

**STANDING AT THE CROSSROADS:  
Where Does Adult Sunday School Go From Here?**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Churches around the world offer Adult Sunday classes as a forum for adult religious education. This time-honored approach to church-based adult education has encountered difficulties in recent times. For many churches, Adult Sunday School is standing at a crossroads. Where does it go from here? This study attempted to determine those factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School and what changes could be made to increase participation in the program.

The context for this study on Adult Sunday School is Langley Evangelical Free Church located in Langley, British Columbia, Canada. This mid-sized church of approximately 600 people provided data upon which any conclusions were made. Surveys on Adult Sunday School were distributed to 365 adults and 195 surveys were returned. Respondents were given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a discussion group to discuss the implications of the survey results. The results was that thirty-one people participated in six discussion groups. The discussion groups were instrumental in making sense of the data and recommending changes to increase participation in Adult Sunday School.

The study asked participants to rate nine factors as to their influence in determining whether or not they would attend Adult Sunday School. The factors were ranked by respondents in the following order: spiritual growth, relevance, practicality, teaching style, sharing experiences, social contact, learning, intergenerational and external expectations. Other variables that were analyzed included age, marital status, family makeup, educational level and involvement in small group Bible studies. There were some significant differences in how members of some of the subgroups rated the factors. The study also looked at barriers to participation which were categorized as situational barriers, organizational barriers and personal barriers. The discussion groups concluded that three factors should be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School at Langley Evangelical Free Church: content relevance, Sunday morning format and a more systematic structure. The results of this study provide valuable information for designing a blueprint for change at Langley Evangelical Free Church which may also be suggestive for other churches as they evaluate Adult Sunday School.

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## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

Adult Sunday School has been a major educational program in churches for decades. In recent years, some churches have begun to question the effectiveness of Sunday morning classes for adults as attendance at these educational events has plummeted. The question that I have pursued in my research is: Where does Adult Sunday School go from here? In an attempt to answer this question, I have looked at the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School. Based on these factors, I have made recommendations about what changes could be made to Adult Sunday School to increase participation. In this study, I examine the background to the Sunday School problem and why this issue is important. I provide a literature review that addresses some of the issues related to the Sunday School question. I also outline my research approach that I adopted in this study. I then give an in-depth report on what I discovered about the factors that influence adults' decision about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School and changes which may increase participation.

Many Christian educators, like me, are standing at a crossroads as they try to discern which direction to go with Adult Sunday School. Should the status quo be maintained? Should Adult Sunday School be allowed to die? Should it be revived? The fate of Adult Sunday School is hanging in the balance as Christian educators wrestle with the answers to these pressing questions. The results of my research may prove helpful to all Christian educators as they make decisions about this time-honored program.

### **Background to the Problem**

Church-based adult education is experiencing a major upheaval. The traditional Sunday morning electives commonly known as "Adult Sunday School" are disappearing in many churches in North America. A new approach to adult education features small groups

meeting in homes during the week to study a relevant topic. Have these small groups effectively replaced the need for Adult Sunday School, or can Adult Sunday School still play a unique role in the life of the church? At Langley Evangelical Free Church (LEFC), we have witnessed a serious decline in attendance in Adult Sunday School over the past 10 years while our small group ministry has grown. Should I let this decades old tradition die a natural death, or should it be reconstituted to meet the changing needs of our local community? Church-based adult educators are earnestly seeking answers to these questions. Yet, there is a dearth of published research to give them insight into the Adult Sunday School conundrum. LEFC has done very little to provide answers to this perplexing issue apart from experimenting with different approaches within Adult Sunday School to see what attracts people to learn in this setting. Much more needs to be done. I have conducted my research as a direct attempt to resolve the dilemma at LEFC and to provide insight for other churches experiencing the same tension.

I am the Associate Pastor of Christian Education at Langley Evangelical Free Church located in Langley, British Columbia, Canada. I have been on staff at the church for over 10 years. The church is 51 years old and holds to the major tenets of evangelical Christianity. The term "Evangelical" refers to the denomination's doctrinal perspective as seen in its doctrinal statement (Appendix A). A major emphasis of evangelical Christianity is the belief that God wants to have a personal relationship with all people and that this is possible through acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The term "Free" has historical connotations in that the denomination started in Scandinavia as a movement opposed to the state's control of churches. Those who belonged to the Scandinavian Free Church were free from government control in the area of religion. Scandinavian immigrants brought the Free Church to the United States in the nineteenth century and the first Canadian Free Church was dedicated on June 30, 1918 in Enchant, Alberta (Hanson, 1984).

From the start of the Evangelical Free Church of Canada, adult education has played a crucial role in the life of the church. Worship services, Adult Sunday School and small group

Bible studies have been and continue to be pillars of Christian education in many local Evangelical Free churches. The same could be said of other churches that follow a different denominational perspective. From my vantage point, the overarching goal of Christian adult education is to make growing disciples of Jesus Christ. The fundamental difference between Christian adult education and general adult education is this emphasis on spiritual growth. Adult education in the church seeks to help people know God and to serve Him better. Adult Sunday School has helped carry out this mandate in the past, but for many churches the movement has lost momentum. Should the importance of this third source of adult Christian education in the church be minimized? What role, if any, should Adult Sunday School play in the new millennium? These questions haunt me. Adult educators in the church are obligated to answer them if they truly want to maximize the impact of adult education in the church.

The issue of viability of Adult Sunday School whether it be at LEFC, or some other church, is fraught with complexities. There are a number of mitigating factors which cloud the issue. We have already seen how the advent of small group educational offerings may have influenced the demise of Adult Sunday School. Is this presupposition true? What role do demographic factors play in determining peoples' participation in the program? How do peoples' past experiences in Adult Sunday School affect their current attitudes? Are there certain generic factors that always exert influence on peoples' decisions to participate in Adult Sunday School? Once again, there is a need for research that helps us to see more clearly the factors that are at work underneath the larger issue of Adult Sunday School participation.

The first step to bring about change in church-based adult education is to clarify an unclear situation. What is currently happening in Adult Sunday School at LEFC? The next step is to ask, "In what sense is the situation problematic?" Is a decline in Adult Sunday School attendance a problem at all? Do people believe that there is a need for Adult Sunday School, or are they content to see it go the way of the dinosaur? Do adults in the church believe that Adult Sunday School can be a valuable educational program for them? If it is determined that a problem exists, then the next step would be to see if something can be done

about it. What should be the focus of Adult Sunday School? What factors could be addressed to make Adult Sunday School more effective in its educational mandate? Would church attendees receive a higher quality of adult education if Adult Sunday School was dropped and other programs emphasized? These questions require a context-specific study which can account for at least some of the factors unique to a particular local church culture.

My life is wrapped up in my work in church-based adult education. I love what I do. I have been on staff at LEFC for over ten years. During that time, I have finished an undergraduate degree in psychology, a masters degree in religious education, and am currently working on a masters degree in adult education. I have a passion for education as I see its potential as a powerful medium for change. That is why I keep taking educational courses as I try to learn more about how I can best use this potentially life-changing tool. I see the resolution of the Adult Sunday School question as being critical to adult education at LEFC and to my role as Associate Pastor of Christian Education. I have only so much energy and time that I can devote to adult education in the church. I must invest these limited resources wisely. Many of my colleagues in other churches are in exactly the same position. Research into the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School and the changes that can be made to increase participation will help us become more effective in providing adult educational offerings that meet needs in a maximum way.

### **Statement of the Research Question**

The focus of my research is nothing less than the future of Adult Sunday School. What is the direction for this Christian Education giant that has begun to stumble in recent times? The program can not be viewed as sacred, but must be analyzed as to its viability in today's educational milieu. My first research question sought to address the issue of participation in the program. What factors influenced adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School? What were the internal and external factors that compelled people to participate in the program? What were the barriers? How did peoples' expectations and

perceptions of the program affect their desire to attend? My second research question addressed the need for change. What changes to Adult Sunday School would be most likely to increase participation, assuming that there are sufficient grounds to continue the program? Both of my research questions were designed to help determine Adult Sunday School's direction for the future. The answers to these questions are extremely important to me as an educational administrator at LEFC as they address the potential educational impact which is possible through Adult Sunday School.

To answer these research questions, I focused my study on the evaluation and improvement of Adult Sunday School. Adult Sunday School is the weekly adult electives that are offered on Sunday mornings apart from the main worship services of the church. Many churches offer youth classes for young people up to grade 12, so the adults who attend Adult Sunday School would be older than this age group. The factors that I uncovered included both incentives to attend and barriers that blocked attendance. These factors could be both internal, or external to those who participated in the study. In my second research question, I used the word "changes" which shows my bias in this issue. I believe that the program can be improved and that it should not be abandoned. Participation can be increased. In other words, I went into the research study with the assumption that the number of regular attendees at Adult Sunday School could be increased if changes were made.

### **Importance of Study**

Adult Sunday School has rested on the pinnacle of educational prominence in the church for many years. Apart from a church's main worship services, it has often been the chief way of providing teaching on the Bible and how to live as Christians. Sunday School has also provided a forum for discussion as the smaller Sunday School groups provide an atmosphere that is conducive to personal sharing. For many people, Sunday School has given them an opportunity to personalize the teachings of Scripture. Topics can be addressed that are impossible to address in a large worship service. Yet, with all these historical strengths, Adult

Sunday School in many churches is swaying precariously as a primary educational program, or has fallen from its lofty position. A strong wind is sweeping through the ranks of Adult Sunday Schools and threatens to wipe out this pillar of adult Christian Education. Something must be done to evaluate Adult Sunday School's role in the twenty-first century. Should it be relegated to a place of secondary importance, or even allowed to die so that newer and more effective educational programs can rise to prominence in the church? Can Adult Sunday School be transformed into an educational experience that warrants the earnest attention of church-goers?

I believe that my analysis of the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School and the changes that can be made to increase participation can play a meaningful role in answering these questions. Is Adult Sunday School structured in such a way so as to maximize the factors that draw people into its educational fold? If Adult Sunday School is already capitalizing on the extrinsic and intrinsic factors that influence peoples' motivation to attend, what impact does this consistency have on attendance? If attendance is not affected in a notable way, are there barriers that are hindering motivated people from attending? What other factors are operative in affecting an adult's decision about whether or not to attend? How can those factors that are deemed critical be addressed to increase participation? I believe that an understanding of at least some of these factors and a knowledge of how they can be addressed to increase participation is essential in determining Adult Sunday School's direction for the future.

I must confess that I experience a lot of guilt when one of my educational programs appears to be second rate. I can remember one time when I set up three Adult Sunday School electives and was disappointed with the low attendance. One class did not even have anyone come to it. My immediate response as a program planner is, "What did I do wrong?" I am responsible for adult education at LEFC and I want the programs to be effective. I want to be a wise steward of my time and energy. When Adult Sunday School is not as effective as I think it should be, I wonder why I spent so much time trying to bolster it. Would it have been

more beneficial to spend the time strengthening the church's small group ministry for adults which attracts more people than Adult Sunday School? I want to improve my practice as an educational administrator at LEFC. If I had a better understanding of why adults attend Sunday School, I could offer a more attractive program. If I knew more about the barriers that people encounter, I could remove or minimize those that are within my sphere of influence. Even if the changes I made did not attract more people to Adult Sunday School, I think I would be delivered from a guilt complex in knowing that I had done all that I could do. I would then find it much easier to accept the reality of Adult Sunday School's fall from educational prominence and to accept its death, or at least its reduced status. My practice would improve in that I could give Adult Sunday School the attention it deserves as a program of secondary importance and divert a greater portion of my personal resources in more productive directions.

Will this research project benefit others beyond myself? LEFC has a number of people on staff. We meet together weekly to make decisions about the programs of the church. I believe that the results of my research will inform our discussions about Adult Sunday School and perhaps provide new directions for adult education in the church. The church board, made up of elected members from the congregation and who are responsible for the overall direction of the church, will probably be interested in my findings. They are the people who would ultimately approve any major changes in the Sunday School program. Obviously, the people who attend LEFC will benefit from this study as it will lead to improved practice on the part of their Christian Education Pastor. The result will be an improved adult education program. I am also hopeful that those who do not attend LEFC will be attracted to the church because of an adult education program which is more effective in meeting their needs.

The focus of my research is one church and yet I believe that the results are important for other churches. Every church has some sort of adult educational program. The ideas presented in my research might provoke thought in the minds of other church-based adult educators as to what motivates people to attend their programs. The methods that I employ

may provide a framework for other churches whereby they can evaluate the effectiveness of their adult programs. I do not believe that all of the factors influencing adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School at LEFC will be the same as those found in other church settings. My research must be seen as a starting point for other churches that are concerned about improving the quality of their Adult Sunday School, or other adult education programs. Reasons for attending, or not attending Adult Sunday School may vary in different churches. Changes that increase participation in one church may not cause the same effect in other churches. Each church must evaluate my results against their specific context. However, I do believe that this study can effectively inform educational practice in other churches and organizations as long as it is viewed as suggestive and not prescriptive.

## **CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW**

The failure of Adult Sunday School at LEFC and other churches to provide attractive educational offerings has contributed to a serious decline in attendance. For one reason, or another, people do not appear to be as motivated to come to Adult Sunday School as they were in the past. Some research has been conducted on this topic of motivation and church-based adult education. I have also discovered that there is a large body of research on motivation as it relates to adult education in general. It is important to note from the beginning that general studies on motivation that are conducted outside a church setting may not be as useful as motivational research done within the church context. A number of motivational scales do not include the spiritual dimension which is an integral part of church life. However, these studies do play a part in providing a framework for motivational research which can be used to substantiate those studies done within the church.

### **Factors That Increase Participation**

The concept of andragogy has left an indelible imprint upon adult education. Lewis (1992) attempts to view Adult Sunday School through the lens of andragogy. The notion of the self-directed learner argues for direct involvement of the learner in the planning process. Sunday School classes should capitalize on this supposed propensity to guide one's learning in a personal way by pointing learners towards additional resources related to addressed topics. Ideally, classes should be structured and conducted in ways which promote a mutual sharing of experiences. Lewis concurs with Knowles' (1980) assertion that adults are more motivated to learn when the material helps them address a real-life task or problem. Bryan (1993) also advocates a focus on the learners' personal and developmental needs as a way of increasing motivation. Does the class scratch where people are itchy? To what extent is a class offering perceived as relevant? Lewis goes on to emphasize the practical orientation of most adult

learners. They want to use what they learn right away. Based on Knowles' theory of andragogy, Lewis concludes that adults are more motivated to learn in Adult Sunday School when they are allowed to direct the learning process, when they can contribute their experiences, and when the ideas discussed are relevant and applicable to their lives.

