

“Jesus Loves Me, This I Know”:
Sunday school in the Bible Fellowship Church



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Jesus Loves Me, this I know

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” Written by Anna Bartlett Warner in 1860 and set to music by William Batchelder Bradbury in 1862, this song has been a favorite of children in Sunday school for decades. Teaching the basics of the Bible to children in Sunday school is important and valuable. When and how did Sunday school begin? What has it looked like through the years in the Bible Fellowship Church?

The origins of the Sunday school movement were secular, rather than religious. In England, in 1780, Robert Raikes, Jr., editor of The Gloucester Journal, observed the plight of children in the growing urban lower class. Working twelve-hour days, six days a week, they were an uncontrollable horde of lawbreakers on Sunday, their only day off. Thus the Sunday school’s primary aim was literacy training for this massive, uneducated segment of the population, with the hope that it would enable them to better their lot in life. Some Christian education was included, with the aim of modifying anti-social behavior.

Women were hired to teach and were paid a shilling a day; class was held from 10am until 5pm with an hour off for lunch. The Church of England and the British Government did not support the Sunday school, but John Wesley saw its value and made it an important part of what became known as the Methodist movement.

In 1785 Raikes and William Fox established The Sunday School Society, and other organizations followed in the ensuing years. The Sunday School Union (1803) became the dominant organization in the Sunday school movement publishing, in addition to The Sunday School Teachers’ Magazine, teaching helps, a catechism, a list of Bible verses, songbooks, and other items.

In North America in the 1700s there were a few scattered Sunday schools, but these were connected to individual church congregations. Thus they existed for those already in fellowship and not for teaching literacy as in British Sunday schools. In 1824, the American Sunday School Union was established and grew quickly, spreading South and West in the United States as the country expanded. At the same time church denominations were starting their own Sunday school societies and producing their own denominational lesson materials.

Closer to home, Mennonite historian John Ruth in Maintaining the Right Fellowship (p.313) tells us that “The Eastern District, in May 1858, registered another advance: its first regular and official Sunday school.” (The Eastern District, or “new Mennonites” are the group from which the Evangelical Mennonites came.) Thus, as the New Mennonites began their Sunday school, we were forming a new church denomination and Sunday school would take a back seat to organizing churches, acquiring property and building meetinghouses.

Early references to Sunday school in Verhandlungen (German minutes of Conference, 1859-1895) are connected to Eusebius Hershey's reports from two Pennsylvania counties – Potter (1867) and Lycoming (1870). Thus on page 76 of Verhandlungen for November 7, 1871, we read: "Because the Sunday school, when it is conducted in the right way, is a children's room of the church, where the children are instructed in the word and will of God, therefore, RESOLVED: that we advise earnestly all our brethren and sisters to support ours as well as other Sunday schools which are conducted according to God's word and will." From this we learn there were Sunday schools in existence in our congregations, in other denominations, in community facilities, and that there were classes just for children. There is no mention of classes for adults yet.

In October of 1878 it was "RESOLVED: that, in our congregations, where churches exist, if possible, Sunday schools shall be established." This reference from page 119 of Verhandlungen shows that not all our churches had Sunday schools yet. The pastoral assignments for that year are listed in Verhandlungen (p.118) and include the following churches: Upper Milford and Fleetwood, Quakertown Station, Coopersburg, Bangor, and Lancaster County. According to Mr. and Mrs. Bright Heist in the Centennial Anniversary 1859-1959 Bible Fellowship Church Zionsville, that congregation organized a Sunday school in 1875. The Zionsville congregation was often referred to as "Upper Milford," mentioned above. Pastor Richard T. Paashaas in "The Coopersburg Story: A brief history of Calvary Bible Fellowship Church" (1995), tells us that Sunday school and worship services were already being held in a barn owned by Henry and John Musselman when the congregation built their first building in 1869.

In February 1889 at conference it was resolved "that this year a Sunday School Convention shall be held." Also resolved was "that the Sunday school Convention shall be held on Ascension Day, which is on Thursday, May 30, and that it shall be held in Quakertown, Bucks County." The Mennonite Brethren in Christ (the name by which we were known then) were not unique in holding Sunday school conventions; other denominations were doing the same.

