

Back to Sunday school?

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A friend of mine was dismayed when Sunday school teachers at her church proposed a new Sunday school schedule for fall: classes held weekly except for the third Sunday of each month, when there would be no structured Sunday school classes. The teachers and their kids would take a break from the 9 o'clock hour Sunday school responsibilities and the Sun. school slot would become childcare with some kind of programming for those parents who need it.

The teachers explained that this proposal would provide a break for them, and that although worship and Sunday school are in separate time slots (one can do both), the teachers would be able to come to worship without having any responsibility for Sun. school that morning. It's a difficult proposal to oppose, as this is a 250-member congregation with no paid staff to help with Christian education. The teachers have been a dedicated and enthusiastic group.

In further discussion, a disquieting reality became clear to my friend: Christian education for kids in this church is threatened by all kinds of competition. Here are some of the comments she heard:

"The kids do baseball all day Saturday. I just need a down day at home sometimes."

"We can't always be there [Sundays]. We're trying to do soccer as well as church."

"Saturday nights/Sundays are the only days my kids can stay over with their grandmother [with a day off of Sun. school]. That's important time too."

"The Smiths don't attend Sun. school often, but their daughter is very alert

and was the first to know what the Apostle's Creed was last week. They're getting good Christian teaching at home even if they're not doing Sun. school."

"It [Sun. school plus worship] is all just too much to do as a single parent with kids."

My friend, who must soon vote for or against this proposal in a session meeting, is stumped. "Where do we start in a session discussion of all of this? How do we raise a vision for Christian education, emphasize a sense of outreach and compete with societal expectations and choices that are bearing down on our young parents?"

Is this situation an unusual one? Or is Sunday school slowly, or sometimes with a fell swoop of fatigue, becoming extinct?