ORGANIZING YOUR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION MINISTRY

Preface

For all the success stories that make their way through the Christian community the reality is that the church is reaching fewer people.

Some years ago, it was reported that those we call "baby boomers" were returning to church, often for the sake of their children. In conjunction with that renewed interest came the discussions, and in many cases the wars, over worship styles and Christian practice. The church still hasn't come to terms with some of the unique features of the boomer generation, even though it is the boomers who for the most part have assumed its leadership. In terms of percentages, boomers represent a much smaller group of church goers than their parents; and they have exited the church in significant numbers. Evidently, it hasn't given them what they are seeking.

Now we have the children of the boomers, and many are well into adulthood. Not only is the church having difficulty penetrating that group, we are losing many that we assumed we had. It is suggested that of those sometimes called the "millennial generation" (because they will grow into adulthood assuming leadership in this new era) as few as 4% will profess faith in Christ. We are now into the generation following the millennial.

How will your church respond?

We can wring our hands and continue much as we always have. That may be what happens. Given our history that's likely what will happen, but it is not a Christian response. Our task is to pray and work to build up the kingdom as God adds to His church daily those who will be His people.

The Presbyterian Church in America's Christian Education and Publications office, in dependence on God, wants to make a difference.

Christian education? Where does that fit? Where does it fit at your church? The objective of this book is to help with these questions. Here's a glimpse at the big picture.

A national study of protestant congregations conducted by Search Institute, Minneapolis, published March 1990 says, "Of all the areas of congregational life we examined, involvement in an effective Christian education program has the strongest tie to a person's growth in faith and to loyalty to one's congregation and denomination. . . . This is as true for adults as it is for adolescents. . . . Done well, it has the potential beyond any other congregational influence to deepen faith and commitment."

Though that study is dated, my guess is that the results would be similar today. A person in a small group has the potential to be far more connected to the church than someone who isn't. Those people who meet each week put names and faces and flesh on that group called a Christian church. The same could be said of any activity in the church where people get to know each other through study, prayer, play, support, and service.

WHY USE THIS BOOK

Some people love to organize. Their schedules are governed by sophisticated calendars. Their homes and offices are neat and clean—a place for everything and everything in its place. In the church, the organizers are quick to form committees. They respond positively to charts showing who is responsible to whom. When given a job, they approach it in an orderly and often diligent way.

For others, it can be a terrible burden. Volunteers can be hard to get, enthusiasm often wears thin, and programs—even those already in place—tend to weigh heavily on the people "in charge."

Organization can also appear to be the antithesis of spontaneity and even spirituality. No matter what, the program rolls on, seemingly unaffected. Left alone, it can be insensitive to the leading of the Spirit.

Organization in a small congregation may seem unnecessary. Committees are informal. Decisions are made as needed and often, either by choice or necessity, at the last minute. At the other end of the spectrum is the small church with an intricate array of committees and subcommittees.

Organization is a tool. In the hands of the craftsman, it can make the job easier and the product better. However, when it takes the place of the craftsman, it becomes ludicrous. There is nothing intrinsically good or spiritual about trying to decide what a group will study two weeks before it is scheduled to meet. At the same time, a three-year program of study (approved by all the appropriate individuals, committees, and boards) can become deadening if it fails to adjust to the needs and resources of the group. In one case, it is like a person trying to work without the needed tool. In the other, the tool may take the place of the person.

Organization is a means to an end. That end is to accomplish your purpose. Without a stated purpose, there may be significant differences in what leaders are trying to accomplish. So before there is serious discussion regarding the organization of your structure and programs, there must be a careful consideration of your purpose. Organization will then provide the structure for you to tackle the job to which you are committed. Without some organization, there is no defined way for a group to work together. The larger and more diverse the group, the greater the need for organization.

Those who know me have heard me say many times in many ways, "go with the flow." By that I mean, "be flexible." Without flexibility there is little sensitivity to the situation or to the Spirit. At the same time, it is imperative that "go with the flow" is said in the context of a structure. It is my aim with this manual to give you what is necessary to put together a structure for you to more effectively accomplish the Great Commission in your congregation.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I. **Form a Christian education committee because the organization of a Christian education ministry requires someone to take the initiative. Areas of responsibility and guidelines regarding committee selection are found under "Getting Started." (page 5)**

II. **Formulate a basic definition of Christian education. A basic description is "making disciples." Beyond that, what is entailed in becoming a disciple and what that product should look like vary considerably. Do not assume that everyone on your CE committee knows, much less agrees with your definition.**

III. **Begin the analysis of your church with what already exists. Unless yours is a brand new congregation, some things are undoubtedly in place—things which could be called Christian education. The "Situational Analysis" (page 11) requires some committee members to do some research on:**

   A. *Your area's demographics.* This will tell you the types of people in what could realistically be regarded as your parish. Consider race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status.