The report from the Sunday School Convention (Verhandlungen pp.181-83) reveals conclusions from their discussion: "That the Sunday School is part of the church." "That the ultimate object of the Sunday School shall be to bring the children to a true conversion, and to win them for the Assembly and especially for Heaven." Other issues addressed include why the growing up youth does not stay in the Sunday School; the Sunday School must be kept free from worldliness; and ideas on "how to hold the Sunday School in an inspired and lively spirit during class." Thus the first Sunday School Convention functioned to establish the purpose for Sunday school; to address issues that some were experiencing; and to inspire the teachers in their important task.

The February 8, 1893 minutes of conference state "that we shall advise our Sunday schools to obtain their Sunday School literature from our printing establishment." (Verhandlungen, p. 220) This was obviously a growing business for by 1895, there were 20 Sunday schools, 17 of which were listed particularly: Hatfield, Quakertown, Coopersburg, Springtown, Erwinna, Upper Black Eddy, Bethlehem, Plainfield, Lower Siegfried, Walnutport, Allentown, Catasauqua, Upper Milford, Terre Hill, Royersford, Gratersford, Spring City. Then, too, as more churches were established, more Sunday schools were formed. The Sunday schools were further organized with officers such as superintendent, secretary, and treasurer. A Sunday school account book for the Zionsville church from 1917 to 1966 has records of offerings and expenditures. Purchases in 1922 included pencils, books, Bibles, tickets, and Easter eggs.

Sunday school classes were generally age-graded and held in the sanctuary, that being the only room in the church building for many congregations for many years. Some readers of this paper don't have to imagine that scenario because they lived it.

Olive Rawn's childhood Sunday school experience was at the Graterford church in the 1920s into the 1930s. She shares that each corner of the sanctuary had a different class. There were not many people in that small congregation; the teachers would not have had to talk over people in order to be heard by their class. Olive also remembers that one of her teachers was Perma Wismer Hipzer (great-granddaughter of preacher Abraham Kaufman), who used picture books to illustrate the lesson. Songs included "Jesus Loves Me," sung with hand motions, and "Jesus Loves the Little Children."



Mrs E E Kublic and Sunday School Class

The Sunday School Conventions of the 1920s and 1930s saw growth in attendance and development in the program. Until 1928, the conference was divided into two districts: Bethlehem and Shamokin. The Bethlehem District would meet on Memorial Day at Mizpah Grove, the Shamokin District at one of the churches in the district. These conventions were attended by "a large delegation," and featured special music and special speakers. In 1929 the districts were renamed Allentown and Easton. Into the 1930s the Allentown District would convene on July 4 at Mizpah Grove during the Easton District's week. (This is also the beginning of the convention being broadcast on B. Bryan Musselman's radio station.) The Easton District would convene on a Wednesday in May at one of the District churches.

In 1933, as part of the Allentown District's convention, several young people wrote and read essays for the sessions. This was an innovative departure from having the pastors present the lectures. Young people who participated were Alton Cressman, Donald Schoffstall, Walter Frank, Miss Naomi Rothenberger, August A. Zimmerman, and Miss Marie Moyer. The following year four daughters of pastors read their own essays. These girls were: Miss Ruth M. Hottel, Miss Ethel Mae Heffner, Miss Alma K. Gehman, and Miss Olivia P. Musselman.

Singing was a part of Sunday school for many years. Music is an effective tool for teaching and indoctrinating as any marketing agency can attest. Readers of this paper can probably remember advertising jingles from decades ago, even if that song has not been brought to mind for many years. Sunday school songs from the 1920s, 1930s, and years afterward include "Jesus Loves Me," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "The B-I-B-L-E," and "If you're Happy and You Know It."

In 1928, there was a report of the committee to secure a suitable hymn book for Sunday school purposes. "After investigating the need and also demand in the various Sunday Schools in regard to a uniform Hymn Book, we learned that there were not enough needed to make it worthwhile to make our own Book. We therefore recommended and do recommend Tabernacle Hymns No. 2 as a suitable book instead." (1928 yearbook, p. 127). This committee comprised C. H. Brunner, B. Bryan Musselman, and F. M. Hottel.

Memorizing Bible verses has been an important part of teaching Bible in Sunday school. To motivate children to memorize, reward systems were developed. Ethel Herb, daughter of the late Pastor E. E. Kublic and widow of Jack Herb, remembers receiving a red ticket for Bible verses learned. The tickets could be used to buy things like books, tablets, and pencils, which were a treat in the years of her childhood. Ethel's childhood was in the Stroudsburg church in the 1930s where Mildred Kintner was the Sunday school teacher for the children. Ethel remembers staying in the same class for many years; she did not "move up" every year. There was also a Sunday school class for adults. There were two small classrooms in the church. Other classes met in sections of the sanctuary.