Blackwood (1992) acknowledges the prevalence of andragogical theory in adult education while critiquing its narrow socio-cultural basis. His work looks at the modes of adult self-directed learning amongst cultural subgroups in urban communities. He contends that churches should help empower people to learn and become better facilitators of self-directed learning. Knowles' utopian view of self-directed learning can only be realized when people are empowered to believe that they possess the personal resources to learn themselves.

The perceived biases of Knowles' (1980) work on andragogy are well-documented. His work reflects something of a white, middle-class, American flavor. A study of the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School must go beyond Knowles' limited framework to include an understanding of cross-cultural differences as it relates to motivation. Phillips' (1992) research on motives for Adult Sunday School participation in Portugal is particularly helpful. He found that the major reason that adults in that cultural setting attend Sunday School is to reach a religious goal such as knowing God in a deeper way. The desire to socialize and acquire knowledge are additional goals that round off the top three major motivational factors that he discovered in his research. Some other minor factors included a desire to comply with formal requirements, the desire to reach a personal goal, and the desire to escape from unpleasant or tedious activities. Phillips' research is instructive as it relates to what might motivate someone from a different cultural group to attend Adult Sunday School.

Kenneth Gangel (1991), a well-known expert in the area of Christian Education, believes that church-based educators should not perpetuate Sunday School survival, but should rather work towards inciting a revival in this time-honored approach to adult education. Many denominations are barely keeping their Sunday Schools afloat. Statistics show that Sunday

School attendance declined 21 percent in 22 denominations across Canada and the United States from 1974 to 1984 (Gangel). Gangel outlines 10 steps to resuscitate a flagging educational ministry with several implications for Adult Sunday School. He embraces three of the four tenets of andragogy espoused by Knowles (1980) which emphasize the importance of self-directed learning, relevance, and practicality. He does not give special attention to the concept of sharing experiences which suggests that he is not open to a wider range of teaching approaches. However, he does assert that local churches must emphasize their own needs and try not to squeeze into an educational model created in other church settings. This requires an assessment of needs which usually involves some sort of personal sharing. The whole idea of self-directed learning also implies the sharing of personal ideas so that the educational process is placed more in the hands of the learners. Gangel does not speak directly to the importance of sharing experiences, but the process could be implied in some of his other steps to Sunday School revival.

Gangel (1991) breaks free from andragogical thought by addressing the issues of teaching style and teacher characteristics as important components of a thriving Sunday School. He cites a study which indicates that Sunday Schools are comprised of five separate audience groups which include a fellowship group, traditional group, study group, social concerns group, and multiple interest group. An awareness that these groups exist may be helpful in program planning so that classes are offered which appeal to the various subgroups within a church. Gangel also emphasizes the importance of lay leadership in teaching roles as they may be perceived as more credible, as having purer motives, and as being more flexible than paid church staff. The teaching staff can play a key role in determining whether or not people attend Adult Sunday School in a sustained way.

Fortosis (1991) looks at both general and religious studies in participation in adult education and the implications that this research has for church education. He concludes that teachers should be aware of their own perspective of learning and those represented within the class. In keeping with Knowles (1980), he advocates learner participation in the selection of

course material. The curriculum should also be practical and relevant. Some religious studies have found that meaningful relationships provide a powerful incentive to learn. Those with more conservative, traditional values are more likely to participate in church education.

Fortosis also explores the notion that church people are motivated to learn when they know it will help them grow spiritually. It is also apparent that in some church contexts older adults and women are more likely to attend Adult Sunday School than younger adults and men.

A related study to why adults attend Sunday School was carried out by Wilson (1992) and focused on why church volunteers attend religious training programs. The context for the study was the 1980 Greater Los Angeles Sunday School Convention which provided training for church education workers from a variety of churches. The three motives for participation in the conference which scored higher than the rest were ministry preparation, spiritual growth, and cognitive learning. It is important to note that Wilson's research focused on subjects attending a training conference, so one would expect ministry preparation to be high on the motive list as the conference would attract people with that goal. Less noteworthy indicators included relationship to God with an emphasis on learning how to be obedient to God, social contact, external expectations, escape from intellectual narrowness, and a desire to get relief from boredom and frustration. It was found that there were no differences in the ranking order between males and females. However, there were significant ranking differences across ethnic groups. Wilson also discovered that ranking order varied across age groupings. For example, the 18 to 22 years old age group was more motivated by external expectations and less by ministry preparation than other age groups. The findings are helpful in that they highlight possible emphases for Adult Sunday School and how a variety of factors are at work in attracting people with different backgrounds.

We have seen that a number of factors have been proposed that might influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School. Table 1 gives a summary of the various sets of factors espoused by each author. What follows is an attempt to synthesize these perspectives and to explore some of the implications for Adult Sunday School.

**Table 1. Summary of Motivational Factors**

|                        | Blackwood<br>(1992) | Fortosis<br>(1992) | Gangel<br>(1991) | Lewis<br>(1992) | Phillips<br>(1992) | Wilson<br>(1992) |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Self-directed Learning | X                   | X                  | X                | X               | 5                  |                  |
| Relevance              |                     | X                  | X                | X               |                    | 1                |
| Practicality           |                     | X                  | X                | X               |                    | 1                |
| Social Contact         |                     | X                  |                  |                 | 2                  | 5                |
| Spiritual Growth       |                     | X                  |                  |                 | 1                  | 2                |
| Teaching Style         |                     | X                  | X                |                 |                    | X                |
| Knowledge Expansion    |                     |                    |                  |                 | 3                  | 3                |
| External Expectations  |                     |                    |                  |                 | 4                  | 6                |
| Change of Lifestyle    |                     |                    |                  |                 | 6                  | 8                |
| Escape to New Ideas    |                     |                    |                  |                 |                    | 7                |
| Sharing Experiences    |                     |                    |                  | X               |                    |                  |
| Sense of Empowerment   | X                   |                    |                  |                 |                    |                  |

x - Discussed as a motivational factor

numbers - Reflect a ranking order given to the motivational factors in the study

### *Self-directed Learning*

The notion of self-directed learning appears more often than any other motivational factor in the literature I surveyed. There can be no doubt that Malcolm Knowles (1980) and the theory of andragogy can take some credit for this pervasive influence. Lewis (1992) has attempted to view Adult Sunday School through the lens of andragogy. The notion of the self-directed learner is an important consideration as we analyze why adults attend Sunday School. According to Knowles, people are more motivated to learn if they are allowed to chart their learning destinies themselves, or at least have a part in the process. Lewis maintains that Adult Sunday School can play a role in encouraging people to go beyond the classroom setting and interact with learning resources on their own. The assumption is that Adult Sunday School can tap into an inherent desire for self-directed learning and promote a pattern of lifelong learning (Gangel, 1991). Going beyond the class setting, self-directed learners should also be given the opportunity to help determine the types of courses that will be offered. Fortosis (1991) believes that programs should be developed at the grassroots level

so that adult education in the church more accurately addresses the needs and life issues being faced at a given time.

I was startled to see such a preponderance of research that favors a self-directed approach to learning. Church-goers may be reacting against the more traditional approach to adult education which places the control of program planning in the hands of the pastors and other church leaders. It is interesting that both Phillips (1992) and Wilson (1992) found that external expectations also play a part in motivating adults to attend educational events. This may also show that church people are used to listening to the "experts" and doing what they say. An underlying assumption is that clergy somehow have a better understanding of what people should learn. There can be no doubt that they may have more background in theological matters and can certainly recommend certain educational objectives from that vantage point. However, we might then ask the question: How relevant is something that is cooked up in virtual isolation? Are the leaders of the church perpetuating an unhealthy co-dependence when it comes to spiritual matters? What steps are being taken to free people up to grow on their own? Does the church provide a climate that fosters a desire to study the Bible on one's own, or is it good enough to come to church and attend the occasional Sunday School class? In the area of program planning, it is imperative that church leaders open the door to this exclusive club so that church people get the message that they can chart their own educational destiny both inside and outside the church.

### *Relevance*

Relevance is another key issue as it relates to the question of what factors influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School. The issue of relevance is directly related to self-directed learning. Adults should be included in the process of determining class topics, but it is not safe to assume that they are aware of all their learning needs (Harton, 1986). Some church leaders may claim that they have a good understanding of what interests their congregations and can thus provide relevant educational programs.

Program planning becomes a solo exercise based on feedback picked up in informal settings. Does this process lead to relevant course offerings? Even if the material is relevant, do potential attendees perceive that it is relevant if they have not been consulted? How does a perceived sense of ownership of the process of program development and curriculum selection affect the motivational levels of would-be participants? The quest for relevance requires a high degree of learner participation.

The need to learn, or learner readiness is directly related to the developmental stages that people face in different aspects of their lives (Knowles, 1980). For example, the changing of a computer system in an office might create a need to learn about the new system. Parents who are expecting the birth of their first child may have a strong desire to learn about parenting. Life transitions will often create a tension that promotes a desire to learn (Lewis, 1992). For example, older adults could benefit from classes that deal with losses such as the loss of health, family, friends, finances and a familiar lifestyle (Vogel, 1984). Vogel believes that religious education can also help older adults cope with fears as they cope with the possibility of becoming a burden, or becoming senile. Fortosis (1991, p. 95) claims that "adults will perceive learning to be valuable if it appears meaningful, emotionally significant, and life-related." The tendency in church-based adult education is to find Adult Sunday School models and curriculum which appear effective in other churches and try to apply it in the same way. The problem with this approach is that it ignores local needs and therefore may not be as relevant as it could be (Gangel, 1991). Sensitivity to the local church culture and to individual needs is an important consideration in determining what factors hinder or facilitate attendance in Adult Sunday School. This may require both informal and formal means of determining what is relevant for potential participants.

### *Practicality*

Practicality is another factor directly related to the self-directedness of the learning process and its relevance. Adults want practical training so that they can leave the Adult

Sunday School classroom with a sense of accomplishment (Fortosis, 1991). The time must be well spent. I believe that this is especially true in North American urban settings where time is viewed as a scarce commodity. It is interesting to note that practicality and relevance did not even show up in Phillips' (1992) study of churches in Portugal. In that setting, the desire for spiritual growth and social contact were of utmost importance. Once again, this might suggest the existence of cross-cultural differences when it comes to examining the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School.

The "present-centeredness" of adults leads them to want to readily apply what they learn (Lewis, 1992). Those who attended the Sunday School Convention in Wilson's (1992) study were extremely motivated to attend. Why? They were at the conference to receive training for their ministries at their respective home churches. I would assume that many of them were in a position of chasing their deficiencies and the convention represented an opportunity to reduce the gap between what they knew and what they needed to know. They were primed for learning because they recognized that a gap existed in their understanding. I remember going through an ordination council where I was asked a number of difficult theological questions. I did not have all the answers. I began to see that there were gaps between what I presently know and what I should know to be a well-informed pastor. The resultant awareness has motivated me to try to fill those knowledge gaps.

What gaps exist in a given congregation? What kinds of skills, knowledge, and values are people looking for? Are people even aware of the gaps that exist in their lives? I was quite content with my theological position until I was forced to address issues that went beyond my current understanding. If something is deemed practical only if it fills a gap in one's understanding, how are these gaps uncovered? Obviously, the process of discovery would require the direct involvement of church people. They would need to be challenged to explore various areas and to come to an awareness of any competency gaps that might exist.

### *Social Contact*

Relationships function as the glue which not only holds groups together, but holds them together closely. It is obvious that people gravitate towards other people whom they know and like. We also tend to explore new ideas and more actively engage in the learning adventure when we are with people whom we trust. Some of the research suggests that Adult Sunday School should accommodate this relational desire by providing opportunities for interaction (Fortosis, 1991). Even at a training event such as a Sunday School Convention which attracted people from many different churches, people were motivated to come in part because of the possibility of building friendships with strangers and others who may have come from their local church (Wilson, 1992). Olsen (1993) mentions the importance of instruction in Adult Sunday School, but goes on to say that it must be accompanied by support and fellowship. Murray (1981) goes even further by claiming that the notion that adults attend Sunday School classes primarily to learn is a myth. He believes that an ongoing Sunday School class should be structured as a social group where relational needs are met. Of course, social contact is a two-way proposition. Some people crave social contact simply to share their lives with others and to meet the needs of others. Others have a personal need to have people in their lives. This desire for social contact came across as a strong motivational factor in the Portuguese context of Phillips' (1992) study. Having been to the Philippines and Albania, I have seen first hand how different cultures can view relationships. In addressing the question of what factors influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School, it would be easy to get the input of those who are currently in the church. Unfortunately, many churches including LEFC, are dominated by Caucasians. Would an educational program designed by Caucasians be effective in attracting people from other ethnic groups? It would be important to include the cross-cultural dimension in any study that seeks to improve educational practice within the church. The purposes of Adult Sunday School at LEFC should be derived not only from current church attendees, but from

potential attendees, as well. The church's great commission is to make disciples of all people and not just those within its walls.

My literature review on factors that attract adults to educational programs in the church is not exhaustive, but it does reveal some important considerations for program planners responsible for Adult Sunday School. We have already seen that a majority of the authors I have surveyed view self-directed learning, relevance, and practicality as factors that exert a considerable amount of influence on adults as they make decisions about adult education. Social contact is important, but perhaps not as vital as the first three. Is this because people have been conditioned to expect a low degree of relational contact in Sunday School, or does it accurately reflect their true desires? The typical Sunday School format in the past featured a teacher who would lecture to a fairly large group of people. Has this stereotype of Adult Sunday School decreased peoples' expectations as to the potential for relational intimacy? A notable trend in Adult Sunday Schools has been a move towards a small group model which places a premium on relationships (Mack, 1996). Does this paradigm shift accurately reflect what people want and need? What impact does local church factors such as the size of a church have on peoples' desire for social contact? Would a church like LEFC with a strong small group ministry require less of an emphasis on social contact in Adult Sunday School because the need is met elsewhere?

The issue of social contact is extremely important in determining the goals and format of Adult Sunday School at LEFC. It is a pivotal issue in that an emphasis on social contact goes against the traditional approach to Adult Sunday School which is more subject-centered. Many churches have jumped on the relational bandwagon and turned Adult Sunday School into an extension of their small group ministry. Which approach, or combination thereof is the right way to go? A careful study of the local church culture is essential in determining the relational emphasis appropriate for that context.

