

His Story/Our Story

Bank on the Principle that God wants to work and move...

Does God want to do incredible, amazing things in the Church where you serve?

ABSOLUTELY! God wants to move in all of His Churches. Don't ever believe the lie our Enemy promotes that God is not able or does not want to work or move in His Church. He can and He does. Your job is to do everything YOU can do to set the stage for God to work. Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His Church and the gates of hell would never prevail over it.

Believe it. Act on it. Count on it. Cultivate it. Preach it. Organize for it ... and then watch.

Fill the Basket ...

"Put all your eggs in one basket and --- WATCH THAT BASKET." This quote from one of Mark Twain's writings has become the mantra for ministry at First Baptist Church in Summit. We believe Sunday School is the key way to organize for Church health and to sustain healthy church growth. This is not to say that other areas of the Church are unimportant. As you will see later, all areas are connected and contribute together to the overall health of a Church. But as for discipleship, we have unapologetically put all our eggs in the Sunday School basket and carefully watch that basket. Sunday School is the main vehicle for small group Bible study, as in most SBC Churches, but it is also the tool we use for connecting people together in relational Christianity, the means by which we organize and promote events, and the vehicle for people having meaningful ministry and mission opportunities. It is almost impossible for people to be aware of and participate in ministry at our church without being a part of Sunday School, and we like it that way.

What the Numbers Were Saying ...

Numbers and charts and graphs are boring ... but they are necessary to gain an overall feel for where we have been and where we are headed. After doing some research in 2007, we were fortunate to see that First Baptist Summit had times of significant growth since 1984. Membership had gone from 745 in 1984 to almost 1400 and the Sunday School average attendance had grown from 228 to 389. However, from 2003 to 2007, membership continued to climb from just over 1,000 to 1373 while Sunday School attendance stayed at around 390. Our dilemma was clear. We were growing by leaps and bounds in membership with no growth in Sunday School. This fact was alarming.

Sunday School began to join the upward trend with membership in 2008. God's leadership in incremental changes helped us begin to grow in a healthy manner ... and when I say healthy, I mean members who were investing in becoming a disciple rather than an attender. They began investing in Sunday School. Looking at 2008, we had 119 people join the membership and only increased in Sunday School by 36. In 2009 we had 132 people join and our Sunday School average went up by 73. In 2010 we had 152 people join and our Sunday School average went up by 73 again. In the first few months of 2011 (January-April) we had 24 people join and Sunday School was up by 41. It appears as though we are turning the tables on the disparity between additions to membership and Sunday School attendance.

Now, here's our story – or maybe it can be better termed His Story/Our Story.

- The first thing that happened to help us get back on our feet with Sunday School was the creation of a Discipleship Pastor (called Minister of Education in many churches) position in 2007. For many years our Church's Minister of Education position had been combined with Minister of Youth. However, in 2007, the church decided to divide those roles and create a

position to focus on discipleship. Whether a Church decides to hire this role or designate it as a volunteer, someone has to “live” with Sunday School. Someone has to eat and sleep Sunday School. Someone has to view every decision in light of how it affects Sunday School.

At this juncture, it is necessary to explain the philosophy that has developed as a staff on the definition and process of discipleship, for it frames what and how we organize to accomplish it. First, discipleship is a process. Specifically, it is the process whereby people grow to be like Christ as a part of a community. Becoming a disciple cannot be divorced from other people. It must be done with others as they “do life together”. Discipleship cannot be delivered in a short term class. As a result, we do not have a separate program for Discipleship Training on Sunday evenings or during another time. We attempt to accomplish Jesus’ command of discipleship through Sunday School. Sunday School is it. We believe people must be a part of a small group patterned after Jesus model of discipleship – a small group of people who learn, serve, apply, fellowship, and minister together, who “do life” together. At FBC Summit this simple definition of discipleship coupled with the decision of accomplishing it through Sunday School led us to structure it (Sunday School) with a larger scope than a forty-five minute lecture once a week. God helped us begin to change the culture from a lecture-based class to interactive, discussion-based community groups. We try to help our groups understand that they exist for more than hearing what a Bible teacher has to say on a passage of the Bible. They are to “do life” (there’s that phrase again) together as they learn about the Bible together and further, they are try to live it out together. You will see in more detail later how we have intentionally tried to move from classes to groups, from teachers to leaders, from lecture to discussion, and from meeting together to doing life together.