Born in 1926, George Shelly's childhood memories of Sunday school in Zionsville were from the 1930s. His father, Russell Shelly, was superintendent there for many years. During the opening exercises there was singing. "Jesus Loves Me" and "Amazing Grace" are two songs that George remembers singing in Sunday school. Red and blue tickets were used for rewards and could be redeemed for useful items. George does not remember visual aids being used when the lesson was taught. He shared that no dividers were used in the sanctuary during the Sunday school session.

Doris Deppe Wire grew up in the Northampton Church in the 1930s. The sanctuary would be divided by a thin little curtain hung between two poles to separate the little children from the older children and from the adults. She remembers that the Sunday school superintendent led the opening exercises with an object lesson. When

her father, Arthur Deppe, was superintendent, he built a little well with a bucket that was raised and lowered with a hand crank. The bucket would be lowered, then raised to reveal it was filled with junk, representing bad habits. The children were challenged to get rid of the junk in their lives and to live for Jesus.



At the Northampton church in the 1930s birthdays

Fisherman's Bible Class - Coopersburg

were observed. The birthday child would place a penny on an iron toy, on the shovel of a man working on a furnace well. The penny was placed on the shovel, the superintendent would press a button, then the shovel would put the penny into the furnace well. Then they would sing: "Dropping, dropping, dropping, dropping, hear the pennies fall. Everyone for Jesus, He will get them all."

Annetta Stengele, great-granddaughter of early church founder William Gehman, shares that she grew up in the Macungie church in the 1930s. She remembers that her teacher was Ada Schultz, her father's sister. Her Sunday school class was in the basement of the church, next to the heater. There were only 4 or 5 children in the class of first, second, and third graders. Songs sung include "The B-I-B-L-E" and "If You're Happy and You Know It." Red tickets were used as rewards for Bible memory verses.

In the 1930s when Thelma Heist grew up in the Zionsville church, Ida Brunner was the children's Sunday school teacher and a good teacher she was. Thelma received an orange and a box of candy for Christmas. She remembers the red and blue tickets: blue for attendance and red for reciting a Bible verse. A tablet of paper or a book could be purchased with the tickets. The tablet had a picture of the church on the front of it.

Retired pastor Carl Cassel shares that his mother ran the children's department in the Sunday school of the Philadelphia Salem church in the 1930s and later. She made a three-ring notebook of songs that were cut out of other books and pasted on pages in the notebook for the musicians. Norman Weiss played the clarinet and Carl played the trombone. Carl's early childhood memories (1930s) of songs in Sunday school include "Jesus Loves Me," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," and "Fishers of Men."

Zionsville member June Heist Hersh's childhood memories were from the late 1930s into the 1940s. Ida Brunner taught the small children at that time, and made her own visual aids for use in teaching the Bible story. June does not remember singing in Sunday school but remembers red and blue tickets being used as rewards. If a student had enough of them, a tablet of paper could be purchased. Class was held in the back of the church in the "cloakroom," then in the "Amen corner" for a while. She remembers getting a book for Christmas. In her adult years, June taught the very young children for a while. There were opening exercises then and the children would sing, but that is not done any more.

Also in the 1930s into the 1940s, in Bethany Bible Fellowship Church in Hatfield, Carol Ziegler Snyder remembers a birthday bank. Children would place their pennies in the bank and sing: "dropping the pennies..." Carol loved seeing the flannel graph figures when the Bible story was taught. When children learned their Bible verse, they received a ticket with which

to purchase items which were stored in the cupboard. The Ziegler children bought birthday gifts for each other this way. Howard and Eva Dettra were quite active in the Hatfield church, where he was the Sunday school superintendent for many years. Eva brought the Clyde and Irene Snyder family to the church through the cradle roll program: when a family had a new baby, someone from church would visit and give them a package of



Sunday School - Harrisburg

literature, etc. and an invitation to church. The Snyders were related to the Dettras and accepted the invitation. (Their son Clyde became the husband of Carol Ziegler.) Carol believes the Sunday school is still a good teaching program for children.

A popular teaching technique for young children is to have them act out a story. Ethel Herb had her young students walk around looking for sheep when teaching the lost sheep story. Each child took a turn being the lost sheep, hiding under an easel in the classroom. The children then insisted she take a turn being the lost sheep. She complied and wondered what the superintendent would think if he saw her hiding under the easel.