   B. *Your attendance.* Your reference points in evaluating attendance are:
      1. The number of people in the congregation for whom the activity is targeted.
      2. The number of people in the community for whom the activity is targeted.
      3. The number of people who actually attend. Who are they and where do they live in relation to the church?
      4. The kinds of people who don't attend, i.e., race, ethnicity, age, etc.

   C. *Your curriculum.*
      1. What do your materials offer?
      2. Do they fit with your statement of purpose?
      3. How well do they deal with contemporary issues?
      5. How well do they handle the Scriptures?
      6. How difficult are they to use? In the final analysis, how well do they work for those using them?

   D. *Your teachers and leaders.* The success of any venture is determined in large measure by those who lead. In this situational analysis, you will examine both those who teach and how well you support them.

IV. **Develop specific ideas about who you are and what you want to accomplish. This is your vision. It is from this that you formulate your core values.**

   A. *Articulate these ideas in your purpose.* Your purpose is your reason for being. Your mission. It is why you do what you do.

   B. *After you have established your purpose supported by your core values, set your goals.* Goals are specific things you want to accomplish in a given period of time.

      1. Goals must be measurable. We cannot measure a person's relationship with God. However, we can measure a person's interest in things related to God, i.e., worship service attendance, biblical understanding, willingness to help others, openness in

sharing, and praying with and for others. A goal also has a time limit. When the time is up, stop and evaluate.

2. It is easy to reduce goals to numbers, people, and dollars. We must also work at goals which evidence growth in relationships to God and others.

C. Formulate your action plan — what you will do to accomplish your goals. If a leader has a goal that half the group will begin to practice regular personal Bible study and prayer within the next three months, then specific things will have to be done to move in that direction. The leader might show the group, through various teaching and experiences, the benefits of prayer and Bible study.

Guidelines are given so that as a group you can formulate your purpose, establish your goals, consider your action plan, and then begin the process of implementation and evaluation that will make your dream a reality.

V. Be sure that each committee member has this book. Set your schedule so that the committee can work through it over a period of months. Once you begin, you may be tempted to do everything at once, but plan for the long haul.

VI. Consider having a Christian Education & Publications regional teacher trainer / consultant work with you as you undertake this process.

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GETTING STARTED

I. **The responsibilities of a Christian education committee**:
   A. In conjunction with the pastor and elders, establish your core values, your purpose, your goals, and your action plan.
   B. Evaluate on-going programs.
   C. Do long-range planning (three to five years).
   D. Recruit teachers and leaders.
   E. Keep the congregation informed about what is happening.

This manual is intended to help you work through these issues, but it is not a once for all procedure. This is an ongoing process.

II. **Form a committee**

   A. Maybe you already have a committee but it is ineffective. There could be any number of reasons for this, and making changes could be hard. However, simply adding a person or two, changing leaders, putting the committee on a rotating system, or renewing your vision could help.

   B. If you are a new congregation, make this an informal group. It will give you the opportunity to test the abilities, perspectives, and commitments of those involved. It also avoids premature organizational entanglements.

   C. Consider the following factors when selecting committee members:

      1. *Membership in the church.* This signals that the person has made a public profession of faith in Christ and that there is a commitment to your congregation.

      2. *Sensitivity to the Spirit.* There must be a willingness to listen, an openness to praying genuinely for direction, and an attitude of humility and service. All who are significantly involved in the disciple making process have definite ideas about how this should be done. If there is not accommodation, your work will be significantly hampered.

      3. *Maturity.* Some believers have had easy lives, and some have had many difficulties. Hardship is not a disqualifying factor; on the contrary, it can quickly mature a person. Yet, someone who has a negative, perhaps bitter spirit will be a drain on the process. Sometimes such a person has what appears to be great doctrinal awareness, and so there is a temptation to choose him / her in spite of everything else. Maturity does not imply perfection. Some who give the impression of maturity also give the impression that they do not need to change any more. That is not maturity.