Before we discuss those items, let us examine the bigger picture of our Church philosophy starting with a statement of purpose or vision. Before you snooze on this idea because you have heard it more times than you can count and may have even established a purpose or vision statement, do not miss the simplicity of what happened next and how it continues to shape us.

- A second major change was God leading our pastor soon after coming in 2006 to help our people establish a mission statement that was simple, yet described what the purpose of the Church is here in Summit.
 - A small group of people helped create it.
 - The people know it because we constantly emphasize it.
 - They believe it because they’ve seen God as work as we’ve tried to accomplish it.
 - We plan the way we do because of it.
 - As the people accomplish it, it causes others to want to become a part of it.

That statement is, “Leading everyday people to love Jesus and make Him known.” It’s simple, to the point, and possible to remember. The beauty of the statement comes in its simplistic power. In a few moments, we can actually tell people what it means to be a part of a Church. Here is what flows out of the statement: Church is about everyday people worshipping Jesus with their lives corporately and privately. Those people are to be in community with each other in Sunday School and strive to make His kingdom known by serving others and being prepared to share their story with anyone wanting to know about Christ. In those few words, we are able to summarize and clarify what many want to know about Church: “What is this (Church) all about?” We are past the days when everyone has a basic knowledge of Church and its purpose. We don’t get a good report in the media anymore and many are sceptical. How valuable is it to be able to verbalize what the Church really is in a moment or two? Immeasurable. Further, we really do abide by the statement. It is a statement of purpose and a statement of process. **We**

move people from loving Jesus in worship to being in community with others to serving God. How do we do that?

The Movement of People

Worship is our entry point because that is the way people normally come into contact with our Church for the first time. It is the pool that feeds Sunday School. Without God honouring, inspiring, Bible preaching services, our pool of prospects and new members would decline drastically. Having said that, here are some practical things in place to help people move along in the process of becoming a worshipper, to a Sunday School attender, to a server in a ministry.

- **From Worship to Sunday School** ... Guest Registries are attached to the side of each bulletin. In each service, guests are encouraged to fill them out. If they do, they are collected by the Discipleship Pastor. After worship, they are scanned and emailed to the person that has been designated as the “Connection Coordinator” for the Sunday School Group they would attend based on life stage. (Our groups are based on age.) The Connection Coordinators are supposed to check their email on Sunday afternoons. If they do, they make a short phone call to the person on the Guest Registry inviting them to Sunday School. On a lighter note but important one, if you want people to fill out a guest card or registry, provide them with a writing utensil. It blows my mind how many churches ask people to fill out something and there is no pen or pencil available to them. Ministry note: this is a great opportunity for a simple ministry for some in your church. Give someone the responsibility of maintaining the pews each week. We call it Pew Information Maintenance Ministry. Sounds technical doesn't it?
- **From Sunday School to Ministry** ... Although we encourage people to have some specific ministry role, our Wednesday night structure allows for group ministry. We call it MIA – Ministry In Action. On Wednesday nights after a short devotion by the Pastor, the people divide into their Sunday School Groups for prayer and to make contacts to their members who may have ministry needs and any guests that attended the previous Sunday. This takes place in the form of post card size prayer-grams (to be mailed to anyone prayed for by the group), letters of encouragement, and visits if necessary. (Instead of having another night during the week for visitation, why not do in-reach and outreach while the people are already there?) Each group has a folder prepared for their group with member needs we know about as a staff, a Sunday School roll, a church directory, a report of anyone who has missed 4 weeks or more in a row, and a list of the prospects that came the previous Sunday that fit their group. Prayer-grams, stationary, envelopes, and pens are provided.

Another avenue to ministry through Sunday School is the fact that all Sunday School groups are expected to adopt a local organization to partner with in order to have an immediate ministry outlet. This might be a school, fire department, crisis pregnancy center, DHS, or some other organization in the community.

We also schedule special outreach events that Sunday School Groups accomplish. One such project is **The Jerusalem Project**, an attempt to visit every household within a one mile radius of the Church. We acquired a map from the county, divided it up, and assigned districts from the divided map. We promoted the plan for making the visits to the leadership, allowed time for the groups to plan their visits, and scheduled no services for 3 Sunday nights at an appointed time. Groups could visit a third of the households for 3 nights, make all visits in one night, or devise their own schedule. It was a great experience for our members and our local neighbours as we prayed with them and met needs. This Summer will be our 3rd year to visit the 768 households within a one mile radius of the Church, and we do it now in one night. Amazing.