Because Sunday school lesson books were already being published, these were generally used by teachers in our churches. Curriculum improved through the years and visual aids were developed. Flannel graph saw its beginning in 1942 by Mrs. Ruth Overholtzer of Child Evangelism Fellowship. This caught on and has been immensely popular ever since.

The Sunday school conventions in the 1940s were affected by the war. The Allentown District did not meet at Mizpah Grove in 1943 since tent meetings were not held that year. Because of government imposed rationing, people were not able to purchase enough gasoline to drive to Mizpah Grove. The following year, there was a conference-wide convention at the Terre Hill church. In the 1944 yearbook (p.92), it is entitled "Sunday School Workers Conference." "A number of Sunday Schools sent exhibits showing various methods employed, as well as samples of the work done in the various departments. There were also exhibits of the work done in Daily Vacation Bible Schools. These exhibits were placed on display in the basement of the church. Many favorable comments were heard about this unique feature."

After the war, the Allentown District went back to Mizpah Grove for their Sunday school convention in 1946. In the following years, particular churches hosted some conventions and some were at Mizpah Grove. The Easton District was renamed the Bethlehem District and used particular churches for their conventions.

Bob Gaugler's childhood recollections of Sunday school at the Graterford Church were from the 1940s. He remembers all the classes meeting in the sanctuary but it did not seem chaotic to him. He received a pin each year for perfect attendance. When he was 16 years old, he had 16 pins. He does not remember anything about red tickets as rewards.

Jim Hartman, born in 1940 and the son of Pastor Ernest Hartman, remembers Sunday school in several different churches. His early childhood recollections are from the Wissinoming church in Philadelphia. Thelma Schimmel is a teacher he remembers as being kind and sweet. She used flannel graph figures to teach the lessons. Tom Campbell was superintendent during that time and led Jim to the Lord. There was a man at the Wissinoming church known as "blind Bill" who had a string of perfect attendance pins. Jim's memories from the Scranton church are from 1948 to 1952. All the classes met in the sanctuary. Harry Bailey was a great Sunday school teacher: he took the class to football games, camping, and had other activities. In 1952, pastor Hartman was assigned to the Graterford church where Harry Lytle was Jim's teacher. Harry was a good teacher and had a great rapport with the students.

Perfect attendance was rewarded in times past. Raymond Rawn, father of retired missionary Olive Rawn, received the Robert Raikes certificate for perfect attendance. This framed certificate had a place to add a "medallion" for subsequent years of perfect attendance, each of the medallions featuring a positive character trait.

Connie Shelly, currently of the Zionsville Bible Fellowship Church, grew up in Macungie in the 1930s and 40s. She attended the United Church of Christ in that town as a child. During the summer, she went to all the Daily Vacation Bible Schools of all five churches in that town. By the time she was 13 years old, she had trusted in Christ as savior but was not confirmed in her church, so she could not take communion. She began to attend the Macungie Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church which was a small congregation. The children sat on one side of the church for Sunday school and the adults on the other. Sunday school began with singing then everyone went to their class. Union Gospel Press curriculum was used. Little red tickets with Bible verses on them were used to reward attendance. Pencils and tablets of paper were available for purchase with the tickets. Pins were awarded for perfect attendance. On Sunday evenings, Esther Gehman, wife of Martin Gehman, would take Connie to Bethel Bible Fellowship Church of Emmaus where the youth of that church would meet together with the youth of the Macungie and the Zionsville churches. It was there that Connie met her husband, Ray Shelly of the Zionsville congregation.



VBS Blandon

Lena Thomann, second wife of the late Pastor David E. Thomann, shares that her connection with the Bible Fellowship church began in the 1950s. She grew up in the 1920s in another church, where she learned things from the Bible but did not hear the term "born again." As an adult, she attended an evangelistic tent meeting at the fairgrounds in Allentown where Norman Cressman was the speaker. Eventually, she and her family were connected to the 8th Street church in Allentown when the late C. Leslie Miller was pastor. Lena taught Sunday school there for many years; in the 1980s, she had in her class Timothy Schmoyer who is now pastor of the Whitehall Bible Fellowship Church. The church building had many classrooms; the congregation purchased a house next to the church to use for Sunday school classrooms. A barn in the back of the house was made into Sunday school classrooms also. Sunday school at the 8th street church met in the morning before the worship service. It began with opening exercises which included singing accompanied by Lena on the piano. Then everyone went to their respective classroom. Lena says that Sunday school was a good outreach tool.

