

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

---

### **COORDINATION OF THE OVERALL PROGRAM**

I am not surprised that pastors ranked coordination of the overall program among the top ten discipleship challenges. Perhaps they had the same types of situations arise as did the ones in these three churches.

The missions committee at Firestone Church was looking forward to next week's annual conference. The mother-daughter brunch was a new feature this year, and they were anticipating a good attendance. The speaker was already contacted, the basement was scheduled and the menu was planned.

The first time they realized they had a problem was when a couple of mothers mentioned that they could not attend because their daughters were participating in a Pioneer Girls activity that Saturday morning. Unfortunately, the club leaders didn't realize there was a Saturday activity that week, so they purchased tickets and promised to take the girls to a play. When they heard about the brunch, they decided to go ahead with their plans, because "most of our girls are from non-church families anyway." Needless to say, the conflict became a source of tension among both club workers and parents.

At First Church the boys club scheduled a day of horseback riding to reward the fellows for their achievements. Later that month the leaders heard that the children's choir director had called a special Saturday rehearsal, because the kids needed more practice for the upcoming concert. Poor coordination again became a source of tension.

At North Heights Church a conflict arose over use of Power Point projectors. The two machines owned by the church were usually sufficient for those who needed them, but recently the demand exceeded the supply. A couple of the teachers began to come early to make sure they got projectors. Some were still searching after class time had begun. One teacher not interested in using transparencies stopped producing visuals altogether. The lack of coordination regarding equipment became divisive.

In these three illustrations, planning was not the central issue; all of the teachers had planned well their own activities. The problem these workers experienced was one of coordination. Conflicts arose over the use of equipment, rooms or the involvement of participants.

Poor coordination of personnel can lead to the overworking of some people, while the overlooking of others. Poor coordination of programs leads to duplication in some areas and neglect in others. Coordination is essential to staffing, program content, program scheduling and facility usage.

An effective ministry is a well-coordinated ministry. It accomplishes the church's purposes without duplication of its resources. Four ingredients are essential for good coordination: a positive team spirit; a functional Education committee; a responsible decision-making process and an annual assessment.

### ***A Positive Team Attitude***

You probably recognize by now that I believe *good attitudes* are critical to Christian education. Effective discipleship is not simply an issue of teachers, curriculum and students. It is primarily the attitudes that we have about our teachers, and the attitudes they have about their curriculum and students. Healthy, positive attitudes produce healthy discipleship programs. Disruptive, negative attitudes result in discouraging Christian education programs.

Frequently I am asked whether one type of church board structure is superior to another. While I believe there are some advantages to a unified board, the bottom line in any system is as strong as the people in it. A quality person will serve faithfully whether he/she is called an elder or a deacon; a cranky, obnoxious leader is cancerous whether he/she is called an elder or deacon. If I had to choose between a contentious, highly talented leader, and positive, lesser-skilled worker, I'd take the positive person every time.

There is no greater wet blanket to ministry than leadership with the attitude, "We can't do it." But there is nothing more encouraging to ministry than a leader who affirms, "I can do everything through him [Christ] who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).

The first step in bringing coordination to the overall educational ministry is to cultivate a positive team spirit among those serving. This task begins by helping people understand that "we are they." You've probably heard people say: "I wish *they'd* quit taking my chairs;" or "*They* never buy enough materials;" or "Why won't *they* give us a larger room?" These comments come from people who subconsciously act as though there is some kind of war going on.

A congregation cannot afford a "we versus they" mentality. It must fight this false dichotomy. *We are the they; they are the we.* The real enemy

is Satan and his forces of wickedness. Yet we get so caught up in our individual programs that anyone who seems to disagree or hinder us is viewed as an adversary.

A “we versus they” mentality can develop between pastor and people, program leaders and board and even volunteers working in Christian education versus music ministries, just to identify a few possibilities. Christians have different functions within the ministry, but we are all part of the same team. There is no “they”; there is only “we.” When conflict arises, it’s not my problem or their problem, but rather our problem. As a cooperative attitude develops among the staff, conflicts diminish.

