

TEN PLANNING STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUNDAY SCHOOL EMPHASIS

1. Surround this special time in prayer. Enlist prayer support for the emphasis from Sunday School leaders and prayer cells in your church.
2. Several weeks prior to the emphasis, list the Sunday School emphasis as a prayer concern in the worship bulletin, church newsletter, and on other prayer lists.
3. Have Sunday School class members begin to pray for ways to make the emphasis a success.
4. Several weeks prior to the start of the emphasis, meet with Sunday School and local church leaders to explain the emphasis, think through goals, schedule important dates, and clarify roles of teachers, greeters, Sunday School classes, and individuals.
5. Familiarize yourself with each week's theme. Brainstorm with other church leaders about how Sunday School can implement each week's theme.
6. Consider starting a new classes and/or a short-term elective to provide an opportunity to invite new people to Sunday School. Plan to begin this class on the first Sunday of the emphasis.
7. Encourage classes (all ages) to creatively integrate the objectives of this emphasis into the life of their classes.
8. Schedule on the church calendar events/locations related to the emphasis.
9. Several weeks out, order promotional give-aways, gifts, and supplies you will need to implement the emphasis.
10. Work with the Sunday School leadership team to establish a follow-up plan.

IDEAS FOR PROMOTING YOUR SUNDAY SCHOOL EMPHASIS

1. Create promotional displays or bulletin boards at least three weeks prior to the first Sunday of the emphasis.
2. Highlight the emphasis in the church newsletter, bulletins, and on the church website.
3. Announce the emphasis and the dates during worship service roll-ins or announcement times.
4. Display signs on the church property announcing the emphasis.
5. On Sunday School emphasis launch Sunday, have the pastor call to the front all the Sunday School teachers and class officers for a special time of prayer for the emphasis.
6. Plan a neighborhood "launch" party the Saturday before the start of the emphasis. Have banners advertising the emphasis, booths for the different ministries of the church, food and fun activities for all ages.

7. Distribute through the Sunday School classes “Make the Connection with Others” cards (found under “resources” at sdmi.nazarene.org). Have Sunday School members identify those people they want to invite to Sunday School during the weeks of the emphasis.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS*

Almost all ministries of the church require lay or volunteer participation. Make sure you carefully explain the task you are asking a volunteer to do. A clear challenge produces more volunteers than an ambiguous one.

Many leaders shy away from inviting people to volunteer because they are never quite sure how to ask in the best way. It is not difficult—but it does require forethought and a belief that what you are asking the volunteer to do is worthwhile.

These phrases *do not* belong in your invitation to a potential volunteer:

- "I know you're busy, but. . ."
- "Would you mind doing a little thing for our program?"
- "We're desperate for new people to help us. We really need you to say yes."
- "Could you at all possibly do this?"
- "We can't find anybody else to do it. . ."

Here are some simple, clear phrases that *do* belong in an invitation to a potential volunteer:

- "We are looking for someone with real gifts in this area for this responsibility."
- "Do you have interests in this area?"
- "How can we help you contribute some of your many talents to Sunday School?"
- "I've observed that you seem to be gifted in this area."

When issuing an invitation, never apologize. For example: "I can guess that you are too busy to help us, but I'd like to ask anyway. . ." By apologizing, you communicate the thought that the potential volunteers have something more important to do or that what you are asking them to do is not worthwhile. Make your invitation to the volunteers positive, simple, and straightforward.

Here are three things volunteers want to know:

1. Is it meaningful? Does it fulfill God's plan? Will I have a sense of significance?
2. Will I have authority and structure? What is the chain of command? Will I have the freedom to get things done?

3. What about training? Will someone help me learn to do what I've been asked to do?

Remember to care for the individuals you ask to volunteer, whether they accept or decline your request. God's love can reach through your willingness to listen, support, and understand those with whom you minister. Your willingness to form a relationship with the volunteers and to appreciate their work and family situations may strengthen and empower them for future, transforming service.

* Taken from *Women's Ministries Handbook for Leaders*.

