

Sunday School Leaders! Code Blue! Stat!!

A short time after coming on staff with the Sunday School/Discipleship Team, I decided to check recent Sunday School statistics among MBC churches. I took the Annual Church Profiles from 1990 to 2007 and compared Total Church Membership, Total Sunday School Enrollment, Average Sunday School Attendance, and Total Baptisms. The results were not surprising. I have seen them all too often in other state conventions.

Total membership in Missouri Baptist churches during that time has hovered around 600,000 with the highest membership reported in 1994 of 600,073. Since then a steady decline in membership to our present 555,872 has occurred.

Total MBC Sunday School enrollment's best year during that time was 1992 with 292,193 reported. Again, since that year a decline to our present enrollment of 241,161 has occurred. Our average Sunday School attendance for 2007 was 122,528. Our best year was in 1992 with an average attendance of 140,934.

Baptisms have held steady with the lowest coming in 2007 of 11,063 and the highest in 2000 of 14,015.

If you graph this information there are four lines that go pretty much straight across the page or have a steady downhill slope with a few bumps along the way. As I sat at my desk and looked at those lines, I was reminded of a patient in a hospital connected to a heart monitor. As long as the lines are moving up and down, the patient is doing well. When the monitor begins to show straight lines across..., well *Code Blue* is a medical term used to indicate a patient requiring immediate resuscitation. And *Stat* is an abbreviation of the Latin *statim*, which means "immediately". Hopefully the doctors and nurses will be able to resuscitate the patient before it is too late!

The same is true with many of our churches. I have met pastors who have said that their church isn't doing too badly. They haven't grown any, but they haven't declined. They

are “holding their own.” May I make an observation? Just like the heart monitor that shows a patient “flat lining”, many of our churches are also flat lining, and unless they are resuscitated soon, I fear we may lose them.

So, how can we bring new life into those churches? Let me introduce a new strategy that the Sunday School/Discipleship Team has developed: **Show-Me Growth! : A Missouri Sunday School Growth Award Plan.** Starting in 2008, I would like to see the lines on the graph begin to take an upward slant in total Sunday School enrollment and average attendance. I know that if those two lines begin to move upward, church membership and baptisms will also begin to grow!

As an incentive to encourage Sunday Schools to grow, we will begin recognizing churches that have significant growth in Sunday School.

First, we will recognize the 10 fastest growing Sunday Schools for the year in four different divisions: Small Churches (100 or less); Intermediate Churches (100-199); Medium Churches (200-399); and Large Churches (400 plus). These churches will be recognized at the State Evangelism Conference in January, 2009.

Secondly, an award program will be instituted to recognize Sunday School growth experienced in the previous year. A three-level award system will be used that any church, big or small, can participate in and achieve recognition for growth. Briefly, this is how it will work:

Bronze Level Sunday School Award – A church will receive a Certificate of Recognition by completing the following: 1. Increase Sunday School average attendance by 5% over the previous year; 2. Increase Sunday School enrollment by 5% over the previous year; 3. Start at least one new Sunday School unit.

Silver Level Sunday School Award – A church will receive a Certificate of Recognition and a Sunday School growth book by completing the following: 1. Meet all the criteria for the

Bronze Level Award; 2. Conduct at least a monthly outreach ministry; 3. Conduct training for Sunday School leaders on a monthly or weekly basis.

Gold Level Sunday School Award – A church will receive a Plaque of Recognition, a Sunday School growth book, and a scholarship for the Pastor, Minister of Education or Sunday School Director to attend a Sunday School/Discipleship Ministries training event during the coming year by completing the following: 1. Meet all criteria for both the Bronze and Silver Level Awards; 2. Compile a prospect file equaling 50% of Sunday School enrollment; 3. Average reported contacts equaling 50% of Sunday School enrollment for the past six months.

Churches will be recognized at the MBC Annual Meeting in October. Why should your church participate in this award plan? My desire is that churches of every size will seek to accomplish these levels of growth as we work to build Great Commission Sunday Schools that impact our churches and communities. The theme of the MBC Sunday School & Discipleship Ministry for 2008 is *Restoring Passion, Revitalizing Churches through the Sunday School*. Let's resuscitate our churches and see real growth in the coming months!

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