In the 1956 yearbook (p. 124) the Report of Program and Promotion Committee for a Conference Wide Sunday School Convention states, "There were 407 officers and teachers of our school registered at the Convention. A total of approximately 800 people attended. We believe the convention was a blessing to our schools; that it

inspired many of our people to greater zeal and showed them better methods of carrying on God's work in this department."

Also in 1956 when Carl Cassel became pastor of the Coopersburg church, the *Glorious Gospel Hymns* book was being used. New that year was the hymnal, *Inspiring Hymns*. "Like a River Glorious" was a new song to those people. Four years later, the "newer" songs became the favorites. The standard format for Sunday school for the Coopersburg church in the 1950s was to have opening exercises first when they sang and recognized birthdays. Ray Dotts led the singing of the birthday song as children put their money into the missions collections box. After the opening exercises, children and adults alike went to their respective classrooms.

In 1959 the name of our denomination became the Bible Fellowship Church. In the yearbook for that year the Report of the Sunday School Promotion Committee presented the following: "One of the greatest and universal needs of our schools is for increased facilities. Realizing this need the Committee has planned for a Conference on Facilities for Christian Education in The Local Church to be held on Saturday, December 5, 1959. The offer of the facilities of the Terre Hill Church for the Conference was accepted. The attendance will of necessity be limited, and all pastors and general superintendents have been contacted regarding it." Our churches were outgrowing their buildings. Some churches were already addressing this happy need. Some churches would need decades before expanding or replacing their buildings.

Another change to the Sunday school convention came in 1960. It was decided to sponsor six regional institutes instead of holding one large convention. It was also the beginning of a new publication. "This year was the beginning of a SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS publication designed to promote Sunday School interest, give helpful information to Sunday School workers, report on what other schools have done and encourage the workers to promote their own class and school." (1960 yearbook, p. 120) Pastor Harvey Fritz of Spring City was the first editor and the newspaper was distributed free of charge. In 1963, a visual aids library was assembled, and items were made available for use, conference wide. Items for loan included film strips. This library was housed at various churches, depending on who the librarian was at the time.

Andy Geissinger's childhood memories of Sunday school at the Zionsville church are from the late 1950s into the 1960s. The basement was a small room that was used for Sunday school but was inadequate for their needs. The younger children trotted down the street to the home of Bright and Joyce Heist for Sunday school while the adults met in the sanctuary. Opening exercises for the children included singing, accompanied on the piano by Andy's mother, Mae Shelly Geissinger. Teachers included Eileen Heist Pruitt, Lucille Weaver, Loretta Heist, Thelma Heist, June Heist Hersh, and Ida Brunner. The classes were age-graded, with boys and girls together. A globe bank was used in the Zionsville Sunday school to collect an offering from the children observing a birthday. A birthday song was sung as the coins were deposited in the slot.

"A happy birthday to you, a happy birthday to you..." Around 1964, renovations to the Zionsville church were completed. They included digging out the rest of the basement to be used as classrooms. Also, a balcony was built and restrooms were installed, an outhouse being used prior to this. In his teenage years, Andy Geissinger had Ronald Weaver and then David Weller as teachers.

By 1968 many churches had started "youth groups" for teenagers. Victory Valley Camp for children had already begun its second decade as had Berean Bible School. The Bible Fellowship Church annual conference realized the overlapping responsibilities of these organizations, including Sunday school, and thus created the Board of Christian Education. Duties included providing guidance to local churches in carrying out their Christian Education Programs and providing denominational and regional programs for related programs.

The 1960s and 1970s saw an innovation in building up the Sunday school: the bus ministry. This did not originate with the Bible Fellowship Church but was an idea of Jack Hyles, pastor of an independent Baptist church in Indiana. This method could be used by any church of any denomination. Walking through housing developments or through



Sunday School Class - Philadelphia, 1930?

town as children were playing outside, invitations to Sunday school were extended to them. On Sunday, those children were picked up by bus, typically a former school bus which was purchased by the church. The Spring City church had a bus ministry in the late 1970s. Pastor Richard Taylor recalls that the man who drove the bus and made contacts was committed and faithful. Today a Commercial Driver's License is needed to drive a passenger bus. Also needed are criminal clearances and child abuse clearances. This, combined with the atmosphere of distrust of strangers interacting with children, make the bus ministry difficult to do anymore.