STRATEGIC DISCIPLESHIP METHODS & IDEAS (SDMI) FOR IMPLEMENTING THIS EMPHASIS

Bible Reading

- Hold a Bible Read-a-thon for teens. This could be used as a fund raiser for a Bible society.
- Order Bibles from a Bible society to give away to children, teens, and adults.
[American Bible Society](#), [Nazarene Publishing House](#), [Canadian Bible Society](#), [World Bible Society](#).
- Give a gift to the people who bring their Bibles to Sunday School during the emphasis,
- Provide Bible reading calendars for all ages. ([Daily Bible Reading Calendar](#) and [Gideon's Bible Reading Calendar](#))
- Have Bible memorization verses for children and have them recite them during the morning worship time.
- Bring in for display old family Bibles, Bibles in other languages, Bibles in various versions and paraphrases.
- Identify one of the [Pauline epistles](#) to read as a congregation.
- Identify several Psalms to read during the week.
- Identify an internet daily devotional to read. [Upper Room](#) or [Crosswalk](#). To subscribe to Tom Barnard's Tuesday morning and Friday evening, send an email to barnard22@cox.net.
- Start an on-going journal about how the Bible passages affected your life this week and in the future.

Prayer

- Plan a neighborhood prayer walk* for the area where your church is located.
- Have church attendees and members living in the same community plan a prayer walk for their areas.

- Take the responsibility list for each class and divide the names on the list among the class members. Encourage people to prayer and contact the names on their portion of the list during the coming week.
- Pray for guidance to identify someone who is open to the Gospel, and pray for the opportunity to share the Gospel with him or her.
- Identify one of the following groups as the focus of the church's prayers for each week of the emphasis:
 - Children
 - Youth
 - College and Young Adults
 - Middle and Senior Adults
 - Co-workers or fellow students
 - People who need salvation
 - Marriages in the church and community
 - Community leaders and public workers such as police and firefighters
- Plan small group prayer nights.
- Plan a concert of prayer or an around-the-clock prayer vigil.
- Pray for the local school system, including public schools, Christian schools, home schoolers, and any institutions of higher education and training.
- Subscribe to the weekly prayer memo from Adult Ministries International and use it as a prayer guide. ([AMC](#) and click on the "Prayer" tab.)

** Prayer Walk

Prayer walk has been called "praying on site with insight." The goal is to pray while walking. You can do this alone, as families, in small groups, or large groups. You can either pray for the area in which you're walking or combine exercise with prayers. When you are praying for specific areas, your walking/praying sites can include workplaces, neighborhoods, sites of consecrated use, overlook points, sites of past sin, or even sites of ongoing sin in the community.

Workplace and School Outreach

- Have a Sunday School class party, and intentionally invite friends who do not attend a Sunday School class.
- Have a block party and invite your neighbors. Also invite your Sunday School superintendent and pastor to come and meet your guests.
- Between Sunday School and morning worship, have a brunch and invite neighbors and friends. During the brunch, introduce Sunday School teachers and give information about the class they teach.
- Sponsor a neighborhood "Let's Get Acquainted Day" at the church. Have a festival of activities for the family. (Have a sign-in sheet available for names, addresses, phone numbers, and emails.)
 - Children... games, inflatable toys, face painting, pony rides, etc.

- Teens...concert with a teen emphasis, ultimate Frisbee, sports events, etc.
- Adults...pie eating contest, exhibitions and workshops on topics such as household repairs, car repair, quilting, canning, candle stick making, etc.
- Invite co-workers and classmates to attend morning worship. As part of the worship service consider asking one person to share with the congregation how a co-worker has impacted his or her life for Christ, and have one student share how a classmate has lived a Christ-like example.

Encouragement

- Have class members contact a person in the church that has encouraged them.
- Have class members contact a person who is not in the church that has encouraged them.
- Do anonymous acts of kindness for someone this week.
- Help decorate another classroom.
- Bake cookies and give them away.
- Pray for the requests made during your Sunday School class or small group gathering last week.
- Start a small or accountability group.
- Surprise a co-worker or fellow students with a card.
- Pay for the person behind you in a drive through.
- Offer a sincere thank-you and a smile to someone who is serving you, such as a clerk, bank teller, or waiter.

Service

- Hold a free a car wash sponsored by NYI or the teen Sunday School class.
- Provide free baby sitting for single moms in the church sponsored by prime time adult and teen classes.
- Have Sunday School classes sponsor a work and witness program to another church. Have them present the follow up pictures and report during Sunday School class time.
- Have "Blue Jeans" Sunday. During the Sunday School class time, clean up the church area and parking lot.
- Identify the senior adults in your congregation that need some extra help with home maintenance. Have teen and adult classes help them with their needs.
- Plan a car care day for senior adults and single moms in your community.
- Plan a trip to a nursing home in your community to visit and encourage the residents.
- Contact another church in your community and do a service project for them.

- Plan a trip to the nearest rescue mission, homeless shelter, or other service organization in your community.
- Plan a mother's day or evening out. Have the teens help plan and carry out the activities for the children.
- Plan a school supply drive.
- Start a coffee shop ministry.
- Provide some after-school programs, including tutoring, for children in the church's community.