### *Spiritual Growth*

A primary difference between Christian adult education and general adult education is the focus on learning for spiritual growth. I believe that the ultimate goal of Christian education is to "promote and provide opportunities for disciple-making that lead to increased worship of God and love for others in an organized context of loving community in which Jesus Christ is central" (Wolff, 1993). The church is a learning community! The goal is to help people know God in a deeper way and to serve Him more effectively. The Bible calls this process making disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). Has this paramount pursuit become obscured in the North American church? Fortosis (1992) reports that those who hold to more traditional values are more likely to attend an educational event in the church. Older adults also tend to be more involved and have a better attitude about the church. Are younger people losing sight of what is truly important? Are they constrained by circumstances which prevent them from fully participating in church life? It is noteworthy that the Portuguese Christians in Phillips' (1992) study put religious goals at the top of their priority list as to why they attended Sunday School. These goals included worshipping God, developing a relationship with Him, and serving Him. Are the Christians in Portugal less distracted by worldly allurements than Christians in North America? Has the consumerism and materialism which typifies North American life distracted us from a cultivation of the inner, spiritual life? Are we so busy that the important is sacrificed on the altar of the urgent?

The attendees at the Sunday School Convention claimed that they, too, wanted to grow spiritually and to learn how to be more obedient to God (Wilson, 1992). It has been my experience in church ministry that those who serve are often the ones who are most committed to the Lord and the church. I would presume that those at the Convention were for the most part already serving in some capacity in their local church. In all likelihood, the Convention targeted a group of serving, committed Christians. Is it any surprise that these committed workers placed spiritual growth high on their wish list for training events? Would

less committed people in a church give spiritual growth such a high profile? More studies need to be done to determine if this would be the case.

A study on the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School necessitates a look at the values that guide peoples' actions as it relates to this educational program. Do people perceive that Adult Sunday School gives them something of value? People may approach adult education in the church with different sets of values. For some, the development or deepening of relationships may be most valuable. For others, learning about the Bible may be of greatest value. This clash of values should not be ignored. In fact, it is this collision of perspectives that provides the researcher with a fertile ground for program evaluation and planning. Understanding the differences people have in their perspectives on Adult Sunday School is helpful for program planners as they attempt to position the program for maximum educational value.

### *Teaching Style*

The notion of teaching style encompasses the approaches to teaching employed by teachers and their sensitivity to group dynamics. Fortosis (1991) uses Houle's typology to show that teachers should teach in a balanced way as it relates to goal-orientation, activity-orientation, and learning-orientation. Most teachers tend to teach in accordance with their own learning orientation. The problem is that a group of learners may operate from different orientations. Pratt (1996) has also proposed that there are five perspectives on teaching in adult education which are expressed in the individual teacher through a unique constellation of actions, intentions, and beliefs. The key to successful teaching is being aware of our usual teaching orientation, where the learners are positioned in their learning orientation and building bridges between the two. This requires a sensitivity to group dynamics. Halverson (1995), in her book about leading adult learners, maintains that teachers should assume the roles of advocates and clarifiers in the class. Advocates elaborate on the content whereas clarifiers seek to provoke inquiry from a more neutral position. Socio-cultural factors may

also have a bearing on how a group functions (Blackwood, 1992). Different age mixes may affect the way the group responds to a particular teaching style. Some have proposed that a charismatic teacher can overcome all of these potential barriers to learning and yet that proposition has not been substantiated consistently in the research (Fortosis, 1991). Suffice to say, teachers do play an important role in creating and sustaining a certain motivational level to attend Adult Sunday School. Hunt (1997) goes even further by saying that a teacher's ability is the number one factor influencing class size. He maintains that teachers do not have to be sensational to increase participation in Adult Sunday School. The teacher does not have to hit home runs every class, but should be hitting singles on a regular basis. Teachers with a good reputation can attract people to an educational program and if the learners sense that a teacher is connecting with them they may be more likely to continue in the program.

An entire research study could be devoted to the topic of teaching style and which approaches are most effective in a given situation. This particular motivational factor contains a greater breadth of possibilities than the others as it is directly related to the teacher's personality and personal experience. Everyone is unique and thus people approach teaching from a singular vantage point. We might be able to group teachers into general categories, but it is obvious that people can move around within the groups and often transcend one group's parameters and move into another. The same is true for each learner and when this is multiplied several times in a class setting, the challenge of connecting with everyone seems insurmountable.

### *Knowledge Expansion*

Humans have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. The theory that people have an inherent desire to direct their own learning is based on this premise. Both Wilson (1992) and Phillips (1992) discovered that this quest for cognitive stimulation ranked third as a potentially potent force in attracting people to adult educational opportunities in the church. Individuals can enjoy an Adult Sunday School class simply because they learn something new. However,

this content focus presents several important questions for consideration. How does the nature of the content affect the motivational level of learners? What is the relationship between content and relevance? How does the practicality of the content influence its ability to attract learners? If a group of young people and a group of older people who knew nothing about Alzheimer's were given the option to find out about this disease, would they be motivated in the same way to attend the class? I would guess that there would probably be greater interest amongst the older people. However, if the young people were given the freedom to choose how they would study Alzheimer's, would there then be greater motivation to learn? The young people might choose to study Alzheimer's from the perspective of helping grandparents with the disease. The involvement of the learners in choosing the curriculum might make the content more attractive. It is readily apparent that the selection of content and its accompanying attraction as a way to expand knowledge is directly related to some of the other motivational factors we have already addressed.

### *External Expectations*

People who attend church programs will sometimes do so out of a sense of obligation. Some may think, "The Pastor has encouraged us to attend this class, so I guess I should." I work with a number of small group leaders and it is expected that they will attend our training meetings. Attendance at the training sessions is almost seen as a part of their job description as small group leaders and most leaders dutifully attend. Phillips (1992) also discovered that people will attend Adult Sunday School out of a sense of obligation to God. The Bible, God's Word, does place a high premium on teaching people how to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus and how to follow Him (Romans 3:23; 6:23; John 3:16; Matthew 28:19-20). Yet, the Bible never states that Adult Sunday School is the preferred way of accomplishing these educational mandates. Some churches have conferred sacred status upon Sunday School. People in those kinds of churches might feel a strong obligation to attend a supposedly "God-sanctioned" program. How does this capitulation to external expectations

affect the learning process? It is one thing to fill a class with people, but it is quite another to maximize the learning experience for them. Motivation to attend a class is not necessarily the same as being motivated to learn in that class. External pressure may drive somebody to attend Adult Sunday School, but it is unclear how this pressure will help or hinder learning once that person is in the class, or how it will affect their long-term participation in the program.

### *Change of Lifestyle*

We all experience the occasional onslaught of the doldrums. It is at these times that we may seek new stimulation to escape from our routines. Some may wish to escape from activities that have become unpleasant, or tedious (Phillips, 1992). Attendance at an Adult Sunday School class may provide the cognitive stimulation and social contact required to escape from, or at least forget about other aspects of our lives. Some people may even become chronic "changers" as they constantly engage in new activities in an attempt to stay ahead of their real lives and accompanying responsibilities. Certain life stages may also create a greater desire to change one's lifestyle. Those going through the empty nest syndrome, or people who have just retired might want to change their lifestyle to fill a new void in their lives. Other people might change their lifestyle first and then realize that they need to learn more about the implications of their decision. A couple may make the choice to have their first child and then come to the awareness that this change of lifestyle has a steep learning curve. Lifestyle changes, whether they happen prior to attending a class, or as a result of attending the class is another factor that may influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School

### *Escape to New Ideas*

Closely related to a desire to change one's lifestyle is a motivational force that pushes people towards new ideas. Some may discover that they are entrapped in intellectual

narrowness and desire to broaden their field of knowledge (Wilson, 1992). Newspaper advertisements will sometimes boast that if you want to be interesting to other people you need to read their paper and thereby fill your mental reservoir with new ideas. A desire to escape to new ways of thinking is different than the motivational category I have labeled, "Knowledge Expansion." The "Knowledge Expansion" category assumes that the learner has an intrinsic desire to know and to be stimulated cognitively. The motivation to escape to new ideas is a more negative motivation in that the person is apparently trying to escape from something unpleasant. Wilson (1992) does not provide a clear description of the differences between cognitive learning and escape from intellectual narrowness to differentiate between these motivational factors. There may be some overlap between the categories. An inherent desire to learn might eventually make people aware of their own intellectual narrowness. On the other hand, a recognition that one is constrained intellectually may stoke the fires of learning passion.

### *Sharing Experiences*

Knowles (1980) advocated the sharing of experiences, believing that peoples' experiences represent who they are. The sharing of experiences is an extremely personal matter because it gives people a glimpse of our true selves. Lewis (1992) takes this tenet of andragogy and applies it to a church setting. An obvious requirement for mutual sharing is a safe environment where people feel the freedom to divulge personal information. Activities designed to draw people out and to minimize any power differences help to create a safe haven for self-disclosure. Some may come with a "school" mentality, expecting to get taught as opposed to becoming a co-teacher in the learning process. The traditional Adult Sunday School format with its perceived emphasis on content may scare people away, even if the format is more discussion-oriented. Of course, some teachers may go overboard on the discussion format and totally ignore other methods which may be more appropriate in certain situations. However, the assumption in Lewis' work is that if learners feel like they are

valuable members of the knowledge formation team, they are more likely to come back to play the learning game again. For many learners, the key will be to get them to overcome false assumptions about Adult Sunday School and to try it out for the first time. Once they see that their assumptions about Adult Sunday School are unfounded, they may choose to participate again.

### *Sense of Empowerment*

The issue of empowerment does not play a major role in discussions on the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School. Blackwood (1992), in his study of African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans, counters this trend by asserting that empowerment should be a component of church-based adult education. In keeping with the dogmas of andragogy, Blackwood asserts that adult education in the church should foster self-directed learning. He believes that members of cultural minority groups are more likely to struggle with self-confidence and may not have the personal fortitude to learn on their own. This inability to direct their own learning may keep these individuals from rising above the various internal and external limitations that they encounter. The result may be stagnancy in their personal lives. Even their ability to know and obey God may be hampered by their sense of inadequacy. Of course, anyone can be afflicted with low self-esteem and an incapacity to direct their own learning. Blackwood does not provide many suggestions for dealing with this perceived problem. I was left with a sense that there is a role for empowerment in Adult Sunday School, but unsure as to how it can be incorporated into the program.

We have explored numerous factors that can increase participation by adults in structured learning experiences. However, someone may be motivated to attend Adult Sunday School, but still may fail to show up at a class. Why does that happen? Everyone faces various hindrances in life that seek to distract them from noble pursuits. An understanding of the

barriers that affect participation in Adult Sunday School is useful to program planners as they try to minimize their debilitating influence.

### **Factors That Hinder Participation**

Cross (1981) has categorized the perceived barriers to learning into three groups: situational barriers, institutional barriers, and dispositional barriers. Situational barriers include such factors as cost, lack of time, home and work responsibilities. Institutional barriers are generally related to scheduling problems, lack of relevant courses, location problems, procedural problems and inadequate communication about the programs. The third category focuses on dispositional factors related to peoples' attitudes. People may feel that they are too old to learn, or perhaps they are tired of school. The personal nature of dispositional factors make them less likely to be reported. Cross concludes that lack of time and cost lead the way as perceived barriers to learning.

Elias (1982) delves into the barriers that affect participation in adult religious education. He refers to Mckenzie's studies on urban parishes in the Midwest United States. The seven factors uncovered in Mckenzie's work include program irrelevance, busyness, health issues, lack of connection with church, negative attitude towards education, alienation towards church activities and a non-joining lifestyle. It is interesting to note that only program irrelevance is clearly an institutional barrier in this study according to Cross' (1981) groupings. Busyness would be classified as a situational barrier and the rest of the factors would be dispositional barriers. Are people involved in adult religious education more likely to be influenced by dispositional factors? Perhaps, they are just more likely to report them.

Foltz (1986) outlines eight major barriers to participation for the adult learner. These factors listed in descending order of mention include lack of time, costs, scheduling problems, assorted institutional requirements and red tape, lack of information about appropriate opportunities, problems with child care or transportation, lack of confidence, and lack of interest (Foltz). Enrollment in Adult Sunday School typically does not cost the participant

anything except in cases where a workbook is required for the course. The issue of child care is also handled in that many churches run a full complement of children's programs concurrently with the adult programs. The church may not be able to address the issue of time shortages with people, but it can help people determine appropriate priorities for their lives. Institutional requirements are minimal in most church settings, but scheduling could be addressed to make the program accessible to a greater number of people. A lack of confidence on the part of potential attendees may require a greater focus on empowering people to learn. Foltz also mentions lack of interest as being a barrier which hinders participation in adult learning. The detracting influence of this factor might be reduced by offering Adult Sunday School classes that are more relevant and are extensively promoted at every level of adult church life.

Spindle (1989) has also tackled the issue of barriers to participation in adult Christian education in the church. He takes a more philosophical approach and insists that many of the obstacles to attendance are inward in nature. People have over stimulated senses and are repulsed by anything that can not deliver another sensory high. Adult Sunday School may seem boring in comparison to their favorite television programs. North Americans engage in countless recreational adventures which may diminish the attractiveness of a classroom learning venture. Fast lane living fueled by materialistic and consumptive desires is often antithetical to learning. Even if people slow down to attend Adult Sunday School, they may not have the time and energy to reflect on the content. Even good pursuits can rob us of what is best for our lives.

Spindle (1989) also asserts that many people have a decreased feeling of need for others. Relational needs are met elsewhere. In past generations, a church activity may have represented a primary social outlet for an individual. This may still be true in some rural areas and with some groups of people such as seniors. However, most urban dwellers are surrounded by a plethora of social opportunities. Technological and medical advances have led to a decreased need for God. Many people believe that solutions to life's challenges can be

found apart from God. Why go to Adult Sunday School if answers can be found elsewhere? The painful truth is that Adult Sunday School has often been irrelevant to peoples' needs. Would people from broken homes and fractured families find help in Adult Sunday School? The presentation of truth must never be divorced from relevant application. Some people may not even accept the notion of objective truth as post-modern subjectivism wages war against the absolutes of the Christian faith. People may say that there is a need for Adult Sunday School, but are they willing to jump over the hurdles that would keep them from participating? Spindle has transcended the typical barriers to adult learning that are usually discussed and proposed a series of barriers that have their roots in dysfunctional societal values.