Growing up in the Graterford church in the 1970s, Karl Cooper remembers first through third grades being in the basement of the church. Opening exercises were led by Betty Wanner who led the children in singing. She may have been his teacher at that time also. When in fourth through sixth grades, opening exercises were led by Jeanne Detwiler Lucas. Other teachers Karl had include Bob Buckwalter, Steady Moono, and Rick Lucas. Points were recorded for attendance, for bringing one's Bible,

and for reciting the memory verse. At the end of the school year, the children received a gift certificate to Provident Bookstore (local Christian bookstore). Karl also remembers receiving a pocket New Testament when in first grade and an entire Bible when promoted to fourth grade. Karl's uncle Doug Bowne was superintendent at that time.

Pastor of the York Bible Fellowship Church, Tim Bertolet, grew up in the Blandon church in the 1980s, before the present spacious building was built. Sunday school classes were held in the basement with curtains separating the classes. There was competition for attention since the students could hear the other teachers. Standing out in Tim's mind is the consistency of the teachers. Some of them taught for decades; they were dedicated to their task.

Jim Crosley, currently pastor of Harmony Grove Community Church in York, Pa, grew up in the Wissinoming church in Philadelphia in the 1980s. His family began attending there in 1984, having recently moved into the area. Teachers he remembers are Miss Alice, Miss Norma, and Mrs. C (Mrs. Clapier). Miss Alice would gradually erase words from the memory verse as the class repeated it. When they said the verse from memory, they were rewarded with candy. There is a large room with three or four classrooms and a kitchen in the basement of the church. Upstairs there is a room or two. Opening exercises were used as a time to sing, but that went by the wayside at some point. A curriculum was used, but Jim does not remember flannel graph being used. He remembers doing some crafts in fifth and sixth grades.

By 1984, declining Sunday school attendance in the denomination was acknowledged and concern was expressed. We "...are looking for ways to reverse this trend." What was causing this trend? Perhaps it was the competition for people's attention. In 1984 there were many more options for people's leisure time than there were in 1884. Community sports for children are often held on Sunday; sometimes on Sunday morning. Going to the beach or park sounds like more fun than being in school for another day.

Attendance in Sunday school may have been declining, but Sunday school continued nevertheless. Born in 1984, Sarah Treese, daughter of preacher Richard Taylor, grew up attending Sunday school at Grace Bible Fellowship Church in Wallingford, Pa. She remembers flannel graph figures being used to tell the Bible story. Her mother, Joyce Taylor, was Sarah's teacher in the elementary grades. Sarah recalls her mother using a lot of games to teach and reinforce the lesson. As a reward system, Joyce used (and still uses) stickers on a chart for various things. Sarah remembers the class earning a pizza party. They did not have opening exercises nor did they sing. Take home papers were given to the children; they told the Bible story in comic book form. Sometimes an overhead projector was used, particularly if there was a special speaker. Sarah now teaches a young adult class in the church she attends where she lives in Virginia.

Jonathan Armstrong's childhood memories of Sunday school are from the 1990s in the Harleysville church. He remembers the room that was used for Sunday school and that they made Christmas ornaments. He remembers flannel graph being used but is not sure if those memories are from Sunday school or from junior church. Ivan and Wanda Buso were teachers that he remembers from his middle school years. For birthdays, the Busos would let the birthday child select either a donut or ice cream as a treat. They would have a Christmas party at their house for the class.



Katie Paul's Sunday School Class

This writer's daughter, Rebecca Armstrong (wife of Jonathan Armstrong) has fond memories of Sunday school at the Graterford church from the late 1980s and the 1990s. Teachers she sat under include Sandy Phillips, Jackie Eplee, Terry Eplee, Paul Sabatine, and her own mother. There was no singing in Sunday school; however, songs were learned in Daily Vacation Bible School, children's choir, and Pioneer Girls. Rebecca vividly remembers flannel graph being used along with other visual aids. Prayer requests from students were taken seriously. In her mother's class (grades 7-9) she remembers lessons on warfare in Bible times, everyday technology in Bible times, and Bible stories that include animals. The logistics of Rebecca watering the camels for Abraham's servant was a lesson that she remembers well. A class activity was an all-night party which changed the dynamics of the class: it gave the students an opportunity to bond. Other class activities gave them opportunities to spend time together outside of the Sunday school class during a time when there was no youth director.