Lastly, we promote that people in Sunday School groups should have a specific role. Here's a short listing of roles that could be volunteered for by someone in Sunday School: Bible Study Leaders, Secretaries, Reporter, Prayer Leader, Prayer Coordinator, Connection Leader, MIA Leader, Breakfast Coordinator, Party Coordinator, Greeter Leader, Shower Coordinator, and Local Ministry Adoption Coordinator. All of these roles can be expanded to a team of at least 2 people, ... so with just this list, 24 people could have a ministry role.

The Dependency Principle

You may be getting the idea that Sunday School gets all the focus at FBC Summit. It is the organizational focus for discipleship, but it is not the focus of the Church. We fully realize that all areas of the Church are dependent upon each other. From a Sunday School perspective, Sunday School is dependent upon the health of all other areas.

- Worship: If worship is bad, it's hard to have a pool of people to move to Sunday School.
 - Music: If music is bad, it hurts worship, which in turn hurts Sunday School.
 - Preaching: If preaching is bad, well you get the idea.
- Discipleship (Sunday School) – If Sunday School is weak, the people that move from worship to Sunday School don't stick and we have an active back door
- Youth/Children's Ministry – If Youth and/or Children's Ministry is bad, families look elsewhere for another Church no matter how good worship and Sunday School is.

Get the idea? All areas and ministries are related to each other.

What helps keep all areas strong? A focus on some key components when it comes to core values as a staff helps keep the ministry of FBC Summit strong.

Key Components of FBC Summit

- Biblical, Passionate, Expository Preaching
- Relevant, Inspiring Music for Worship
- Focus on Relationships in Small Groups (which we call Sunday School Small Groups)
- Championing Ministry Involvement
- Connectedness between all ministries and the overall vision for the Church
- Simplicity and Excellence – **WORDS WE CONSTANTLY USE FOR EVALUATION.**
- Prayer – (Watchman on the Wall)

Elements of Successful Sunday School

1. Focus on it from the Pastor down. The Pastor must champion Sunday School. He doesn't have to lead it, just believe in it!
2. Stress what it really is.
 - We moved from the idea of classes to groups. Discipleship is not a class. It is something that happens in community with others. Who wants to go to class anyway? For guests, going to a class is not something that is appealing and it carries the idea that it only lasts for a certain period of time. A group stays together and has things in common. For Sunday School, it's Jesus!
 - We call our Sunday School leaders, well, leaders ... not teachers. We want people to be more concerned with leading others to Christ, not just teaching them about Christ. It's subtle, but powerful and biblical. Jesus taught as a part of His leading. Besides,

some people have the mindset that to teach Sunday School, they have to be experts in the Bible. Our philosophy is that every Christian, after a period of time being a Christian, should be able to lead a short discussion on what we say we base our lives – the Bible.

- The emphasis of our meeting time in Sunday School is not just on teaching, (and it's especially not on lecturing) it is discussion. People need to interact with the Bible and use their minds and hearts, not just hear what someone has to say.
- Sunday School is not about meeting together with a group of people once a week for a 45 minute lecture. It's about doing the Christian life together in community. To do that, we have to spend time with each other outside of "class time".

3. Enlist & Connect with the leaders regularly.

- Make your expectations clear. Nothing will hurt the unity of the Church more than a leader in Sunday School who is not on board with the mission of the church and who does not know your expectations. Make them clear. Type them up and put them in front of leaders a few months before they are to serve for another year. Give them a chance to bow out gracefully if they are not with you.
- Meet with your leaders somehow. In a day and age when schedules are crazy with job responsibilities, it is difficult, to say the least, to meet with your leaders to make sure they are getting the information they need concerning where the Church is headed and continued training to make them better leaders. Here are a few ideas on meetings:
 - Meet when there is a reason to meet. You'll lose leaders attendance to meetings if you meet just to meet. We meet once every two months.
 - Schedule multiple meeting times. We give leaders two and sometime three options on meeting times. Yes, this means we have to conduct multiple meetings, but if it's important, it's important enough to do the meeting more than once if necessary.
 - Use a web cam to conduct a simulated meeting and post it to your web site, Godtube, or youtube.