Carey (1984) has delineated several obstacles to adult growth in religious education. He groups them into three categories: misconceptions regarding learning, real and imagined fears and problems associated with adult learning. One misconception he describes is that learning is passive and formal. Many people are not attracted to this kind of educational experience and so this misconception might act as a barrier to participation. Others might assume that learning is only initiated by people in authority. Some churches may have fostered this misconception through their planning and execution of educational programs without pervasive involvement by potential attendees. Another misconception is that learning is the sole responsibility of the teacher. The teacher prepares the lesson and disseminates the information to passive recipients. Most people do not gravitate towards learning environments that do not have the potential to meet their needs and improve their lives. They want adult education to go beyond titillating their minds. Other adults may have the impression that learning is a serious matter. People whose lives are characterized by intensity may prefer a dose of levity in their formal learning pursuits. Some people may believe that learning is a private matter and fail to see the value of group learning. All of these misconceptions regarding learning may influence adults' decisions about whether or not to participate in Adult Sunday School.

People have fears that may impede their learning progress. Carey (1984) addresses the fear of looking ignorant and the fear of failure. Most people do not want to look "dumb" in front of others. I taught an Adult Sunday School class one time that had people in it who were in their 20's and people who were in their 70's. I could sense that the young adults felt intimidated by the experience and wisdom of the older adults. The result was silence on their part. They may not have wanted to look foolish compared to their older counterparts. Another fear that Carey mentions is related to change. We might be exposed to information that will challenge us to change. A learning experience may also cause, or expose pain in our lives. Some people may not like the idea of getting close to others. Intimacy scares them. All of these fears can be real, or imagined. Both types of fears can have a dramatic influence in curtailing an adult's desire to participate in Adult Sunday School.

Carey (1984) goes on to outline several problems associated with adult learning. The simple truth is that people may not be motivated to participate. He suggests that the potential remedy to this problem is to help people see the personal relevance of the material, let them be involved in planning, provide a variety of learning experiences that have an exciting air about them, make realistic demands and insure that people feel valued as unique learners. Other potential attendees in Adult Sunday School may view learning through a negative lens based on past experiences. Aging can also be a problem as memory and sensory perception may deteriorate as people grow older. These problems associated with adult learning along with peoples' fears and misconceptions can produce severe blockages in moving people into Adult Sunday School.

A study of the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to participate in Adult Sunday School must address barriers that act as roadblocks to learning. Barriers related to organizational and program structures must be investigated to see if they can be minimized without compromising other core values within the organization. Program planners should help potential attendees determine appropriate priorities, so that decisions are made according to convictions and not just personal issues such as availability of time. Public

awareness in the area of priority-setting may also reduce the influence of societal values that are contrary to Biblical teaching. Some barriers to learning may never come down. It is imperative that program planners discern which obstacles can be minimized and address those barriers while building on those factors that attract people to Adult Sunday School.

We have seen that participation in Adult Sunday School is determined by a complex interplay of factors that may either entice them to come, or stop them from coming. In some cases, there is a noticeable overlap between the factors. People are motivated to attend Adult Sunday School if they perceive that the content is relevant and they are detracted from coming if they perceive that the content is irrelevant. It is also true that what motivates one person may repulse another person. Some people may gravitate towards Adult Sunday School because of the prospect of social interaction. Others may avoid the program for the same reason. It is impossible to devise a program planning prescription that applies to every church setting, or addresses the needs of every individual. It is important that each church determines which factors are most important in their context. The resultant program planning can then utilize this information in establishing programs with maximum participation. The goal is not total participation, but maximum participation. The following chapters outline my study at Langley Evangelical Free Church as I attempted to determine the factors that influence adult's decisions about participating in Adult Sunday School and what changes could be made to increase participation.

## **CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODS**

As an educational administrator, I believe that the results of this study will give me guidance as to the future of Adult Sunday School. This is the overarching goal of the study. The research methods I have employed are intended to provide practical insight into the Adult Sunday School dilemma for program planners at LEFC and other churches. It is impossible to account for all of the variables that exert their influence on adults' decisions about whether or not to participate in Adult Sunday School. It was my goal from the onset of my research to track several key variables that formed the core components of my research model. My research approach has sought to collect data from three sources including the participants in the study, members of a third party and myself. I have attempted to minimize my own biases and to obtain results that are as reliable as possible. However, researchers are fallible and research methods are subject to error. All results must be scrutinized to insure that they are accurate and fit within a given church's educational milieu.

### **Research Model**

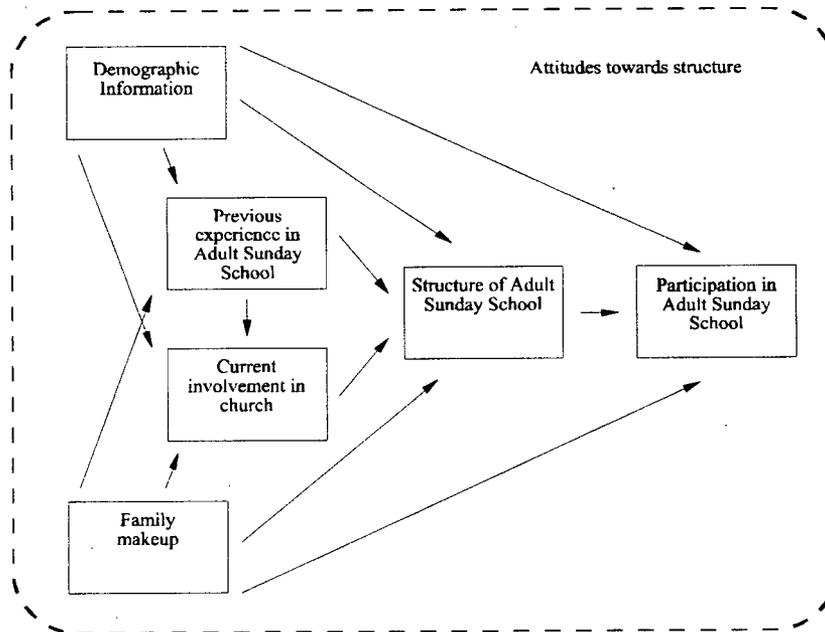
The dependent variable for this study is participation in Adult Sunday School. The main independent variables of interest are demographic factors (age, gender, and marital status), family makeup (size of family, nature of family and ages of children), previous experience in Adult Sunday School, program structure, attitudes towards adult education in the church, and level of involvement in church (worship services and small group Bible studies). What relationship do these independent variables have on the dependent variable?

The target population for my research project was all adults who attend church. I am hopeful that my findings are generalizable to the extent that most churches in Canada and the United States will be able to use the research results as a starting point for their own context-

specific research. Churches in other countries may also be able to apply the findings depending on the cultural differences that relate to this issue.

The model represented in Figure 1 is an attempt to show the relationship between the variables that I have chosen to study in my research. As I have mentioned, the dependent variable is participation in Adult Sunday School. The other five variables can be independent in nature, but three of them also have a mediating quality. Previous experience in Adult Sunday School mediates between demographics/family makeup and participation. Current involvement in church is also impacted by demographics and family makeup and in turn influences participation. To a lesser extent, the structure of Adult Sunday School has been informed by demographic information and family makeup and definitely has a direct impact on participation levels. In the survey, respondents were asked to rate nine factors as to their importance in attracting them to Adult Sunday School. These nine factors represent nine aspects of the Adult Sunday School structure. I wanted to determine how the church in general wanted Adult Sunday School structured. However, I also wanted to see the structural preferences of various subgroups within the church with different demographic backgrounds, family makeup, previous experience in Adult Sunday School and current involvement in the church. The program structure variable contains both factors that increase participation and factors that hinder participation in Adult Sunday School. I also added attitudes towards structure as a contextual factor which is impacted by all of the other factors and plays a crucial role in determining levels of participation. These attitudes, or perceptions of Adult Sunday School, may or may not be informed by any of the other factors, but can have a profound impact on participation levels.

**Figure 1. Research Model**



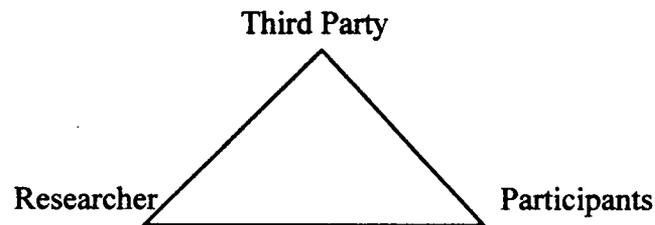
The factors that influenced adults' decisions about whether or not to participate in Adult Sunday School came from each of the independent variables and a combination thereof. In my research, I wanted to determine those factors that influence decision-making about Adult Sunday School in the general church population. What factors can be addressed, in a generic way, to attract adults to the program? I was also interested in knowing if particular subgroups within the church population are attracted to Adult Sunday School for different reasons. My research approach sought to obtain data that provided a profile of the average adult at LEFC and profiles of adults within specific subgroups as to what factors influenced their decision to attend Adult Sunday School. From this base, I then made suggestions as to how the program could be changed to increase participation.

### **Research Approach**

My research approach involved collecting data from three sources. To increase the accuracy of my research, I used a modification of the triangulation model presented by Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993). The three corners of the triangle represent major

sources of data which I have adapted to my setting in the church. They include my perspective as the researcher, the perspectives of potential participants, and the perspective of a third party (see Figure 2).

*Figure 2. Sources of data*



*Researcher*

I recognize the limitations of bringing my biases to bear on the research and yet I believe that my observations, personal experience, and intuitive insight made a positive contribution to the research project. My research proposal and thesis became a research journal where I recorded my observations and related insights. This helped to capture emergent ideas before they were lost in the flurry of new stimuli. The writing process also helped to bring my tacit knowledge to the surface and gave me the opportunity to apply it to the research project. I believe it also helped to bring some of my biases to the surface. This ongoing "research journal" assisted me in personalizing the results of the research which has helped improve my practice as an educational administrator at LEFC.

I have undoubtedly brought biases into this study on Adult Sunday School. I tend to take a more progressive approach to adult education which views experience as an important aspect of the educational process. I prefer a setting where everyone has the opportunity to contribute their insights to the issue at hand. This preference lends itself to a bias against traditional forms of Adult Sunday School which follow a lecture-based format. I do see the

value of structured knowledge dissemination at certain times, but my experience dictates that learning takes place at a deeper level when I am allowed to interact with and shape the knowledge that is discussed.

Another bias that may have come into play in this study revolves around the make-up of groups in church-based adult education. At the start of my tenure as a staff member at LEFC, the Adult Sunday School classes were more homogenous in nature. The classes were roughly grouped according to stages of life. We decided to try an electives approach to Adult Sunday School in 1993 thinking that it might be beneficial to have people from different stages of life meeting together and sharing their different perspectives. This change to a more heterogeneous approach to Adult Sunday School reflected my desire to see both the young and old learning together. However, it was about that time that we introduced the concept of small groups to the church and saw attendance plummet in Adult Sunday School. Am I open to moving back to a more homogenous grouping of classes if this approach increases participation? I struggle with this issue and knew from the start that I would need to have a planning team who would help me keep my eyes open to possibilities that run contrary to my value system.

I am heavily influenced by church tradition. I grew up in the church and have heard about Adult Sunday School since childhood. It is almost an inseparable part of my church experience. What would church be without Adult Sunday School? In my mind, Adult Sunday School holds a prominent place simply because it has been a part of church life for such a long time. My natural desire would be to continue Adult Sunday School in some form without putting its current viability through a rigorous analysis. Yet, this type of thorough examination must be undertaken to improve the overall effectiveness of church-based adult education.

### *Participants*

I used a two-tiered approach in obtaining data from participants in the program. The first level involved sending out a survey to the adults in the church. The second level took place in six groups that met to discuss the implications of the survey results. I wanted to insure that others had an opportunity to analyze the survey data, so that my findings would be based on a more collective assessment at the grass roots level of the church.

### *Surveys*

The survey questions were carefully crafted with input from my thesis committee, leaders in the church and my Survey Research Methods class at the University of British Columbia (Appendix B). I wanted every question to be clear and relevant in answering my research questions. I pilot tested the survey with two groups in the church and one other group outside the church. I distributed the survey to two members of the pastoral staff and to all 12 members of the church board. I wanted to get their feedback on the survey and also to have their approval for widespread distribution. I received some input and modified the survey accordingly. I also distributed the survey to members of my Survey Research Methods course. They perused it and gave valuable insight into how to make it more effective in accomplishing my research purposes.

*The composition of the survey* reflected my desire to explore the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School. I wanted to know each respondent's gender as men and women may have different needs as it relates to Adult Sunday School and it would be important to capture these differences for planning purposes. I asked people about their marital status. Are women and men attracted to Adult Sunday School for different reasons? I suspected that age played a part in determining whether or not someone might attend Adult Sunday School, so I asked people to write down the year they were born. I was also interested in knowing if educational level had any bearing on peoples' perceptions of Adult Sunday School. Of the 600 people who attend LEFC, approximately 400 of them

are young parents and their children. It was very important that I gained an understanding of what this group wants from Adult Sunday School. All of these factors were important to me as I sought to determine if peoples' personal background impacted their desire to participate in Adult Sunday School.

Involvement is one way of measuring a person's commitment to the church. We tend to invest our time and energy in those activities that are important to us. Attendance at a worship service is the most basic indicator of commitment to the church. I wanted to see if there is any noteworthy difference in the responses from those who attend regularly and those who do not. In some ways, the question also provided insight into those who filled out the survey. If most of the people said that they attended services regularly (three or more Sundays per month) then we might wonder if those who are not regular attendees did not fill out the survey. It may also be important in determining the priority of responses. For example, I would be more likely to change Adult Sunday School to meet the needs of those who attended worship services most of the time as opposed to those who only attended sporadically. Of course, an attractive Adult Sunday School program may have the indirect benefit of causing people to attend worship services more often. I also wanted information on peoples' Sunday morning ministry involvement. There are many people involved in various programs on Sunday mornings including children's and youth Sunday School, worship team, library, nursery, and hospitality ministries such as ushering and greeting. Some of these ministries require more extensive involvement on the part of participants. I was interested to discover if changes could be made to attract those with varying degrees of involvement on Sunday mornings. Do they even have a desire to attend Adult Sunday School? One of my interests in doing the survey was to determine if those who are already part of a small group Bible study are less likely to participate in an Adult Sunday School class. In other words, have small group Bible studies replaced the need for Adult Sunday School? These questions related to church involvement provided valuable information in regard to how much people

are involved in various ministries on Sunday mornings and the correlation between attendance in a small group Bible study and participation in Adult Sunday School.

Questions 10 to 19 focused on issues related to Adult Sunday School. The first question in this section asked people about their average participation in Adult Sunday School over the past year. This question drew a line between those who attended during the past year and those who did not. The next question asked respondents if there was a time when they had attended Adult Sunday School more. If they replied in the affirmative, they were asked to give reasons for this dichotomy in question 12. Their answers gave insight into strengths resident in previous Adult Sunday School experiences and perceived weaknesses in the current program.