Fellowship

- Plan a bike ride or walk-a-thon. Invite the community to join the fun.
- Host a vintage car show. Invite community people to show their cars.
- Have a cookout and service at a park or on the church lawn. Provide free food and give -aways for adults, teens, and children.
- Divide the congregation into small fellowship groups. Have leaders plan activities ranging from games to backyard barbeques.
- Encourage inter-generational classes for a Sunday. Have the adult Sunday School classes adopt a children's or teen class and meet together for the lesson, food, fun, and fellowship.
- Plan a game night for the congregation. Ask people to bring table games and a snack (or provide popcorn and ask people to bring sodas.)
- Develop a presence on Facebook or other internet social networks.

Meditation

The biblical understanding of meditation is listening to God and seeking to obey Him. The Psalms are rich with examples of mediation. Through meditation, God spoke to His people – not because they had any special abilities but because they were willing to listen.

- Through Sunday School and small groups, help people understand the real purpose of meditation by revealing to them three common misconceptions about Christian meditation:
 - *Myth 1: It is synonymous with the meditation of the Eastern religions that are typically an attempt to empty the mind.* No, Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind through connecting with our personal, loving God.
 - *Myth 2: Meditation equals inaction.* No, meditation is a tool to redirect our lives so we can deal successfully with the world around us. It opens us to God's guidance so we can go into the world with perspective and balance.
 - *Myth 3: Meditation is a form of "Christian psychology."* No, it is not a discipline designed for us to explore our own subconscious minds. It is intended to help us explore our relationship with God, to acknowledge His presence, and to commune with Him.
- Through Sunday School and small groups, help people understand the forms of genuine Christian meditation:

- **Meditating on Scripture.** This is not the same as a study or analysis of Scriptures. It is a time to humble ourselves and receive God's Word as it is addressed to us. It is a time to allow one story, parable, passage, or even a single verse to take root in our mind and heart.
- **Palms Down, Palms Up Meditation.** This is a form of meditation in which you simply become still and silent and allow your mind to focus on God's presence. Sitting first with your palms down symbolizes your desire to let go of fears and feelings that separate you from God. After a time, turning your palms up is a symbol of your desire to receive what God is offering to you – peace, patience, or encouragement.
- **Meditating on Our World.** This is a time to soberly contemplate creation and to learn about life from nature – perseverance, growth, change, life, death, and more. Through this contemplation we can learn about the kingdom of Heaven. In addition, this is a time to seek understanding and the biblical significance of the events going on in the world. It allows us quiet time to look for God's insight into world events and to deeply consider how we can be instruments of salt and light.
- Encourage every Sunday School and small group member to set aside time at least once a week (perhaps for only 15-30 minutes at first) for quiet meditation. Tell them in advance that you will ask for reports on their experience in a few weeks. Follow up after 4-6 weeks by asking those who have added meditation to their schedules to share with the class/group its effect on their lives.
- Talk to parents about meditating with their children. Some will be reluctant at first. Encourage them to experience meditation on their own before they share it with their children. When teaching meditation to children, the goal should be the same as with adults – listening to God and seeking to obey Him. Meditation with children should be limited to one minute for each year of their age. Teaching children to be still before God can have a profound effect on their relationship with Christ.
- If there is not currently a quiet place in your church for meditation, talk with church leaders about developing a small space for this purpose.

Fasting

Fasting is an exercise designed to bring the flesh under the subjection of the Spirit. The purpose of fasting, in combination with meditation and prayer, is to get you attuned to the Spirit so you can hear what God is saying and be guided to do His will.

- Have the pastor's message address the discipline of fasting.
- Have each Sunday School class or small group encourage members to fast one meal in the upcoming week. During the time the meal would have been eaten, ask the class members to spend that time in prayer and meditation. Provide a list of prayer suggestions for class members.

(Note: Consult your physician beforehand if you have a physical condition that could be negatively affected by fasting.)

- For class members who, for health reasons, cannot fast one meal, encourage them to “fast” (or skip) another activity and use that time instead for prayer and meditation.
- Distribute to class/small group members a card or paper with Isaiah 58:6-7. Ask them to meditate over this Scripture, and ask the Spirit to direct them in prayer for the 7 reasons Isaiah lists for fasting:
 - To bring justice
 - To undo heavy burdens and break the yoke of bondage
 - To free the oppressed and loose the bands of wickedness
 - To share food
 - To provide shelter for the poor
 - To clothe the naked
 - To provide for one’s family
- Help children understand the concept of fasting by sharing the story of Esther. (Note: <http://gardenofpraise.com> offers free downloadable resources to accompany this story.) Encourage children to think of ways they can fast (food or activity) and use the time to pray for their friends and family.