4. Organize ministries through Sunday School.

- Connection Coordinators – Connect guests in worship to Sunday School using a representative from each Sunday School group to contact the guests who would fit into their group.
- Use groups to conduct evangelistic outreach events:
 - Jerusalem Project: Use groups to visit every household within a mile radius of your church.
 - Harvest Sunday: Attempt to call the residents of the community where the Church is located inviting people to come to church.
- Encourage Groups to adopt local ministries: Provide a list of community organizations/ministries and let Sunday School groups form a partnership with one.
- Provide Church announcements through Sunday School: Provide announcements with a simple announcement sheet to be used during group time. Leaders can make the announcements or enlist a member to do them (giving them a role) as a part of Sunday School. This will save your worship service from a long list of time-consuming announcements.

5. Connect Sunday School to In-reach.

- MIA – Use Wednesday nights to promote ministry with Sunday School Groups. Let them pray specifically together the way prayer was designed. Praying for "the prayer requests that God knows about" is not our most effective way of praying. We should pray specifically for needs and people by name. Imagine what a devoted prayer time together can do to strengthen your Sunday School groups as they pray specifically and out loud for each other and other people.

6. Connect Sunday School to the Proclaimed Word of God.

- Message Track. Use the current message series in Sunday School as the curriculum. At FBC Summit, about half of our 22 adult groups use the message text and passage for their group time. Groups can study the passage the week before it is preached, the week after it is preached or the same week. Discussion guides based on the sermon are delivered via email and our web site prepared by the Discipleship Pastor in cooperation with the Pastor.
- Use the message on Sunday to connect to the “lesson”. Even if you do not wish to do the Message Track, encourage Sunday School leaders to use information and points from the message that connect with their current Sunday School group time.

7. Start New Groups.

- According to our research with our attendance records, for every 30 people we have in attendance, we need an adult Sunday School group. For example, if Sunday School attendance is averaging 600 and we have 20 groups, we have hit the ceiling of attendance.
- Here’s how we start new groups: (started 9 groups since 4/09 and one more on the way as this is being written)
 - Talk about starting new groups. Use the language of starting new groups, not splitting existing ones. Prepare the soil way ahead of time. Get people and leaders acquainted with and used to the idea before launching any effort.
 - When going to a Sunday School group that is ready to start a new group, ask the group members to think and pray about being involved with this condition: Don’t try to pull anyone out, Don’t try to keep anyone in – the focus is on you and what God would have you do. Generally, we try to start with a core of 3-5 couples.
 - Find a good leader(s) willing to start a new group.
 - Get the blessing and input of Sunday School Leaders.
 - Do a little recruiting accordingly and test the waters. This takes time! Don’t move too fast!
 - Meet with the core during Sunday School to share the vision of Sunday School and talk about prospects for the new group.
 - Use inactives as a pool and brainstorm about others the core can invite.
 - Have the core take responsibility for inviting people to come to a breakfast during Sunday School the next week.
 - Have the breakfast and a light devotion from the new Sunday School leader(s), then start the next week.
- Challenges to starting new groups ...
 - Room/Space. If you do not have the room, create it. Use existing space, build space, or adjust your schedule (multiple Sunday School approach). FBC Summit went to 2 Sunday Schools simultaneously with 2 worship services in January of 2010.
 - Leaders (our greatest struggle). The first question asked by potential members of a new group is “Who is going to lead it?” Develop leaders by expecting current groups to enlist another leader who can team with them whether it be alternating weeks, once a month, or even once a quarter. About Leaders ... Be careful enlisting leaders. They do not have to be Bible scholars, but they do need to have a certain level of spiritual maturity and be on board with the mission of the Church. Sunday School leaders have a lot of influence. Decide what you expect out of them and let them know before the next year begins so they can either choose to be on

board or excuse themselves knowing they are not headed where you are headed.