Question 13 asked people if they thought that there was a need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC. This question attempted to gauge the perceived importance of the program. The next question asked respondents who had said that there is a need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC to give reasons why there is a need. It was my hope that the responses to this question would form a framework for determining an appropriate mission statement for Adult Sunday School in addition to providing insight into resident core values about the program. Question 15 asked respondents to rate the significance of nine factors which might influence their decision to attend Adult Sunday School. I chose these factors based on a review of related literature and the educational context at LEFC. Survey respondents were asked to rate the nine factors so that I could readily see which were deemed most important by the general church population and by subgroups within the church.

Question 16 asked respondents who had not attended Adult Sunday School regularly this past year (three or more Sundays per month) to list the primary reasons for their absenteeism. Once again, I was primarily interested in ascertaining those factors that barred people from participating in the program. The next question asked people to recommend topics that would be of interest to them in an Adult Sunday School format. I suspected that topical relevance would be a key factor in the study and this question gave respondents an

opportunity to suggest topics that would be relevant to them. Question 18 asked survey participants to rate different meeting times. I wanted to see if there were alternate time slots that would appeal to different people within the church. I assumed with this question that Sunday morning may not be the best time for adult electives for some people. I was open to considering alternatives. I was also interested in knowing if there was a strong preference for having classes during the first service or second service. Some leaders in the church have also discussed the possibility of creating an Adult Sunday School block between the two services. I wanted to get people's feedback on that option as it would require a major format change if implemented.

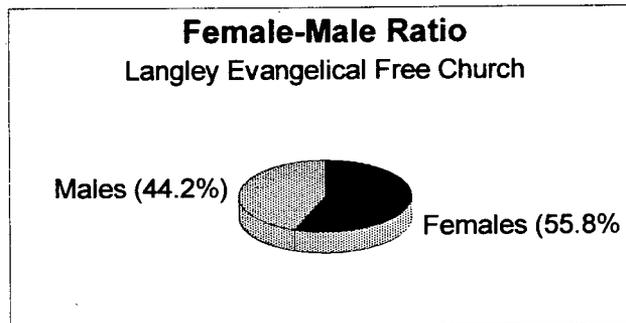
Question 19 asked people to rate the value of an Adult Sunday School that changed according to their recommendations. It is always risky to ask a hypothetical question of this nature because it is impossible to please everyone. However, I wanted to get an idea of peoples' potential commitment to a changed program. I've done enough program evaluation to realize that people can make great suggestions, but may not act on their own suggestions. Once again, as an educational administrator who oversees a broad range of adult programs, it is important for me to know how much time to put into Adult Sunday School based on its present and potential impact. This question may also have provoked a reevaluation of personal values. Respondents may ask the question, "How valuable should Adult Sunday School be to me?"

Question 20 asked respondents to say whether or not they would attend an Adult Sunday School that met their expectations. I have often seen a discrepancy between peoples' values and their actions. This question attempted to get people to give an honest answer to whether or not they would actually attend a changed Adult Sunday School. The next question gave people an opportunity to make additional comments. I like to give respondents a chance to express anything else that may have arisen in their minds from the questions. The final question asked people if they would like to participate in a group that would meet to discuss the survey results and make recommendations as to the future of Adult Sunday School. This

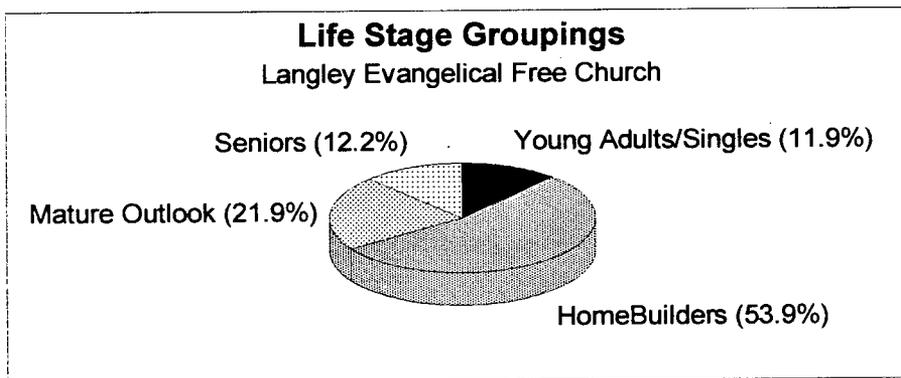
proved to be a good way to recruit people for the discussion groups. The discussion group question was removed from the completed surveys, so as to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

*The distribution of the survey* followed the lengthy process of composing questions that attempted to address my research questions from several different angles. My sampling frame included all adults at Langley Evangelical Free Church who are out of High School (or 18 years old if they have dropped out) and who have a church mailbox. This number fluctuated as a few people left the church and new people came during the distribution process. Figure 3 shows the approximate female-male ratio in this sampling frame at the start of the study. The percentage of women is slightly higher than the percentage of men. LEFC has a number of widows and female single parents which may account for this difference. Figure 4 shows in a general sense how people fit into various life stage groupings in the church based on a study conducted several months prior to this study (Wolff, 1999). Those in the Young Adult/Singles group would be between the ages of 17 and 45 who are not married. The Homebuilders group is composed of young married couples without children and those who have children still living at home. The Mature Outlook designation refers to single people, or couples over the age of 45 who do not have children, or whose children have left home. The Seniors' group generally consists of those 70 years old and older. These demographic considerations were important as I wanted to make sure that my survey respondents represented the different groups within the church.

**Figure 3 - Female-Male Ratio at Langley Evangelical Free Church**



**Figure 4 - Life stage groupings at Langley Evangelical Free Church**



I sent out personalized letters (Appendix C) to each adult a few weeks before I distributed the surveys which gave details about the upcoming survey. The letter gave people an opportunity to fill out a form saying that they would not like to participate in the survey. I did not want people to feel pressured to participate. I did not receive any forms back before I distributed the survey. I also ran a notice in the church bulletin prior to the survey distribution which informed people about the survey, but also reminded them that it was coming. On May 11, 1999, I distributed 365 surveys in the church mailboxes. This widespread survey approach gave every adult in the church with a mailbox an opportunity to share their perspective on Adult Sunday School. Identification numbers were placed at the end of the last question, so that I could send out thank you notes to those who had responded. These

identification numbers were automatically removed from the surveys when the responses to the discussion group question were removed.

By June 13, I had received 131 surveys and the rate of return had slowed down considerably. The identification numbers served a second purpose at this point as I was able to send out a second copy of the survey to those who had not yet participated. I attached a note that once again gave people the option of saying that they would not be participating in the survey. It was very important for me as a Pastor in the church to try not to offend people by exerting too much pressure to complete the survey. The reminders must have worked because the return rate accelerated and I was able to include responses from 195 surveys in my research.

Who were the 195 survey respondents and were they representative of the church? The percentage of female respondents (58.2%) was slightly higher than the percentage of females in the church (55.8%). The survey population consisted of respondents that were married (85.1%) and those who were single (14.9%). All of the age groups were represented in the survey population including those born after 1969 (11.0%), those born between 1960-1969 (34.6%), those born between 1950-1959 (26.9%), those born between 1940-1949 (8.2%), those born between 1930-1939 (8.2%) and those born before 1930 (11.0%). The larger percentages for those born between 1950-1969 is consistent with the make-up of the church (see figure 4). Based on the fact that 72.5% of the respondents were under the age of 50, it is not surprising that 63% of the respondents said that they had one, or more children living in home. There was also representation from all of the educational levels being monitored by the survey: less than a High School diploma (8.3%), High School diploma (28.5%), College or Technical Institute diploma (36.8%), Bachelor's degree (20.2%) and a Master's degree or Doctorate degree (6.2%). I did not have a breakdown of educational levels within the larger church population, so I could not determine if the survey respondents were representative of the church in this area. A particular group may be over-represented, or under-represented.

However, some representation in each area does insure that the views of each group were presented for consideration.

In the survey, I asked four questions that related to participation in various programs of the church. I asked about average attendance at Sunday morning services. The results of this question showed that 86% of respondents attended three or more Sundays per month, 6.2% attended one to two Sundays per month and 7.8% attended less than one Sunday per month. It is obvious that a large majority of those who filled out the surveys were regular attendees at worship services. Those who were not regular attendees may be under-represented in the survey population. The results of the survey may not accurately reflect the preferences of those who are not regular attendees. I also asked people to state what their average participation in Adult Sunday School was over the past year. I discovered that 53.4% of the respondents had not attended this past year, 25.4% had attended less than one Sunday per month, 14.5% had attended one to two Sundays per month and 6.7% had attended three to five Sundays per month. I wanted to know why people currently attend the program, so that those factors which have historically drawn people to the program are not abandoned. However, it was imperative that I collected data that also reflected the desires and needs of those not involved in the program so that changes could be made to increase their participation.

My research project was not immune to bias and error. As far as non-sampling bias is concerned, I have detected a number of potential sources of error. Most family units that attend the church have a mailbox and are thereby registered in the church directory. The church directory represented my list for the frame population. Each adult family member received their own survey, so this should reduce errors due to cluster listings. One potential source of error at this level is that there may be some in the church who are not listed in the directory and do not have a mailbox. My frame population did not include these people. Another possible source of error is that families might complete the survey together, or at least bias each other by sharing their perspectives before all family members had completed

the survey. I sent a survey to each adult in family units with a personalized cover letter, so hopefully this reduced errors of this nature. There were also a number of questions about demographic background which would have been difficult to answer with a group response.

The results of the survey are also susceptible to bias and error. Some people have a greater propensity to fill out surveys and so I may not have achieved a true representation of the frame population. Another possibility is that only those with a vested interest in Adult Sunday School filled out a survey. Those who were not motivated to attend Adult Sunday School may not have been motivated to fill out a survey on Adult Sunday School either.

I am also keenly aware of my position as a Pastor at the Langley Evangelical Free Church. It is a position of power and influence. Did some people fill out the survey simply out of a sense of obligation to me? One person in a discussion group commented that she could not imagine why anyone would not fill out the survey for me. There is always the possibility that some survey respondents told me what they thought I wanted to hear. I tried to reduce this potential bias by assuring anonymity of responses.

*Data collection* began as soon as completed surveys came in. I had instructed people to return the surveys to me. Some people would hand them to me while others would put their survey in either my mailbox in the church office, or my mailbox in the church foyer. I entered responses from the quantitative questions in S.P.S.S. 9.0, a statistical software package. Responses from the four open-ended questions were entered in the Microsoft Works 3.0 database which could better accommodate a diversity of responses. I did all of the data entry myself as I wanted to get a "feel" for where individual respondents were coming from and to be aware of emergent themes. With data entry, there is always the possibility of error and so I tried to double-check my entries at different times to insure increased accuracy.

*Data analysis* is the process of trying to make sense of the survey data. I used Chi-Square testing procedures to check for significant relationships between the nine factors and several demographic factors (age, gender, marital status, family makeup, educational level, small group involvement). A result of .05 or less was deemed significant. Altrichter, Posch,

and Somekh (1993) have once again provided a useful model for data analysis of a qualitative nature. Data are first of all read carefully as a means of recalling what happened. Data are then prioritized on the basis of relevance to the study with similar factors grouped together and complex factors simplified. Thirdly, the data are organized in a readable form such as an outline, or diagram. The fourth step according to Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh is to interpret the data and draw conclusions. I condensed their four steps into two main stages of data analysis. My approach to data analysis focused on the coding of data which necessitated sorting and prioritization and the interpretation of data which required looking for patterns and inconsistencies.

My coding of the data required a clear understanding of what data was important to the research project. I looked for any factor that might influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School and data that suggested changes that could be made to increase participation in the program. Each factor was given a unique code to set it apart from the others. I made sure that I had a consistent coding approach and I tried not to quantify qualitative data beyond what was appropriate. I was also interested in analyzing data which provided background information as to the reasons behind someone's viewpoint. Why do they believe what they believe? How has their experience dictated their current position? I coded the data in such a way so that comments from the same person could be linked together to provide a richer understanding of an individual's position. I wanted the data analysis to maintain something of the richness of individual expression.

Pattern analysis and dilemma analysis are two complex methods of data analysis (Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh, 1993). As I analyzed the survey data, I was constantly on the lookout for recurrent themes. As certain patterns become more pronounced than others, I explored the importance and effects of these patterns. An important part of this interpretive process was to check to see if I was the only one who saw the patterns, or if my influence was somehow producing certain patterns of response. The group discussions provided greater reliability in this area as group members could challenge my preliminary analysis.

Dilemma analysis looks for tensions in the data. For example, a large number of adults in the church might believe that learning about God is important in Adult Sunday School and yet choose to spend the time with family instead. I did not shy away from apparent contradictions, but rather explored them as a means of gaining a better understanding of the situation. Differences of opinion expressed in the surveys and group discussions were welcome sources of data which provided important details as to the diversity of perspectives on Adult Sunday School. Even dilemmas which could not be readily resolved led to valuable discussion about better ways of coping with the tension.

### *Group Discussions*

One of my fears as I started this research project was that no one would volunteer to be in a group to discuss the implications of the survey results. My fears were unfounded as approximately 40 people volunteered. I sent each of these individuals a thank you note that informed them that more information would be forthcoming. As the survey return rate began to slow down, I sent a packet to the potential discussion group members that contained two copies of a letter, two copies of a consent form and a preliminary summary of the survey results for their consideration (Appendix D). The letter mentioned six meeting times in August and they were asked to choose a time if they were available and still interested in participating. The meeting times were spread out over three weeks on every day except Friday to accommodate as many people as possible. Some returned the letter with a meeting time selected while others were contacted to determine their interest level and availability for a meeting. A second packet was sent out to those who signed up for a meeting time (Appendix E). This packet contained a summary of the four open-ended questions and presented the four questions that would be discussed at the discussion group meetings. Discussion group members were asked to read the material as a way of preparing for the meeting. By the end of the sixth discussion group meeting, 31 people had participated in the discussion process.

The discussion group meetings went well as most people felt free to contribute their ideas. I tried to act as a discussion facilitator while refraining from impinging my ideas on the groups. I probably influenced substantive elements of the discussions at times, but I tried to stay in the background as much as possible. Of course, that became difficult when group members asked me for my opinion. I usually tried to deflect questions of that nature and let the groups come up with their own answers. I set up each discussion in a similar fashion. I reminded each group of the purpose of my research. I went over the four questions that we would address. I then read through the summary of the answers from the four open-ended questions so that we would have a framework for the discussion. I wanted the group discussions to build on the survey results. I made it clear to group members that the goal of the discussion was not to promote personal agendas, but to determine which factors could be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School. For the first two questions, I tried to make sure that each person had a chance to respond before I opened it up to a more interactive discussion. The discussion groups provided a wealth of data, especially in answering my second research question about what changes could be made in Adult Sunday School to increase participation.