Journaling

Journaling is one way to communicate with God. Christian journaling combines prayer, scripture reading, and a deeper analysis of God’s teachings. It’s an excellent way to spend time with God and draw closer to Him.

- Share with Sunday School and small group members the essential steps to journaling:
 - Pray, pray, pray.
 - Read, read, read your Bible.
 - Write, write, write your prayer requests, praises, confessions, goals, and responses to the Bible passages you have read.
- Encourage class and small group members to experiment with journaling. If possible, provide each member with a small journal (available at many \$1 stores). Challenge the people to journal at least three times a week. After 4-6 weeks, ask them to report back how journaling has affected their spiritual growth.
- Children too can be taught the spiritual benefits of journaling. Let them make personal journals with construction paper covers and computer paper pages. Hole punch and tie with decorative ribbon or staple. Even very young non-readers can journal by drawing pictures. As with meditation, journaling is another way for children to develop a close relationship with Christ.

Stewardship

- Before taking the regular offering, have an individual or couple give a personal testimony about how the Lord has taught them to give 10% or more to the Lord's work as their first and highest financial priority. Have them explain briefly how they felt about this decision and how the Lord has blessed them for their obedience. (Note: Testimonies can be video taped and played during the pre-service or service.)
- **Google** "Brian Kluth 100 verses to encourage generosity." Use one of these verses weekly in the church bulletin, read one before taking the offering, reference one or more as theme verses for special funding initiatives, or use one as the basis for a lesson or sermon on generosity and giving.
- Plan an all-church tithing Sunday. Challenge everyone to bring a full 10% of their income as an offering on the designated Sunday.
- Provide cards and ask people to write (without giving their names) how much their tithe would be if they gave 10% of their income. Tally this information and give the total back to the congregation. Share the difference between this figure and the actual average monthly tithe given to the church. Stress how much more could be done for the Kingdom if everyone would faithfully give at least 10% to the church.
- If your church does not already do so, encourage the staff to send out quarterly giving reports to the congregation. This will help the congregation feel more involved with the finances of the church, and it will help them see specific areas of need.
- Long-term: Have a qualified lay person in your church begin a Christian financial counseling ministry to help families in trouble. As families begin to get their finances in order, they will begin to faithfully give to the Lord's work.
- Help people think about stewardship of their time and talents as well as their finances. Encourage or challenge people through Sunday School classes and small groups to prayerfully consider ways they can share their time
- Activities with children:
 - Collect milk and juice cartons for children to decorate as offering banks for home. Encourage them to save money from gifts and allowances. Use this to discuss the importance of giving tithes and offerings.
 - Talk about the things people do to help in the church. Discuss these jobs and how important they are. Have children make cards to thank these people for the work they do. Use this activity to discuss the importance of giving God our time and talents.
- Children can learn a lot about stewardship by participating in service projects. Let the children help you plan the project. Consider the ages of the children in your group when planning. Make sure the children are in safe situations and avoid use of dangerous tools. Some ideas include:
 - Make colorful boxes to collect food or clothing at church for shelters or food banks.

- Collect food for your church's food pantry or local food bank.
- Plant flowers around the church
- Recycle cans or newspapers

EMPHASIS FOLLOW-UP: AFTER THE EMPHASIS IS OVER...

1. Encourage each Sunday School class to continue the ministries begun during these emphasis weeks – perhaps on a monthly or quarterly basis.
2. Recommend that Sunday School members keep their “Make the Connection with Others” cards over the coming months as a reminder to pray for and connect with others.
3. Have an assigned team to personally contact each visitor who attended during the weeks of the emphasis.
4. Have a “Celebration Sunday” meal event at the conclusion of the emphasis. Invite people from the neighborhood to attend. In larger churches, encourage an adult class to partner with a children's or teen class to host a “Celebration Sunday” meal and invite people who attended during this emphasis.
5. Honor Sunday School classes that have demonstrated growth during the emphasis.
6. On a Sunday following the emphasis, plan to recognize new attendees who came to the church because of the activities of the emphasis. Celebrate newly-established spiritual victories.
7. Host a “meet the pastor” luncheon or coffee as opportunities for new attendees to fellowship with the pastoral staff and families and other key church leaders. Provide information about how they can become involved with the ministry opportunities available at your church.
8. Encourage Sunday School classes of all ages to plan follow-up parties or socials to involve the new attendees.