A church with a positive team spirit demonstrates flexibility when inadvertant conflicts arise. For example, because of the healthy staff relationships in the church with the projector problem, a solution was worked out. One of the leaders began to bring a projector home from work on Friday evenings to use in his adult class. One teacher switched to a chalkboard and two teachers alternated usage every other week. Furthermore, the C.E. Committee placed a request for an additional projector in the upcoming budget.

A positive team spirit is also enhanced when people in one program know what’s happening in another program. Sunday School teachers or youth sponsors are typically so involved in their own program that they rarely are aware of developments in the nursery or home Bible study ministry. Program awareness is increasingly difficult the larger a church becomes. Nevertheless, an increased awareness of other programs helps volunteers feel that they’re part of an overall team.

Awareness is facilitated by a *master calendar* to coordinate through one centralized office room reservations, equipment, etc. Typically, a church office manager will handle requests and make tentative schedules (pending board approval). While many churches utilize a calendar for recording requests, too few use it to communicate back to program leaders the overall annual planning. Regular distributions of scheduled activities to workers make them aware of other activities taking place. The two-way calendar is an indispensable tool for coordination and communication.

Regular communication of events is also facilitated through positive articles in a *church newsletter*. Program leaders can take a moment at staff meetings to bring updates of what’s happening in other programs. Volunteers that enjoy their own ministries, and who appreciate the service of team members, are more likely to coordination efforts.

### ***A Functional Education Committee***

The best guarantee for a balanced, coordinated education program is the supervisory work of a Christian Education Committee. Churches able to

afford a discipleship pastor benefit greatly from this professional oversight. Nevertheless, all size churches derive profit from a good committee that meets periodically to establish policy, coordinate programs, and assist in personnel matters.

First, the *organization* of a Christian Education Committee can, by its very composition, help coordinate the overall program. A good organizational form for coordinating the educational ministry is to have program directors comprise the committee. For example, a C.E. Committee may consist of:

- ◆ The children's Sunday School Coordinator
- ◆ The children's church coordinator
- ◆ The director of the club program
- ◆ A youth director (or coordinator in a smaller congregation)
- ◆ The personnel coordinator
- ◆ The pastor (or representative from the church board).

Larger congregations have seen the value of utilizing age group coordinators. With this arrangement the Christian Education Committee will look like this:

- ◆ Early childhood coordinator
- ◆ Children's coordinator
- ◆ Youth coordinator
- ◆ Adult coordinator
- ◆ Personnel coordinator
- ◆ Representative from the pastoral staff.

Coordination of the educational program with the overall church ministry is best accomplished through a unified board system (i.e., a deacon or elder serving on each subcommittee) or through a church council.

Second, the Christian Education Committee coordinates its ministry through the *adoption of programs*. For example, two years ago Bethany Church began a club program for its boys. The new program was so exciting that some parents wanted to change the existing girl's program to the same publisher as the boy's work. In a church where leaders are allowed to do their own thing, a real squabble over the girl's program could have developed. But at Bethany Church, the Christian Education Committee received the request, reviewed the program, and shared with the parents a good rationale for keeping the existing girl's program.

The experience of Sunnyside Church provides a similar example. For over two decades Sunnyside had conducted a two-week Vacation Bible School (VBS) each August, but over the past few years it had become nearly impossible to find enough workers. For many, vacation time was a conflict; others felt that lost momentum in the ten-day school.

A request came from the Vacation Bible School coordinator and the children's coordinator to move to a one-week Bible school. Some on the committee felt that the recommendation was a move away from Bible teaching. Others saw a real potential for holding the children's interest, and

for staff recruitment. After much discussion the committee agreed to the five-day VBS, with a closing carnival on Friday evening. The new format was so well received by both the community and teaching staff that they have maintained the one-week format for the last few years.

The change to a one-week school would have caused dissension if the decision was made only by the Christian education director or the VBS coordinator. But because of the unanimous recommendation of the Christian Education Committee, the congregation was ready to move in a new direction.

Whether the issue is beginning a day camp ministry, establishing a youth “coffee house” or starting a Bible study at a retirement village, the Christian Education Committee is the place where pros and cons are evaluated, and programs are coordinated. Group decisions are safer than unilateral decisions. Remember, “Many advisers make victory sure” (Pro. 11:14).