I prepared a summary after each discussion group meeting and sent copies to the group members. I had told them during the group meeting that this summary would be coming and to inform me of any modifications that needed to be made. I wanted to make sure that the summary accurately reflected the major themes that had been discussed. Each participant had signed a consent form which allowed me to audio-tape each session and take notes. It was imperative that I captured the various viewpoints that were expressed. However, I realized that accurate recording of the information does not necessarily equal an accurate understanding of what was communicated. Sending out a summary of each discussion and asking group members to critique it was one way of increasing the reliability of what I had perceived as being important. I also sent out an overall summary after the sixth discussion

group had met. I wanted participants to see how their views related to the views of others and how some factors had emerged as being more notable than others.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time with the discussion groups. There was almost equal representation from males and females and solid representation from every age group in the church. This made the results more generalizable to the whole church and to other church settings. The participation of some ethnic representatives also enhanced the generalizability of the results. The groups provided important feedback which laid a foundation for change in Adult Sunday School.

### *Third Party*

The perspective of a third party was essential to insure that I did not become ensnared in narrow thinking. Members of my third party challenged preconceived ideas and opened up new ways of thinking. They monitored my biases as a researcher and made sure that they were properly disclosed in the research project. In many ways, the discussion groups not only represented a source of participants for my study, but they acted as a third party. Other members of the third party included those on my thesis committee, members of the church board, the elders in the church and church staff. I was challenged to substantiate some of my claims. In retrospect, it would have also been beneficial to have a critical friend in place who would have been even closer to the research process. This person could have observed the small jumps I took in the interpretive process along with the bigger jumps observed by other members of the third party.

My research approach is not without its flaws. In the real world, it is impossible to do perfect research and so my goal was to minimize those factors that had the potential to undermine the validity and reliability of the study. I tried to monitor my own biases even as I recognized that I was a valid source of data for the study. I chose a two-tiered approach to collecting and analyzing data, so as to increase the reliability of the results. Those in my third party acted as traffic cops at times to make sure that I did not misconstrue, or inappropriately

apply the data. I believe that this research study provides important information for program planners at LEFC and for educational administrators in other churches. Adult Sunday School is standing at a crossroads and this study provides guidance for churches as they determine where the program should go in the future.

## CHAPTER FOUR FACTORS THAT INCREASE PARTICIPATION

My study on Adult Sunday School has two basic purposes. The study seeks to determine some of the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School and what changes could be made to increase participation in this educational program. This chapter focuses on those factors that might attract people to Adult Sunday School.

An underlying assumption in the purposes for this study is that Adult Sunday School still has substantial value in the life of the church. In my survey of adults at Langley Evangelical Free Church (LEFC), almost 60% stated that there definitely is a need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC and 30% affirmed that there probably is a need. When asked to respond to the question, if Adult Sunday School changed according to your recommendations, how valuable do you think it would be to you, 18.2% said that it would be of great value while 47% said that it would be of considerable value. The survey participants were also asked if they would attend an Adult Sunday School that met their expectations. A large number of people said that they would attend (28.9%), or that they would probably attend (50.8%). It is obvious that many adults at LEFC believe that Adult Sunday School is, or at least can be an important component of church life.

I was also amazed by the positive response to the survey as evidenced by the survey response rate. Over half of the adults in the church filled out the survey. However, there were more surprises in store. Thirty-one people participated in discussion groups to discuss the implications of the survey results. I had planned on having one or two groups, but had to enlarge my vision to include six discussion groups. The good response to the survey and peoples' willingness to participate in a discussion group indicated that many people at LEFC have a vested interest in Adult Sunday School. They want to be part of the evaluation process and do what can be done to make the program even better.

Survey respondents were asked to rate the significance of nine factors which might affect their decision to participate in Adult Sunday School. Table 2 shows the mean scores in descending order for each of the nine factors. The prioritization of these factors in terms of importance reflects peoples' preferences as to how Adult Sunday School should be structured to attract them to the program. These preferences are influenced by demographic information, family makeup, previous experience in Sunday School and current involvement in church (see Figure 1 on p. 33). Respondents were also asked to respond to open-ended questions on the need for Adult Sunday School, why they had attended Adult Sunday School more in the past and what topics would be of interest to them in an Adult Sunday School format. Their answers provided a rich description of the thoughts and feelings that exist behind the various factors. The comments give an inside look into peoples' attitudes and preferences about Adult Sunday School. We will look at the nine factors in the order that they were ranked by expanding on them using the personal comments of the respondents themselves. We will then analyze how demographics and other personal factors impacted the ranking of these nine factors.

**Table 2: Mean Scores and Rank for Nine Factors**

| <b>Rank</b> | <b>Factor</b>         | <b>Mean Score</b> |
|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1           | Spiritual Growth      | 4.60              |
| 2           | Relevance             | 4.45              |
| 3           | Practicality          | 4.29              |
| 4           | Teaching Style        | 3.98              |
| 5           | Share Experiences     | 3.22              |
| 6           | Social Contact        | 3.20              |
| 7           | Learning              | 2.70              |
| 8           | Intergenerational     | 2.49              |
| 9           | External Expectations | 2.00              |

### **The Lives Behind the Nine Factors**

The ranking of the nine factors selected for consideration in this study painted a vivid picture of what people want in Adult Sunday School. They want to experience spiritual growth. Adult Sunday School must go beyond learning and encourage them to grow closer to God. The classes must be relevant and practical to peoples' lives. Most people want to study something that makes a difference to their quality of life. Teaching style is also important. The sharing of experiences and social contact are of moderate importance. Learning in and of itself, external expectations and learning in an intergenerational environments are not seen as strong attracting factors when it comes to drawing people to Adult Sunday School. Of course, factors that have a lower ranking for the sample population may be more important for individuals, or subgroups within the survey population. The comments made by the survey respondents provided a rich description of what people expect as it relates to these nine factors. The pursuit of spiritual growth is a lofty ideal, but what does it mean? Relevance sounds good, but what are specific topics that would be relevant for people in the church at this point in time? The ranking of the factors is helpful, but it is the personal comments of respondents that give life to the labels.

#### *Spiritual Growth*

The fact that spiritual growth was ranked as the most important factor is not surprising. The overarching goal of the church is to help people know God better. What is surprising is that even though 64% of respondents said that spiritual growth was a very significant factor, 32% said that it was fairly significant and 4% said that it was somewhat significant. It is also important to note that approximately 19% of the survey respondents actually ranked another factor higher than spiritual growth. It is apparent from these findings that promoting spiritual growth must be a major goal in Adult Sunday School. However, other factors must also be emphasized in order to attract those who are influenced in other ways.

### *A Desire to Grow Spiritually*

Why did some people not place a premium on spiritual growth? Some of these people may have been experiencing the "spiritual blues." One respondent said that he used to attend Adult Sunday School more when he "felt closer to God." Others conceded that they did not attend Adult Sunday School regularly this past year because of a lack of commitment and laziness. Several people admitted that they used to attend Adult Sunday School more in the past because they wanted to learn and grow. One person wanted to "grow and mature spiritually" in the past and that was their motivation for participating. Another person attended more in the past for "spiritual growth...to be fed." One respondent stated, "We attended because we wished to know more of God's Word." Is the waning interest in spiritual growth as it relates to Adult Sunday School a personal issue, or does it reflect Adult Sunday School's performance in this area in the past? One person once had a "strong motivation to learn God's plan for my life {because I was a} newer Christian." Another person said that, "I attended Sunday School until I was 24 years-old and then decided it was becoming redundant." Basic Christian knowledge is necessary for those new to the Christian scene, but seasoned Christians require a more advanced educational focus to keep their interest. However, this advanced focus is no guarantee that people will have an inner desire to grow spiritually. This desire must be in place before spiritual growth can occur.

### *Learning*

If spiritual growth is such an important factor in attracting people to Adult Sunday School, it is important to determine from the survey responses how people view spiritual growth. Many people suggested that learning is a critical component of Adult Sunday School. Some of these people outlined their belief that learning is the precursor to personal growth. One person said, "I feel that Adult Sunday School is necessary because it educates, which expands ones knowledge and ideas and in turn will cause growth." Another person asserted

that, "We all need to learn in order to grow." Learning is connected to this noble pursuit called spiritual growth.

### *Developing a Relationship with God*

A further question that could be asked is, "What should we learn in order to grow spiritually?" One area that respondents addressed was that of developing their relationship with God. The underlying belief, as stated by one individual, is that Adult Sunday School can "further help a healthy and growing relationship with God." One person said that, "Sunday School is an effective tool for worship." In other words, Sunday School can help us focus our full attention on God. We develop in our human friendships by giving others our attention and this is also true in our relationship with God. Another person said that "there is tremendous potential for compelling, faith-building sessions in Sunday School." Faith is our ability to trust God which is another important aspect of any growing relationship. Adult Sunday School can help people focus on God, to trust Him, and in the process to "draw closer to Him."

### *Facing Life's Challenges*

Another aspect of spiritual growth addressed in the survey responses deals with personal issues that people face. We might say that spiritual growth represents the growing ability to handle life's challenges in appropriate ways. One survey respondent forcefully maintained, "When there are no longer problems in our lives and we don't need to be exhorted than [then] we can scrap Sunday School." All of us struggle at times and Adult Sunday School "gives the opportunity to center around individual specific needs." Adult Sunday School is "a good time to learn more about a personal Christian walk..." These comments suggest that Adult Sunday School can empower people to face life by giving them Biblical tools which will help them in this endeavor.

We have seen that spiritual growth tops the charts as the leading attracting factor in determining whether or not adults will attend Adult Sunday School. The concept of "spiritual growth" is somewhat nebulous. Peterson (1984) maintains that certain elements must be operative in adult Christian education for spiritual growth to occur. These foundational experiences include interaction with the content, exposure to godly role models, and fellowship and dialogue with other Christians. From the survey results, we have seen that some of the components of spiritual growth include having an inner desire to grow spiritually, learning about God and His Word, developing a deeper relationship with God, and facing life in a God-honoring way. An Adult Sunday School program that addresses these spiritual needs in appropriate ways is likely to have a captivated and growing membership.

#### *Relevance of Content*

Relevance, or at least a perception of relevance is another important factor as it relates to whether or not adults will attend Adult Sunday School. A large group of respondents (49%) said that the relevance of the content is very significant, 37% said that relevance is fairly significant, and 6% said that relevance was somewhat significant. Only one person rated content relevance as having lower significance. One respondent summed up the need for Adult Sunday School by saying, "I think S.S. [Sunday School] should be a forum where we can wrestle with the issues that bombard us in the 21st century and seek to understand how our faith relates." Another person carefully connected spiritual growth with relevance by stating that Adult Sunday School "offers an opportunity for more spiritual growth, especially in topics/areas of most interest to the participant." Perhaps the underlying assumption in this statement is that people are more motivated to learn and grow in areas that interest them. One respondent adamantly declared that "topics need to be very relevant" for, in the words of another person, "If you have relevant topics, people will come." It is interesting to note that the person who made this last comment went on to give two examples of relevant topics that had been offered in the past. The one topic dealt with money management and the other one

was a study of a book of the Bible. It would be premature to assume that topical relevance requires a severing from Biblical moorings.

One discussion group struggled with this issue of relevance. What does it mean to have a relevant Adult Sunday School program? Does it mean focusing on spiritual needs which are common to all, or does it mean focusing on felt needs which often have an emotional base and are more dependent on individual circumstances? The group acknowledged that both were important, but that Adult Sunday School could perhaps be the best venue for focusing on spiritual needs through strong Biblical teaching. The assumption is that a strong spiritual foundation will help people cope with any other needs that arise throughout the course of life. Survey respondents were given an opportunity to comment on why Adult Sunday School is needed and their responses give us insight into two types of relevance: group relevance and personal relevance.

#### *Group Relevance*

Adult Sunday School can provide group relevance by offering a variety of topics. Diversified course offerings allows segments of the church population to choose those learning opportunities that they believe would be most beneficial to them. It is the buffet approach to adult education. Most people can go to a lunch buffet at a restaurant and eat something that they like. There is also something satisfying about being able to choose a desirable option. We take ownership of these kinds of choices and enjoy the fruit of our choices more than if we had been served up the only "choice." One person succinctly summed up the need for Adult Sunday School by saying, "The church community includes a diverse group of people whose needs cannot be solely met through the Worship Service. By providing Adult Classes, groups can be given individual attention and fulfill the gaps that exist." Adult Sunday School "allows for teaching subjects not available in other mediums." Adult Sunday School is "reaching out to different members of the congregation in different

ways." This target group outreach was expressed in at least two ways in the surveys as respondents commented on age-specific groups and interest-specific groups.

Adult Sunday School at LEFC used to feature homogenous groups made up of people who were approximately the same age. Some of these groups included a College and Career group, a Homebuilders group for adults with young families, and a Mature Outlook group for those without children, or whose children had left home. A few survey respondents reminisced about the "good old days" when these groups existed. One person said, "There is very little consistency as we used to have it. We used to have an age-specific class [made up of] young couples where 30-40 people attended every Sunday morning." Another person referring to a former age-specific class said that "it was nice to meet with our friends for Sunday School." Age-specific groups can play a part in achieving a sense of group relevance for some people as they make decisions about attending Adult Sunday School.

It would be fairly safe to assume that age-specific groups share some common needs that could be addressed in Adult Sunday School. However, there are many needs that transcend age boundaries. Interest-specific classes may attract people going through the same stage in life (e.g. a class on parenting preschoolers), or they may draw in people by addressing more of an intergenerational need (e.g. a class on money management). One person stated that there is a need for Adult Sunday School so that people can "pick a topic that interests them for a few weeks." This person then goes on to say that growth groups are all year long. In other words, the need for longevity with people and topics is met in a Growth Group. The advantage of Adult Sunday School over Growth Groups is that it can target relevant topics for a short time and then move on to other topics which may attract other subgroups within the church. One of the questions in the survey asked people to suggest topics that would be of interest to them. Their responses give an interesting composite of what topics could be offered to increase participation in Adult Sunday School.