      4. *A vision for what God might do.* It will have to become a shared concern from which you will agree on your purpose.

      5. *A mix of interests.* Find people with different gifts and abilities: someone who understands what is involved in conducting a summer ministry or taking responsibility for a Sunday school; someone who has the ability to teach / lead small children, older children, teens, adults; someone who understands what can be accomplished in small groups; someone who can articulate our beliefs; someone who appreciates what is involved in reaching other races and economic and social

groups; someone who has a burden for groups with special needs (i.e., those who grieve, those trapped in particular sins, the mentally and physically challenged).

6. *God's leading.* Even with all of the above considerations, God often seems to use the most unlikely people. So pray—not just once or twice, not just about one or two people. Open yourself to God's direction.

Few people are looking for another "meeting." However, with a committed group following the outline given in this book, you have the framework for organizing a Christian education ministry.

CHANGE

Change is hard. It's difficult to change personally. A librarian I know was chewing gum at her desk and I tried to tease her about it. But it was serious business. She was trying to stop smoking. We all have habits and patterns of behavior; and some, perhaps even a lot of it, could stand to change because what we're doing is hurtful to ourselves and others.

1. Much of the time we don't realize how we need to change.

2. When we do realize some way that change is needed, as often as not, we resist. Even though we know what we're doing is hurtful, we're used to doing what we do; and it's difficult to picture ourselves doing things differently. Thus our desire for change is often little more than wishful thinking.

Change can be as difficult organizationally as it is personally. Many people love to talk about change, and they are all for change as long as we do things basically the way we have always done them. To forthrightly address this society's need for the gospel will require a lot of thinking outside the box and boldness in the church's willingness to try some things that haven't been done—or at least haven't been done in the way that you might be thinking. There is obviously risk involved.

1. People are used to what you do now; and the more success you have had in the past with what you are presently doing, the harder it will be to change.

2. Those involved in leadership are often tied to the present way of operation and consequently resist meaningful change.

3. If entrenchment in certain areas runs deep enough, change could cause division in the church.

This poses a real dilemma. I will go to great length to avoid a rupture to the peace of the church. Our communities don't need another illustration of church people doing battle.

However, if what we are presently doing is not significantly impacting the relationship with Christ sustained by our membership, and if we are not seeing significant evidence that we are making some difference in our communities, or if we are simply concerned about enhancing our effectiveness, then for the sake of the gospel we must work toward change.

The church I am associated with now is a healthy, viable congregation; but the area is changing—not economically but racially. And we are not touching that new racial mix in any meaningful way. So to remain healthy and viable, we will need to change; not cosmetically, but significantly. However, it will be hard enough that the course of least resistance will remain attractive—even if we are dying.

That's not just one church. It's most congregations. Few find real change easy. Just the opposite. It's wrenching; as difficult as any family's move from one city to another—maybe more so. It is as hard as dealing with the long term illness of a loved one—or even death—and maybe even harder.

What I am saying is this. It's possible to be involved in great discussions going through this book. I've been part of some. However, it seems rare to find a group that has taken a hard look at where they are and determine to do something radically different—for the sake of the gospel.

May the Lord work in your committee as you address the issues confronting your congregation.

YOUR FIRST MEETING

Christian Education

I. **Do the following get-acquainted activity, even if you have been working together for some time and/or think you know each other well.**

A. Have each person capsule his / her life story in no more than two minutes, focusing on things others in the group might not know. Appoint one person time-keeper and hold firmly to the two-minute limit.

B. Ask for a couple of volunteers to talk briefly about what they would like to contribute to this committee's work. What would they like to get from it?

II. **Pray**

A. Reflecting on God, who He is, and what He means to you.
B. Thinking about each other.
C. Considering the opportunities at your church.

III. **Address this question: What is Christian education? I suggest that it is the process by which disciples are made. Jesus said, ". . . make disciples . . . baptizing them . . . and teaching them . . ." (Matthew 28:19). Making disciples is a primary work of the church. Thus, Christian education is a primary work of the church. Jesus indicates that this process involves both baptism and teaching.**

A. *Baptizing.* Baptism is the introductory rite into the faith. Making disciples involves introducing people to Jesus. When a person professes faith in Jesus, he / she is baptized. Covenant children are baptized. Due to their parents' faith, they are recognized as members of the church; but each covenant child, while growing up, undergoes a process by which the parents' faith must become his / her faith. If that doesn't happen, the person will not be counted with those who believe.