8. Create an overall culture of change. **HUGE!** This takes time. Move slowly with the vision in mind. Have patience. One thing at a time is a good pace, but consistently cultivate the attitude that change is necessary even when there isn't a change necessary in the present tense. Use opportunities from the pulpit and with leadership in formal and casual settings to help people know that we will change methods, but not the message. Ask for permission to fail. Some things we try will work. Some things will fail. Prepare the people to try great things for Jesus.
9. Encourage groups to have a "missional" mindset.
 - Missional mindset for starting new groups. Help groups see the bigger picture of being a sending agent for Sunday School. Help them see the benefit of being willing to start new groups. Remind them that there was a time in the past when their current group did not exist!
 - Missional mindset in doing ministry together. Doing ministry together is invaluable in building relationships that are strong. You really get to know people when you work with them. And that work experience provides a shared experience that the group can build on during the Sunday group time.
10. We don't purge Sunday School rolls. Why? Membership in Sunday School starts when you join the Church and continues until you join another.
 - When people join FBC Summit, they automatically go on a Sunday School role because we expect members to attend Bible study. And since Sunday School is the way we do in-reach, it assures they will get contacted when they do not come through the MIA ministry.
 - When people leave our church, they should join somewhere else and we remind them to do so. We are responsible for them until they officially join another body of believers. If we drop people from SS rolls when they don't attend after some designated amount of time, we have almost assured that they will receive no contact from the Church in the future. Stuff happens. People need to be reminded from time to time that someone cares. We believe that a periodical contact will come at a key time in former attenders' lives when they will either be reminded of the Church family that loves them and return to the fold, or they will find a Church home where they are.
11. Allow for flexibility with curriculum.
 - Lifeway Materials: ETB, BSFL. These materials are good, but they are not the only resource that can be used for Sunday School. We use both of the Lifeway curriculums, discipleship studies, and the Message Track (following the message series). Flexibility allows teachers to flourish.
12. Encourage Sunday School "Jobs"
 - The more people that have a job, the more investment in the group. Here are a few Sunday School jobs that can complete the cycle of being "Everyday people who love Jesus and make Him known."
 - Discussion Leader/Team
 - Prayer Leader/Team
 - Connection Leader/Team
 - MIA Leader/Team
 - Fellowship Leader/Team
 - Care Leaders/Team
 - Mission Leaders/Team
 - Attendance/Secretary
 - Greeters/Team
 - Donut Coordinators/Team

How are ministries connected at FBC Summit?

- All ministries have the same mission/vision.
- Music and Message passages work together.
- If a ministry does not help accomplish the mission of the Church, it is eliminated or takes less priority. Time and resources will not be expended on programs that are not essential to advancing the core mission of the Church. This can be a painful and slow process, but it is worth the effort.
- Sunday School is connected to MIA (AKA: “Wednesday night Prayer Meeting”)
 - Bible Study, Outreach, Inreach, Ministry, and Prayer
 - MIA: Ministry in Action - for adults not teaching or in choir/orchestra
- Ministry is channelled through Sunday School.
 - Jerusalem Project
 - Harvest Sunday
 - Adoption of Ministries/Mission
 - Announcements

Common Sense Ideas

- Start stuff vs. Stop stuff. It’s a lot easier to start things than stop them. Think carefully through starting new stuff. **HUGE!**
- There is no substitute for Pastoral Support.
- Organize within your context. Don’t take any idea we have and plug it straight into your context. Tweak it for your ministry in your location with your people.
- Change must be deliberate and slow. Patience is a virtue. **HUGE!**
- Pace yourself – one thing at a time is a good pace.
- A common vision is necessary among the leadership of the Church

Conclusion

The ideas and principles described in this document are worth nothing without the blessing of God. He is the one who is moving at FBC Summit and we are truly grateful. We believe He has led us thus far and will continue. May all the glory go to Him for whatever successes may be mentioned at FBC Summit. May we keep our eyes on Him.

– Craig Richardson, Discipleship Pastor

Galatians 6:9 states, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Time and again the Scriptures call us to perseverance. Leading God’s Church is a high and worthwhile calling. I believe God is ready to do new and exciting things in His Church through His people. Let us remember the words of Hebrews 12:2 and fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. It is hard work, but the reward is worth it. Never give up!

– Dr. Larry LeBlanc, Pastor

Key Books:

- *Simple Church* by Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger
- *Transformational Church* by Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer
- *Why Men Hate Going to Church* by David Murrow
- *Church Unique* by Will Mancini
- *Comeback Churches* by Ed Stetzer