*Bible classes* use the Bible as a starting point for content and discussion. As I read the responses to the question on topics of interest, it became increasingly clear that most people

want a strong Biblical component in their Adult Sunday School program. Over 40% of those who responded to this question included the Bible in their list of topics they would like to see covered. Can there be any doubt that the Bible must be foundational in Adult Sunday School? The comments made about a Biblical orientation for Adult Sunday School address two areas: how the class approaches the Bible and what aspect of the Bible is studied.

There is a strong desire to make sure that any study of Scripture has an application-orientation and an in-depth approach. One person wanted to focus on the "Bible in relation to our daily living." Another person wanted to learn "how to focus on Jesus in my life of experiences, challenges, problems, joys." One respondent expressed a yearning to understand "God's instructions for our daily lives." People do not just want to fill their heads with more knowledge. They want to see how Biblical knowledge relates to their lives. There also was a desire amongst some survey respondents to approach Scripture in an in-depth fashion. Some suggested that a teacher should lead the class inductively and allow Scripture to speak for itself. Others spurned an approach which results in "a skimming, or birds-eye view." These respondents are presumably seasoned veterans of the Christian faith and want spiritual meat, not baby food. It would be important to consider their needs in making changes to Adult Sunday School to increase participation across the many subgroups represented within the church.

The participants in the survey gave clear direction on the content, or focus of the Bible classes. Bible classes should include a study of particular books in both the Old and New Testaments. The assumption is in keeping with Dobbins (1936) assertion that the Bible should be our ultimate source book for answering all of life's questions (Dobbins, 1936). The book of Revelations was mentioned several times while other books were mentioned only once, or twice. Bible classes should also include topical studies dealing with topics such as personal growth, prophecy and end times, doctrine, spiritual gifts, knowing God's will, and the character of God. These first two areas received considerable attention in the survey comments whereas the last two areas were addressed only a few times. A third component of

Bible classes that was mentioned was character studies such as studying the life of Jesus. The fourth dimension was survey studies that feature a general overview of large segments of Scripture such as the New Testament. It is interesting to contrast this desire for survey studies with the desire to approach Scripture in an in-depth way. Obviously, it would be impossible to satisfy both desires in one class and so this tension would have to be resolved at the programming level.

*Classes on relationships* were requested by forty-six of the survey respondents. The importance of relationships within the church context became evident as many people expressed a desire to address relational issues in Adult Sunday School. A few of the comments pertained to specific relational issues such as anger management, rebuking others properly, and dealing with conflicts. Most of the suggested topics in the realm of relationships focused on family relationships with special emphasis on marriage relationships and parent-child relationships.

Marriage enrichment is a topic that many people shy away from. Perhaps we are embarrassed to admit that our marriage could be better, or maybe we are afraid that a marriage course would show that we have personal weaknesses. Despite the tendency to avoid the topic of marriage enhancement, several people did mention that they would appreciate a class on that topic. One person wanted to see a class on "How to make your marriage grow through God's Word." The challenge of offering any course on marriage-related topics is to convince potential attendees that their marriage does not have to be on the rocks to attend.

Approximately 19% of the survey respondents mentioned parent-child relationships as an important topic to address in Adult Sunday School. The emphasis on parenting issues is not surprising considering that over two-thirds of the people who attend LEFC are at that stage of their lives. One parent expressed a desire for "topics that help me understand my teens (post-modernists)." Another parent wanted training on Christian parenting that was Biblical in nature and not merely psychological. One respondent shared their enthusiasm about the

intergenerational Sunday School class where parents and children could learn together. I found one response especially intriguing as it seemed to express an unfulfilled longing. "If we had a younger family, we would be interested in parental Christian education." Would this family have benefited from a parenting course when they were dealing with parent-child issues? Another person shared a desire to learn "how to reflect God in my life as a grandparent/parent." Classes on parent-child relationships should also include other caregivers who are in a parenting role, such as grandparents.

*Outreach classes* focus on the necessity of reaching out to others which is an important aspect of church life. Pastors may preach sermons on the importance of reaching out to people and sharing the claims of Jesus. Yet, there is a need for people to be equipped and empowered to perform this daunting task. How does a person effectively share their faith? Beyond this initial concern of sharing one's faith is the issue of defending one's beliefs. Apologetics seeks to unearth evidence for the Christian faith and to provide resources for engaging conflicting thoughts. Many churches also stress the importance of cross-cultural witnessing and label this type of outreach, "Missions." Many churchgoers are fascinated and encouraged by stories of how Christianity is making inroads in Canada and around the world. The survey results clearly showed that some people are eager to have classes that address these three dimensions of outreach: witnessing, apologetics and missions.

Witnessing, for the Christian, is the simple act of sharing their beliefs with others in a non-offensive manner. The early apostles who had walked with Jesus could not stop speaking about him (Acts 4:19-20). In the same way, Christians are instructed in Scripture to tell others about Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). Several respondents expressed their desire to have classes that help them share their faith with others. One person narrowed the focus of witnessing by requesting classes that teach "boldness in sharing one's faith with family members and close friends." The premise behind this statement may be that we should not share our faith with someone until we have earned the right to do so through relational development. Another person suggested, "...instead of talking good deeds, I'd welcome the

opportunity to go do them." This person went on to give a hypothetical example of a single Mom in need of help and a team from the church assisting her. This statement serves as a practical reminder that witnessing is far more than just sharing one's faith. It is sharing one's life.

Training in apologetics, from a Christian perspective, is grounding people in Christian beliefs and equipping them to defend those beliefs in a sensitive way with others who have a contrary belief system. A number of people who completed the survey used their voice to ask for classes on apologetics. One person remembered an apologetics class that was offered several years ago and remarked that it was "an excellent topic which would be nice to do again." Others commented on the need for teaching on other religions, so "we're able to be a witness." One respondent expressed a desire to learn about different world views. It is important that an apologetics class stresses the importance of understanding and appreciating other people even if they embrace contrary beliefs. Once this attitude is in place, it may be possible to move towards a mutual exchange of ideas.

The spread of evangelical Christianity continues at a pace unprecedented in all of history with steady growth in Western countries and dramatic growth in non-Western countries (Johnstone, 1993). Many Christians love to hear stories about short-term and long-term missionaries who are making a difference for Jesus in their corner of the world. Just like sports fans like to see their sports team moving forward, so too Christians like to hear about successes on their "faith team." Several participants in the survey shared their desire to have Missions classes. These classes would feature missionary reports, but would also challenge people to consider going out as missionaries themselves.

Outreach is a critical aspect of the Christian life. In James 2:17, we read that faith is dead if it is not accompanied by action. The fact that a fairly large number of people said that they wanted outreach-oriented classes is a healthy indicator that the church wants to go beyond its four walls and impact the world beyond.

*Issues classes* are designed to deal with relevant issues which would not get covered in an in-depth way in other adult educational programs of the church. We will never have a shortage of issues. In many ways, issues provide adult education with an opportunity to maximize learning by addressing something that is intensely interesting. Issues grab our attention. It is obvious from the survey responses that many people want Adult Sunday School to tackle various issues from a Biblical vantage point. The study of church history and archaeology is one topic that came up several times. One person envisioned that Adult Sunday School could bring the "Bible alive in archaeology, history and travel." Others thought that Adult Sunday School could focus on the issue of finances. The topic of money management could be broadened under an umbrella class called Christian stewardship. Another issue that surfaced in the surveys was current events. Some individuals are interested in studying "current affairs from a Christian perspective." Creation versus Evolution was another issue that emerged from the surveys. Other people liked the idea of studying issues such as leadership, the Christian in the workplace, time management, social concerns such as poverty, helping the aging, the roles of men and women and ethical issues such as abortion. One of the key aspects of doing issues classes is to insure that the issue of choice generates enough interest to make the class worthwhile. Perhaps some issues could be combined into a generic "Issues Class" that would tackle a different issue each week. It would be important that any type of issues class is based on Scripture so as to stay consistent with the strong desire of many survey participants to have a Biblical foundation in Adult Sunday School.

Group relevance occurs when a group of people attend a class which has a group atmosphere, or topic that they deem relevant to their personal lives. The topics that were suggested as a way of achieving this group relevance could be grouped together in four categories: Bible, relationships, outreach, and issues. Based on the survey results, classes offered within these four areas have the greatest chance of attracting people to Adult Sunday School. However, the story does not end there. The topic might be interesting, but what makes the learning experience relevant on a personal level? Survey respondents went beyond

general relevance that attracts groups of people and commented on how a class can become more relevant for each individual who attends.

### *Personal Relevance*

The term "personal relevance" refers to an individual's experience within a class setting. It is the participant's response to the question, "Was this class relevant to me?" Can those who participated in the class use their learning experience to shape their lives in a positive way? Did the class scratch them where they are itchy? Once again, the responses of the survey participants provided insight into the issue of personal relevance. The responses indicated that there are two key elements in achieving personal relevance beyond the subject matter itself. These elements are interaction and an opportunity to ask questions and receive answers. These two self-directed processes allow the learner to personalize the information and make it more relevant.

*Interaction* emerged as a fundamental requirement for an attractive Adult Sunday School program. The word "interact" and related words came up repeatedly as people shared why there was a need for Adult Sunday School. "Adult S.S. can provide a more interactive forum dealing with relevant topics that a worship service or growth group cannot provide." Another person said that "as a group it is important to meet and discuss God's Word..." One respondent stated that Adult Sunday School was necessary because "Sunday School serves a primary function in that it allows/encourages interaction between individuals in the class. This can help a Christian walk mature and give life to it." Another participant in the survey asserted, "People need to interact and discuss the topics in order to learn better." The connection between interaction and learning was restated in another way by a different respondent. "The time for interaction on various topics helps us to understand and learn more effectively." Another person continued this theme by saying that Adult Sunday School "causes participation and is a means of growth." As I reviewed the responses related to interaction and discussion in Adult Sunday School, I got the impression that people still want

the discussion to occur in a semi-controlled setting under the auspices of a resident "expert" who can give intelligent answers when appropriate. Many people do not want Adult Sunday School classes to be another small group Bible study with lots of discussion, but little teaching. They want to be taught by qualified teachers who will encourage some interaction with themselves and with other group members.

*Asking questions* was another aspect of personal relevance that some respondents thought should be a part of Adult Sunday School. Some participants in the survey had a desire to interact with others in a class setting without the discussion degenerating into a collective pooling of ignorance. A few survey respondents also said that they would like to ask questions in a class setting as this is virtually impossible to do in the worship service. One person claimed, "The service is to sit and listen; the SS [Sunday School] is for discussion and question and answer time." This type of non-threatening atmosphere where people are free to ask any question may be especially beneficial for new Christians. It also places Adult Sunday School in a unique position on the continuum between the lecture-based approach of the sermon and the discussion-orientation of small group Bible studies. Adult Sunday School's unique positioning allows it to use both teaching and relational interaction to achieve its educational mandate.

The relevance of content is an important consideration in attracting people to Adult Sunday School. Group relevance can be achieved by targeting various groups within the church, whether it be by age, or by specific interests. Four general groupings of topics that were mentioned by survey respondents as areas of interest included the Bible, relationships, outreach, and issues. Relevance can be further enhanced by giving class members an opportunity to interact in the class. This interaction is not just two-way communication between the teacher and individual participants, but should be opened up to include discussion amongst the group members themselves. A topic may attract someone to a class, but it is often this in-class interaction that will help them to personalize the information on a life-changing level.

### *Practical Nature of Content*

We have already seen that some survey respondents prefer content that is practical. Before we explore this third most important factor, it is important that we differentiate between relevance and practicality. For the purpose of this study, relevance refers to that which is deemed important by a group or individual as it relates to meeting a perceived need. Practicality, on the other hand, refers to the immediate usability of the content in one's life. Of course, practical content would also be relevant so there is overlap between the two concepts. However, practicality takes relevance one step further. Relevance may make knowledge meaningful, but practicality makes the knowledge useful.

The practical nature of content scored high with survey respondents as 42% said it was a very significant factor in determining whether or not they would attend Adult Sunday School. Another 47% said that it was fairly significant, 9% said that it was somewhat significant, and 2% said that it was of little significance, or not significant at all. The practicality of content was expressed in at least two ways in the survey responses. Some people defined content practicality in terms of putting knowledge into practice. Others saw practicality of content in Adult Sunday School as equipping people for more effective service. It is these two aspects of content practicality that we will address using the comments of survey participants as a framework for our analysis.

#### *Putting Knowledge Into Practice*

What is the purpose of Adult Sunday School? According to some survey respondents, Adult Sunday School is a place to learn the practical and to "discuss application in our lives." "If you're not in a growth group, it gives you that more personal, practical, hands-on teaching on a weekly basis." It is a venue for educating adults because the "world is constantly changing and we need to be equipped to confront change." One survey participant acknowledged the importance of learning about God, but added that we also need to put this knowledge into practice. Another respondent hinted at the idea that knowledge which is not

applied in practical ways is potentially useless. The person stated, "Most Christians have a false sense of security. We know all about that topic! However, when the testing comes, we often fail." Adult Sunday School can assist people in taking knowledge from minds and hearts and putting it into hands for immediate usage.

### *Equipping People for Effective Service*

The success of churches around the world is largely dependent on their ability to foster an environment of servanthood within their membership that extends into the community. Jesus himself said that others will know that we are his followers if we have love for one another (John 13:35). A few people responded to this call for servants by suggesting that Adult Sunday School should equip people for more effective service. One person said that Adult Sunday School should "equip Christians to be more effective disciples and disciple-makers" while another said that the program should help people "be equipped for Christian service and church ministries." One respondent referred back to the church's mission statement and stated, "As the mission of the church to make disciples of Jesus Christ, we need to train, instruct, and prepare our adults to be able to become effective in their ministry..." Another survey participant suggested that "equipping Christians for ministry in counselling" might be a practical avenue that Adult Sunday School could explore. This task of equipping Christians for more effective service is a continuous process and cannot be accomplished through a one-time course offering.

The practical nature of course content must be addressed as we attempt to attract people to Adult Sunday School. We cannot stop at relevance, but must show how this pertinent information can be put into useful action. It is then that people will become more effective as disciples of Jesus Christ.

### *Teaching Style*

Teaching style was ranked fourth in order of importance by survey respondents. As a factor involved in affecting participation in Adult Sunday School, it cannot be ignored when

29% of respondents said that it was very significant and 44% said it was fairly significant. However, it is important to note that teaching style was given less attention than the relevance and practicality of the course content. Apparently, the topic takes preeminence over the presenter of the topic in a general sense. This content dominance was especially evident in the comments made by survey participants. Teaching style did not appear to be a top priority for many people.