B. *Teaching.* Part of a church's responsibility is to challenge both children and adults with what it means to believe in Jesus. Evangelism should never be separated from nurture. We want to attract new people, and we want those people to grow. The Great Commission explicitly widens the scope beyond our community and the kind of people we attract, even beyond the diverse groups found in our country. Jesus wants us to see the world. That requires education which will result in people giving their lives to make Him known— everywhere.

Too often, Christian education has been reduced to the communication of information about what the Bible says. There is an assumption which suggests that information, correctly understood, will produce a corresponding change in a person's life. Biblical information is a means to an end. The end is restored relationships with God, others, ourselves, and our environment. Thus, the most important thing a Bible teacher has to offer a class is himself / herself, a person in whom God is working. The Christian leader attempts to apply the Bible to himself / herself and to the group. (That is done most effectively when relationships are cultivated outside the study sections.) Your applications have to do with ways in which God might further restore relationships strained because of sin. The Bible makes clear that all of this is possible because of what Jesus has done.

We want people to:

1. *Enter into a relationship with God through Christ.* For that to happen, we must understand the Bible's message in such a way that we are urged to faith. For many in the church, a relationship with God is somewhat tenuous. Encouraging a vital relationship with Christ is necessary for those in and out of the church. With faith and understanding comes the challenge to obey.

2. *Experience restoration and depth in their relationships with each other.* This can be experienced in a group as people learn to lean on each other, to pray for one another, to encourage each other in the faith. The process must also impact relationships at home, school, and work.

   Christian education takes place in the Christian community. Christianity in the United States has tended to center on the individual. However, the individual cannot survive without the community; and the community is strengthened as those who believe encourage each other in their relationships with God, others, and themselves. More than once the New Testament capsules the Bible message with words drawn from the Old Testament — love God, love your neighbor as yourself.

   Individualism in this culture seems to be giving way to fragmentation. It has been said that the only thing which unites us is sports. The church mirrors the society, but it doesn't have to. We are one in Christ. *Let's get involved in the lives of those with whom we work.* "Much of education is concerned with helping people know what their teachers know. Christian education is concerned with helping people become what their teachers are" (Lawrence O. Richards, *Christian Education*, Zondervan).

3. *Have a better understanding of who they are.* We tend to underestimate the effects of sin. At the same time, the good qualities we possess can be underrated. One of the principle responsibilities of those who lead and teach should be to help people discover, develop, and use their gifts for God.

   The gifts He has given to His people are intended to "build up the body." The Spirit given to those who believe makes worship, change, and growth in grace possible.

4. *Better understand what it means to be responsible for the creation.* We live in a world that is cursed. Our best efforts will produce mixed results, but to abuse the creation intensifies the effects of the curse. Our faith should influence our politics, our views on social problems and our willingness to help make both our environment and our culture more wholesome.

Your objectives should have to do with making disciples. They should have in view how best to encourage the development of disciples. To put it another way, the process (your program) should be evaluated in terms of the product (the change in lives).

IV. **Put together your own definition or summary statement describing Christian education. Be sure the group is in agreement.** *Be sure the Session or church leadership agrees.*

   It will be easy to simply echo what I have said. However, even if there is agreement on my broad outline there could be a significant difference in emphasis.

   For instance, I stress the relational. Others I have worked with would rather spend more time on content. Both are necessary to help us attain maturity in Christ but tension may develop in how these work out. Where would your committee be on such a question?

Another issue might be the willingness in the group to try different things. Are programs simply a means to an end or something more? Is it possible to imagine your church without Sunday school, substituting something you think would be more effective?

If we are to fulfill the Great Commission in this increasingly secular society we cannot be content with business as usual.

V. Make assignments to various committee members. These should be completed in time for your next meeting.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Preparation for Your Second Christian Education Meeting

Demographics
Who comes to our church's activities?
Who might come?

The assignments on the following pages should be completed for review at your next meeting. *Complete the following attendance trends graphs.*

ATTENDANCE TRENDS

Church Membership

_____

1000
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
150
100
0-99

Years ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
Chart the past ten years.

Morning Worship Attendance

_____

1000
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
150
100
0-99

Years ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____
Chart the past ten years.

Sunday School Attendance

1000
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
150
100
0-99

Years

Chart the past ten years.