Born in 1997, Lena Derr of the Zionsville congregation shares that Carl and Carol Beltz taught the preschool class. Connie Shelly, then her mother, Susan Derr was her Sunday school teacher for kindergarten through third grade. They did a lot of crafts during the lesson time. Sue Weller was her teacher in fourth through sixth grades. Lena learned a lot of Bible stories in that class. Opening exercises included singing and a prayer time. In the high school class, they read from the Bible, starting in Genesis and going into Exodus, with Mike Wiren as the teacher. They also did Bible puzzles. There were very few students at the time and it was decided to place the teenagers in the adult class where a Ken Hamm series on DVD on evolution and creation was being used. Lena profited from that class.

The Conference wide Audio-Visual library was discontinued in 2006. "Dated materials as well as increased availability of video/DVD programs for local churches at reasonable cost have brought us to the point where we have discontinued the AV Library." (page 173, 2006 yearbook). Now and then we should evaluate our programs and resources to consider if they are still needed.

The Sunday school conventions were dwindling. Pastor Dave Shoen was officially trained in the "Walk through the Bible" program in 1997. He conducted seminars for Sunday school teachers in the denomination for a number of years. Denomination-wide teacher training conventions are no longer held as of 2008. Is current curriculum user friendly? Do our Sunday school teachers not need training? Bible colleges and Bible Institutes in the United States started in the late 1800s, but our people were discouraged from pursuing higher education until the 1940s. Are our current Sunday school teachers Bible College and/or seminary trained? A survey of churches that list a Sunday school in the 2015 yearbook reveals that most of them have Bible College, Christian College, and/or Seminary trained people and most are teaching the Bible at church in Sunday school or in another program of the church.

Linda Bowne, current teacher of the pre-school class at the Graterford Bible Fellowship Church says that in today's curriculum there is a new kind of flannel graph. Instead of the flocking on the back of the paper figures, a circle of the loop part of Velcro fasteners is provided for the teacher to peel and stick onto the paper figure. Linda then gives these visual aids to the kids to take home as a lesson reinforcement. She does not have to save them from year to year because new curriculum is always purchased.

This writer currently teaches the seventh to ninth grade Sunday school class at the Graterford church. The reward system used in that class is the shekel. Paper shekels of various denominations are used for Bible verses learned, for getting to class on time, for bringing one's own Bible to class, for helping around the church, and for having a birthday. Shekels can be used to pay for Sunday school class trips or cashed in for U.S. currency for personal use.

This writer's grandchildren, also children of Timothy Schmoyer, pastor of the Whitehall Bible Fellowship Church, share their current experiences with Sunday school. Nathaniel, eleven years old, reports, "We have Sunday school so the young' uns can know about God and what he influenced others to do. We have Sunday school to teach us about the Bible. You could do that in a sermon, but the kids would not understand all the concepts or the vocabulary of adult classes."

Ten year old Evelyn reports, "Sunday school is a lot funner. You don't have to just sit there listening. You get to do stuff like play games and listen to CDs. In the beginning we talk about what we did that week and Star Wars since we all like Star Wars. Sunday school is important because it is telling kids about Jesus in a fun way."

Caroline, eight years old, says, "In Sunday school sometimes I do things that make it like we are actually in the story and we do the things the Bible characters did. We have an attendance chart where we mark if we did good things, brought our Bible. Sunday school is important because the teacher tells us about God, we praise him, and we do funny and helpful things."

The youngest Schmoyer child, Molly, at seven years old shares, "Sunday school is important because they teach you about the Bible. It is good we have Sunday school because no matter what age we are we can learn about Jesus."



Sunday School - Officers and Teachers - Reading

Do we still need Sunday school? Is it still a viable program? Yes, Sunday school is still a useful program. Other programs of the church can also fulfill the function of teaching the Bible and providing opportunity for connecting with other believers. Eric North reports from the Howell, NJ church that there are children's classes during the worship service and small groups that meet during the week. At the Northern Lehigh church, Aaron Smith shares that they have Life Groups at homes during the week, AWANA midweek for children, and during the service a children's lesson. Children's junior church is offered during the service at Community Bible Fellowship Church in Red Hill, Pa. and at TheMission in Townsend, De.

People of all ages still need to hear the Gospel and get to know the Lord through knowing the Bible because "Yes Jesus loves me, yes Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so."

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