Third, the Christian Education Committee coordinates ministry through *approval of curriculum*. In the Old Testament we read that “there was no king in Israel, and all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Jud. 17:6). Unfortunately, many educational programs run the same way. Adult teachers do their own thing. Children’s workers purchase and use whatever is appealing. And who knows what is studied in some small groups? However, a church that takes seriously its discipleship responsibility will make sure that its people have a balanced and thorough understanding of the Scriptures.

For this reason many churches follow the scope and sequence of one publishing house to assure coordination in the Sunday School. These materials typically highlight major Bible concepts in the preschool years; cycle through the Scriptures again in story and history form in the childhood years; give a balance of Old Testament, New Testament, and contemporary issues in the youth years and offer expository and topical studies for adults.

Coordination of curriculum across educational programs is possible once the curriculum is determined for the most highly attended ministry. Since in most churches the Sunday School is the program with the largest attendance, curriculum for other programs can be built around themes in the Sunday School. Duplication, or neglect, of Scripture is eliminated through requiring the Education Committee’s approval for all teaching materials.

At Paradise Cathedral the youth pastor developed a six-year curriculum for the Sunday School. Not satisfied with one particular publisher for the entire youth division, he selected a balanced diet of subjects for his teens. The comprehensive plan was approved by their Discipleship Committee, and he selected the best publisher for each specific topic. By charting out the Sunday School program of study, he was able to plan his Wednesday evening gatherings and retreat themes around topics not currently covered in Sunday School.

The average teacher does not have the skills or time to objectively evaluate curriculum. The Education Committee, with responsibility for the overall program, is better able to study alternatives and make sound decisions.

Fourth, the Education Committee encourages coordination by *appointing educational workers*. While names of perspective workers are cleared through the church staff or a volunteer ministries team, the inviting of teachers to service is the responsibility of the Discipleship Committee. Teachers that are poorly recruited rarely feel a part of the big picture. But when the Education Committee welcomes teachers to the teaching team, and commissions them for service, the volunteers feel a part of a team.

The Christian Education Committee's effectiveness in coordination is directly related to its effectiveness in conducting business. *Profitable meetings* are essential for program management. Committees function best when limited to four to nine members. A committee comprised of coordinators (who actually supervise their areas of ministry) could meet as few as four to six times per year. Other committees would profit from monthly meetings.

A *planned agenda* is a must for all meetings. Committee members should know ahead of time whether program updates are expected, and should be informed of issues scheduled for general discussion. *Handouts* distributed prior to the actual meeting allow time for study by committee members. The *length* of time for meetings is best kept between seventy-five to ninety minutes. A meeting deadline will expedite business and avoid the free rolling discussions that distract from the committee's charge.

### ***A Responsible Decision-Making Process***

The pastor of Bloomfield Church made a classic blunder. Concerned with their rapid growth he worked with the church council to develop a plan for double services. The elders understood that they should *consider several solutions before selecting the best solution*. However, when the first announcement was made to the congregation, flack from a few key people awakened them to the realization that they had failed to *involve significant people* in the overall process.

The double-session arrangement had implications for both worship and the Sunday School. And while the educational leadership was in agreement with the plan, individual teachers were never asked their opinion. The first time Mrs. Townsend knew that her class was switched from 9:45 to 11:00 was when she read it in the church newsletter.

One year later the leadership at Bloomfield Church had to make another decision. This time they involved many people in the process, and

subsequently *gave early communication* of the decision. The church council was concerned with developing a comprehensive assimilation program. Too many visitors and infrequent attendees were slipping through the cracks. So they approached the Education Committee with the possibility of using the adult Sunday School for the assimilation program. The educational leadership surveyed the teachers and classes, and then made a recommendation to switch from an elective system to a life-stage format.

The council targeted the following fall to begin the program, but used the intervening months to communicate the reasons for the change. They wanted enough time to present the benefits of the stage-graded structure and to answer objections honestly. They used the church newsletter for congregation wide communication, but also interacted individually with people, sharing their enthusiasm for this new approach to caring. The early communication by the leadership, and the enthusiasm of the teachers once the program began, produced a climate of acceptance.