Break down the current participation in your educational programs.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Age / Grade	Number in Church	**Number in Community	Number on Roll	*Average
0-2 years				
2 & 3 years				
4 & 5 years				
1-2 grades				
3-4 grades				
5th grade or 5-6 grades				
Middle School				
High School				

Adult (break down by age groupings and/or stage of life, i.e., single, divorced single, married with no children, married with children, divorced with children, retired)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

*Distinguish between those who are members or regular visitors and those who are not.

**Available from census data found in local government offices. See definition of "community" on page 18.

OTHER CHILDREN/YOUTH MINISTRIES

Do a breakdown of each of the children's ministry activities (i.e., SS, Pioneer clubs, children's church, youth groups, discipleship groups).

Age / Grade	Number in Church	*Average Attendance
0 – 2 years		
2 & 3 years		
4 & 5 years		
1 – 2 grades		
3 – 4 grades		
5th grade or 5th & 6th grades		
Middle School		
High School		

*Distinguish between those who are members or regular visitors in your church and those who are not.

ADULT GROUPS

(Women's groups, discipleship groups, growth groups, singles groups)

Type of Group	Number in Church	*Average Attendance

Distinguish between those who are members or regular visitors in your church and those who are not.

SUMMER MINISTRIES

Age / grade	Number in Church	*Average Attendance
0 – 2		
2 & 3 years		
4 & 5 years		
1 – 2 grades		
3 – 4 grades		
Middle School		
High School		
Adult		

*Distinguish between those who are members or regular visitors in your church and those who are not.

ANALYSIS OF CURRENT TRENDS

CONGREGATIONAL TRENDS

Ages
What is the age span?
What is the age concentration?
What is the average age of the congregation?
What are the implications of this information?

Educational Level / Type of Employment
Mostly high school graduates?
Mostly college graduates?
What kind of jobs do they hold?
What are the implications of this information?

Types of People
Singles, other racial/ethnic groups, professionals, retirees?
What are the implications of this information?

Economic-Social Description
Type of employment will influence the way people see themselves as well as their cultural attitudes, i.e., assembly line personnel may earn more than school teachers, yet both might agree that school teachers have a more "prestigious" job. Those on the assembly line may identify more with the lower-middle class while teachers may relate more to the upper-middle class.
What are the implications of this information?

Mobility
How long does the average family stay in the area?
What are the implications of this information?

Politics
What are the implications of this information?

Geography
Where do most people live in relation to the church?
What are the implications of this information?

How does this information compare with the demographics of your community? Or do your people live outside what might be considered your community? If so, what are the reasons?

COMMUNITY TRENDS

Definition of community:
"Community" can be defined in different ways. An urban congregation might think in terms of a three-mile radius, a suburban church a five-mile radius, and rural church a seven-mile radius. More important, however, are the barriers. These can be socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, political, a river, highway, town / city / county / state line, etc.

If a smaller congregation is drawing from a wide geographical area, it could indicate that people have moved out of the community yet remained with the church; and/or the people who come were looking for that kind of church, which often means doctrinal distinctives.

COMMUNITY DATA

AGE:	Young Adults	Middle-Aged Adults	Retired Adults
Number	_____	_____	_____
% Married	_____	_____	_____
% Single	_____	_____	_____
% Unmarried (living together)	_____	_____	_____
% Same sex partners*	_____	_____	_____

EDUCATIONAL LEVELS:
    High School Graduates   College Graduates

ETHNIC GROUPS:
    Anglo   Hispanic   Korean   Black   Italian   Other

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* It might be important to determine the number identifying themselves as homosexual, if such information is available.

*SOCIAL GROUPS:

    Professional People   Industrial Workers   Service Jobs   Rural Community

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INCOME STATUS:

    Upper-Level   Middle-Level   Lower-Level

MOBILITY:

    Long-term Residents   Transient / Short-term Residents

POLITICAL TRENDS:

    Conservative   Liberal

**RELIGIOUS CONSTITUENCY:

    Other Denominations   Number of Churches   Average
    and Religions   Synagogues, Mosques, etc.   Attendance

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* What do we know about them? Should we get more information?

**It could be helpful to contact the other religious groups in your area, finding out who they are reaching and their assessment of community needs. For a pastor to meet with a fellow minister in such a circumstance could be the beginning of a long term relationship.

POPULATION STATUS:
    Growth Area   Declining Area   Changing Area

What are the implications of this information?

Are we reaching groups within our community? If so, what are the reasons? If not, why not?