low score on the Sunday School Standard of Excellence Questionnaire for visitation criteria calls into question

¹ Ernest R. Adams and James E. Fitch, Reaching People Through The Sunday School (Nashville: Convention Press, 1979), p. 108.

² Adams and Fitch.

³ Harry M. Piland, Growing And Winning Through The Sunday School (Nashville: Convention Press, 1981), p. 160.

⁴ Piland, p. 93.

⁵ C. Kirk Hadaway, Church Growth Principles: Separating Fact From Fiction (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), p. 44.

the type and quality of visitations the churches in the Association are doing. Perhaps they are not doing growth producing visitations. Possibly, their visitations are more of the project approach.⁶ This means that the Sunday Schools do visitation on a once-a-while basis. The churches may also be focusing their visitation efforts on members rather than prospects. Analysis of ratings on visitation by individual churches shows that only one church in the Association has a regular planned Sunday School visitation.

The Association, over the five-year period (1989-1993) had an average composite growth of over 100% (or about 20% per year). Out of the twenty churches, two reported a composite growth decline. The average composite growth was enhanced by three small churches with high growth rates. This supports previous findings in the literature that new units grow faster.⁷

Discussion

The Sunday School Standard of Excellence was formulated to serve as a 'tool' to aid Sunday School work. It was to be a means to an end and not an end in itself. The churches of the Ogbomosho West Baptist Association emphasize areas of the Standard that bring about the formal organization of the school more than they do the outreach areas. The churches have the Sunday School because, as

⁶ Piland, Growing And Winning Through The Sunday School, pp. 150-154.

⁷ Adams and Fitch, Reaching People Through The Sunday School, p. 108.

one of the organizations of the church, they should have it. Perhaps, not much thought is given to the usefulness of the organization in the growth of the church.

The Sunday School can be a good "tool" for growth in the churches if it is properly used.⁸ The school has all the "ingredients" necessary to bring about growth. Good enlargement, quality Bible study and enrollment and evangelistic visitation of prospects will help increase the members of the school. Thorough training of workers can be of help to the spiritual growth of individuals and the numerical growth of the church.

The analysis of the data showed that none of the twenty churches met 100% of all criteria of the Sunday School Standard of Excellence. This is in spite of the fact that Sunday School history in the Nigerian Baptist Convention can be traced back to the beginning of "Sabbath School."⁹ Since 1965, Standard of Excellence have been promoted by the Nigerian Baptist Convention.¹⁰ Yet, the fact that the churches in Ogbomosho West Baptist Association did not rate 100% on all the criteria of the Sunday School Standard of Excellence could mean that they were ignorant of the Standard or did not take the Standard seriously. It is however commendable that the churches rated high in the use of literature.

⁸Hadaway, Church Growth Principles: Separating Fact From Fiction, p. 42.

⁹Ceill Roberson, Bowen Or An Evidence Of Grace (Unpublished work, 1969), p. 29.

¹⁰Building Better Sunday Schools (Ibadan: Publishing Board of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, 1965).

The fact that there was no significant correlation between the total rating on Sunday School Standard of Excellence Questionnaire and Church Growth as measured by growth in composite membership is surprising. The review of the literature in chapter 2 indicate that the Sunday School can be a powerful "engine" for church growth. Therefore, it can be said that the churches are not interpreting or using the various areas of the Standard of Excellence as they should.

Implications

Two major implications can be drawn from the study.

1. The Sunday School is not serving as a growth agency for the churches in the Ogbomosho West Baptist Association. Perhaps it is not perceived as growth "tool". This point may explain why there was no significant positive correlation between the Sunday School Standard of Excellence Questionnaire criteria and composite Church Growth. The Sunday School organization was most likely seen as just one of the organizations of the church. Areas in the Standard of Excellence such as enlargement, grouping, visitation and evangelism make the Sunday School and church to grow if well utilized.

2. The older churches in the Association are not growing at as rapid a rate as the newer churches. The older churches had a 72% average growth from 1989-1993. The newer churches had 295% average growth from 1990-1993. Two of the older churches have plateaued and begun a decline in their composite growth. New units, classes and even churches will grow faster.¹¹

¹¹ Adams and Fitch, Reaching People Through The Sunday School, p. 108.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations to the churches, Association and Conventions:

1. Each church, Association and the Nigerian Baptist Convention should emphasize and publicize the Sunday School Standard of Excellence. The emphasises and publicity should be on the growth criteria as well as the organizational criteria in order to promote use of the Standard of Excellence as a 'tool' for church growth.

2. Churches, the Association and the Convention should set and publicize annual growth goals. A good example here is the Southern Baptist Convention Bold Mission Thrust of 8.5 by 85. That is, a goal was set that before 1985, 8.5 million people should have been enrolled in Sunday School.¹² The Nigerian Baptist Convention has joined various evangelical groups in the laudable goal of reaching all for Christ by A.D. 2000 with the Operation Reach All (ORA) campaign. The Sunday School is a very good avenue where the campaign can be effective. Each church should set growth goals and work towards achieving the goals for the glory of **God**.

3. Enlargement is going to bring about growth in the church if plans are put into effect to enlarge the Sunday School. New units should be created as often as possible. Class members should be encouraged to reach other people and bring them to the Sunday School.

¹² Piland, Growing And Winning Through The Sunday School, p. 5.