A responsible decision-making process also *anticipates the consequences of decisions*. In the case of Bloomfield Church, they offered one elective class for those who preferred the old system, and they even scheduled several intergenerational activities. Now after three years they have only the life-stage classes, and each of the age groups in thriving. Broad involvement, the best solution, and early communication helped them change a twenty-year tradition into a well-received ministry.

### ***A Periodic Assessment***

Home, comfort, familiarity. Change, disruption, the unknown. Which set of words makes you feel better? Most people are content with the familiar and established; churches are no exception. It is easier to perpetuate programs that are familiar and comfortable than to evaluate whether they are the best possible ministries for the present situation. A periodic assessment can help people critically evaluate the present value of a program. Furthermore, the assessment can reveal whether the ministry mix is balanced and in harmony with biblical purposes.

Clark Summit Church developed its mission statement from Colossians 1:28: "that we may present all people mature in Christ." They sought to accomplish this endeavor by being a community for worship, a classroom for education, a family for fellowship and a task force for outreach. Now it's easy to add a mission statement to a constitution, but the question remains: How are we measuring up to our purposes? Clark Summit decided to assess its program.

One Thursday evening the church board convened for an evaluation session. The moderator drew a grid on the blackboard. He listed their four purposes horizontally, and asked the group to delineate their programs

vertically. As a program was mentioned, he asked the council to identify whether it was in the category of worship (adoration of God), education (Christian learning), fellowship (caring and sharing), outreach (witness, missions, and social concerns), or a combination of those. The markings on the chart yielded a bird's-eye view of the church's overall ministry. Initially the leadership was concerned that they provide more fellowship for the congregation, but when the moderator finished placing the last check, they saw other areas with greater need.

The most glaring neglect was outreach. Except for periodic invitations by the pastor in the service, or an occasional conversion in the children's Sunday School or VBS, the church was doing little corporate evangelism. Except for their counseling center, they were also doing little by way of community impact.

Philosophically the board understood that the church gathered for worship, education, and fellowship and scattered for evangelism. Nevertheless, they felt that as a congregation more intentionality was needed in witness and social concern. Their second observation noted the limited opportunities for worship. Corporate adoration of God only took place in the Sunday services, and perhaps during choir rehearsals.

As a result of the self-study, home Bible study leaders were encouraged to include worship as part of their weekly meetings. The outreach committee made contacts with the Red Cross, and the church became a center for regular blood donation drives. The committee also scheduled a community recreation night once a week in the gymnasium to build bridges with neighbors. In addition, the evangelism committee laid plans for beginning an Alpha evangelism program. Clark Summit's self-study helped them assess their program mix and identify areas for program development. The study was also beneficial to the budgeting process, for it revealed areas that needed additional support for effectiveness.

A periodic assessment was also profitable to Berean Church. Their study listed the programs they offered by age groups. As a result of their evaluation they realized they needed to do more for their children. As a result of the study, Berean began an after-school club program for third through sixth grades. A year later the church formed a children's choir, which met during the second part of the morning worship service. As in the case of Clark Summit Church, Berean Church was able to better coordinate its overall ministry because the leaders assessed the program mix in light of their church's mission and purpose.

## **Conclusion**

Polls reveal that many Christians spend more time in front of their televisions than in private devotions and church activities combined. Unfortunately, many even watch more hours of programming in one evening than their total participation in church programming during an entire week. The influence of secular values hits our people outside the home as well as within. The adversary's public relations techniques are cunning, but we are not ignorant of his schemes.

Therefore, it is imperative that churches plan and provide a quality discipleship program for their people. Pastors and program leaders must resist mediocrity; every sermon and every teaching session must be a vital component toward maximizes spiritual growth.

A quality ministry with a balanced program does not take place by chance. Effective coordination of the entire educational ministry requires healthy teacher attitudes, good organization, wise decisions, and regular evaluation. A well-orchestrated program encourages participation and fosters Christian maturity.

©2002 by Ministry Transitions, Inc.

*Permission granted for personal use, but not for duplication or distribution.*

*Notification of copyright may not be removed from these e-articles.*

## **A Checklist for Coordination**

Does our church have. . .

- ? A Positive Team Spirit
- ? A Functional Christian Education Committee
- ? A Responsible Decision-Making Process
- ? An Annual Assessment