Five people cited teaching style as an important factor pertaining to why they had previously attended Adult Sunday School more. In one case, the teacher was "exceptional." In another case, it was because "a dedicated teacher faithfully prepared and taught." One person said, "Some teachers I find very thought-provoking and stimulating." Another person claimed that the "quality of teachers was better" as a rationale for attending more in the past. In response to the question about why you were not a regular participant in Adult Sunday School this year, one person responded, "[I] did not like the teaching ways." Another respondent said, "I was very bored when I did go [because of the]teaching style, atmosphere." Two people expressed their disdain of videos. One of these individuals also claimed that it "took too long to get into the study. First we visited, had coffee, joked and wasted valuable Bible study time." As we can readily surmise from these comments, teaching style is a highly subjective matter.

What kind of teaching style would be most appropriate in Adult Sunday School? I did not set out to answer this question in my research and my findings do not give any conclusive answers. However, based on the prioritization of the factors that affect peoples' determination to attend Adult Sunday School, I believe we can make some broad generalizations. As much as possible, teaching style should be informed by a teacher's quest for spiritual growth within the group, and the relevance and practicality of the course materials. A pursuit of spiritual growth would require a Biblical foundation in the course content and presentation. This Biblical focus would require a certain amount of in-depth analysis of Scripture and connected topics so as to facilitate spiritual growth in more mature Christians. Ideally, each teacher

should use different teaching styles so as to make the learning experience more meaningful for each learner. A more realistic approach would be to make sure that a diversity of teachers with varying teaching styles are employed in teaching Adult Sunday School classes. Teaching style may have some importance, but it should not occupy a place of dominance over the other factors already mentioned.

### *Opportunity to Share Experiences*

The opportunity to share experience in Adult Sunday School is a determinant for some as they decide whether or not they will attend a class. The survey results showed that 10% of those who responded to this part of the question thought it was a very significant factor, 30% said that it was fairly significant, 38% said that it was somewhat significant, 16% said that it was of little significance and 6% said that it was not significant. The need to share experiences is met to a large degree within the small group meetings of the church as 62% of those who completed the survey said they participated in a small group of some kind. Other interpersonal settings would also help meet the need to share experiences.

My intent in including this factor was to gauge peoples' desire to make Adult Sunday School more experiential. Do people want to come to Adult Sunday School and have an opportunity to share their hearts with others? There is a strong desire for interaction as we have already seen, but this is not necessarily the same as sharing experiences. Interaction can occur on a more cognitive level whereas sharing experiences often has an emotional flavor. My impression from the survey data is that sharing experiences can play an important role in Adult Sunday School provided that it is done in moderation and that it does not consistently distract from the subject at hand.

### *Social Contact*

One of the biggest surprises for me in compiling the survey data was to discover that social contact ranked sixth in order of importance based on mean scores. This placement is

incompatible with the comments made in the open-ended questions which would suggest that it has greater importance. I should have perhaps used the word "fellowship" instead of "social contact." Fellowship is a more acceptable term in church settings. The concept of fellowship denotes more of a sense of community where people care for and encourage each other. My goal was to measure the importance of fellowship which may not have been accomplished by listing this relational factor as social contact.

The comments from the open-ended question on the need for Adult Sunday School clearly show the importance of fellowship. Many people maintained that social contact with a purpose should be a part of the Adult Sunday School experience. This is compatible with Larson's (1991) claim that surveys all over the United States show that the main reason that adults come to Sunday School is for fellowship. He advocates using the name, "Adult Bible Fellowships," instead of Adult Sunday School because "fellowships" suggest more of a relational focus. The survey responses indicated that Adult Sunday School can help people get to know others, it can provide encouragement and support, it can help people grow together, and it can help people have a sense of belonging.

### *Getting to Know Others*

A church of more than 300 people can be intimidating at times. Individuals may walk into the lobby of a church and become overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of hundreds of people milling around. Most people prefer to make acquaintances in a smaller group setting where conversation can be carried out in a comfortable atmosphere. One person affirmed the need for Adult Sunday School by saying that it "enables people to get together in a smaller setting. I did not grow up in a very large church and prefer smaller groups to get to know people." It is an opportunity to get to know others with whom you would not normally interact. One respondent liked the idea of younger and older people being able to meet each other. Several people saw Adult Sunday School as an extension of small group Bible studies,

especially in the area of meeting fellowship needs. Smaller group settings definitely provide more opportunities for relational development.

### *Providing Encouragement and Support*

The small group dynamic of Adult Sunday School allows group members to encourage and support one another. The atmosphere is more relaxed than a worship service and so people are more apt to share concerns with one another. This sharing may even happen before, or after the class as people mingle. People are sometimes encouraged by the fact that others are going through the same challenges. One person said that it is "comforting to know that others in the congregation are facing and are interested/concerned about similar issues." Certain Adult Sunday School classes have the potential to become support groups. A class on parenting teens might elicit responses from people that require follow-up. The extent to which encouragement and support are demonstrated within the class is largely dependent on the subject matter and style of the teacher.

### *Helping People Grow Together*

An interesting concept emerged from some of the comments of respondents as they shared about the importance of corporate growth in the church. One person stated the importance of Adult Sunday School in that it gives us the "opportunity to encourage others and grow together, individually and as a group." Dobbins (1960) asserts that optimum learning occurs in a group setting. Another survey respondent stressed the importance of "forming unity among the Body" which Adult Sunday School can help accomplish. I was challenged by this line of thought. As I reflected on past learning experiences, it became obvious to me that we often form relationships as we learn. It is possible to grow together in knowledge and in love, or at least friendliness. Group members benefit when someone else in the group shares their insights. Someone who has expert knowledge or skill in a given area can teach others. The result is that one part of the body strengthens another part and causes

corporate growth. One respondent said that Adult Sunday School should "allow experts in areas to share their knowledge so we can benefit from it." A church can grow together in knowledge and camaraderie as they share their insights with one another.

### *Helping People Have a Sense of Belonging*

Some people said that they used to attend Adult Sunday School more frequently because they felt more a part of the church. The irony of this train of thought is that Adult Sunday School can help people feel connected to the church. One person maintained that Adult Sunday School "makes church more personal [so that I] feel a part of the church family." Those who do not want to get close to others may avoid Adult Sunday School as a way of protecting themselves. However, for those who crave a sense of belonging in the church, Adult Sunday School might help provide, or strengthen such a connection.

Relationships are an important dimension of adult Christian education in the church. Many people want to learn within a caring community. Adult Sunday School can provide this kind of learning environment as program planners and teachers structure and teach in relational ways.

### *Learning for the Sake of Learning*

The category of "Learning Just for the Sake of Learning" may have been another factor that was misunderstood by respondents. There appears to be a discrepancy between the ranking of "Learning" as the seventh most important factor on the list and the preponderance of comments made about the importance of learning. The comments of survey respondents who mentioned learning address peoples' need to learn and the importance of understanding the Bible and other life issues.

### *Need to Learn*

Many people asserted that adults have a need to learn. One person said that the "need to learn is definitely there, whether one is a beginning Christian, non-Christian, or a mature Christian." Another person stated that "I don't think we can ever get enough teaching" with the assumption that there is always a need to learn more. One participant in the survey remarked, "One can always use an opportunity to learn more about God's Word." Another respondent continued this theme with the question, "How else would a person become aware of and familiar with vital Scripture teachings?" This need to learn appears to be a church-wide desire as summed up by one person who asserted, "Most, if not all congregation members, could learn more about the Bible, living a Godly life, raising Christian children..." It is obvious from these comments and others that many people in the church place a high value on learning.

### *Understanding of the Bible and Other Life Issues*

Acquiring knowledge does not necessarily lead to understanding. As we saw in some of the comments about spiritual growth, learning can be the precursor to personal growth, but the relationship is not necessarily causal in nature. Understanding suggests that the information that has been learned has found meaning in a person's life. One person who participated in the survey said that the purpose of Adult Sunday School is "to learn more about the Bible and understand the meaning of it" while another person said that the program should "encourage peoples' understanding of the Bible." Numerous people mentioned the importance of studying the Bible in an in-depth manner. "A Sunday School class can provide a more in-depth and more personal study of a subject." Adult Sunday School provides "an opportunity for a more involved learning environment." The assumption is that an in-depth approach helps facilitate the transition from learning to understanding the material.

We must now address the question as to why learning was ranked as the seventh most important factor in determining whether, or not someone would attend Adult Sunday School.

This question becomes even more perplexing when we see numerous responses that praise the virtues of learning. It is my impression from the data that when learning is mentioned, there is an underlying assumption that learning is more than filling one's head with information. The premise is that learning provides a context for personal growth within Adult Sunday School. Learning sets the stage for understanding and the growth that comes when we apply relevant information to our lives in appropriate ways. Learning is important, but only as it leads to personal growth. Learning just for the sake of learning may fire up some neurons, but does not appear to be a top priority in the minds of many who responded to the survey.

#### *Intergenerational Setting*

The notion of having adults and children learning together is not a new idea at Langley Evangelical Free Church. A Family Sunday School Class was launched in January of 1999 and ran for several months. This experimental approach to Christian Education in the church attracted a substantial number of families. I was curious to see if there would be a widespread desire to see this program continued. Of those who ranked the intergenerational factor, 5% said that it was very significant, 19% said that it was fairly significant, 24% said that it was somewhat significant and 52% said that it was either of little significance or not significant at all. We must be careful in our analysis of these numbers due to the fact that 37% of the survey respondents said that they did not have children living at home. An intergenerational class would simply be irrelevant for many adults who do not have children at home. With this in mind, there does appear to be some support for intergenerational classes amongst certain groups in the church.

#### *External Expectations*

External expectations are those expectations that we perceive others have of us. In the church context, the sources for these external expectations include God, church leadership, and other members of the congregation. We sometimes respond to what others want us to do

out of a sense of guilt. We do not want others to think we are inferior as people, or as Christians. Perhaps we might respond to the expectations of others in order to please people, or even appease them. Some people might obey a leader within the church because they somehow believe that the person in authority is speaking for God. It is noteworthy that several people believe that the expectations of others is a persuasive force in determining whether or not they will attend Adult Sunday School. The survey results show that 4% believe that external expectations are a fairly significant factor and 27% said that it was somewhat significant. The remaining 69% stated that the expectations of others was of little significance, or not significant at all. The goal of this study on Adult Sunday School is not to provide guidance on how to manipulate people into attending Sunday School. A church has the potential of placing inappropriate expectations on people. From an ethical standpoint, Adult Sunday School must strive to attract people on the basis of its own merits as a Christian Education program and not try to coerce people into attending out of a false sense of guilt.

The survey on Adult Sunday School at Langley Evangelical Free Church asked respondents to rate the importance of nine factors that might play a part in attracting people to adult classes. The mean scores show that spiritual growth is the most important factor within the survey population. People have a desire to grow spiritually, to learn about God's Word, to develop their relationship with God and to use their growing relationship with God as a foundation for facing life's challenges. The survey results also indicated that people want Adult Sunday School to be relevant and practical to their daily existence. They want to choose from a diversity of topics that focus on the Bible, relationships, outreach and pertinent issues. There is also a strong desire for interaction within the classes themselves so that a greater degree of personal relevance is achieved. However, relevance is not enough. Many of those who participated in the survey also want the class material to be practical. They want to be able to use what they learn. Teaching style was another important factor for many adults. It may not be as important as spiritual growth and a relevant and practical orientation, but it still must be taken into account for attractive program planning. The opportunity to share

experiences and to have social contact may also attract people to Adult Sunday School. It is evident from the survey responses that social contact must go beyond a superficial level and encompass the notion of fellowship within a caring community. As a fellowshipping community, Adult Sunday School can provide a context for encouragement and support, it can help people grow together, and it can help people have a sense of belonging in the church. Others expressed the importance of learning for the sake of learning and some liked a more intergenerational flavor in Adult Sunday School. The external expectations of others may also play a role in attracting people to Sunday School, although the church is responsible for insuring that the program is not promoted as a sacred obligation. People must have the freedom to make their own decisions.

The study of factors that attract people to Adult Sunday School could conclude at this point. We could take this prioritized list of factors and design an educational program around these nine factors. However, this would be premature. The ranking of the nine factors represents an average response of the sample population. This is helpful in providing a general framework for program planners. The rating process could be readily replicated in any other church to authenticate the generalizability of the results. However, the averaging of responses does not allow us to see the preferences of certain groups within the church. Are there subgroups within the church that have unique preferences? We will now look at how some of these subgroups ranked the nine factors.

### **Subgroups and the Nine Factors**

Our look at the nine factors that influence attendance at Adult Sunday School has been an approach based on averages. The prioritization of these factors has not taken into account individual differences related to age, gender, marital status, family makeup, educational level, or small group involvement. We will now consider each of these background factors to determine their effect on what people believe is important in attracting them to Adult Sunday School. It is imperative for program planners to know how different groups view the

attracting influence of each factor as they structure programs and classes to meet a maximum number of needs.

### *Age*

Many of the survey respondents acknowledged that there is a need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC with 30% saying that there probably is a need and 59.5% saying that there definitely is a need for the program (see Table 3). The majority of people believe that Adult Sunday School is necessary in the life of the church. There is also a strong indication that all of the age groups represented in the survey believe that there is a need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC. In fact, there was no significant difference in responses to this question across the age groups ( $p=.747$ ). Over 80% of the respondents in each group said that there probably is a need for Adult Sunday School, or there definitely is a need (see Table 4). The survey question did not differentiate between personal need and a general need for the church as a whole. Some responses may reflect the respondent's need for Adult Sunday School whereas another respondent may be thinking of other people in the church who could benefit from the program. The lowest mean score of responses was for those born before 1930 (4.39). The open-ended questions in the survey provided a possible explanation for this result. Several seniors mentioned that age and health issues were why they did not attend Adult Sunday School regularly this past year. The next two lowest mean scores belonged to those born between 1960-1969 (4.45) and 1950-1959 (4.46). Are the parents in these age groups preoccupied with the rigors of raising a family and therefore less likely to see the need for Adult Sunday School? Some of the comments on the surveys indicated that many parents struggle with the issue of going to Sunday School because their children find it difficult to be at church for the entire morning. These age groups have inherent barriers that would need to be addressed to curry a widespread favorable response to attending Adult Sunday School.

**Table 3: Need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC**

| <b>Responses</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Cumulative<br/>Percent</b> |
|------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Probably Not     | 1                | 0.5            | 0.5                           |
| I Don't Know     | 19               | 10.0           | 10.5                          |
| Probably Yes     | 57               | 30.0           | 40.5                          |
| Definitely Yes   | 113              | 59.5           | 100.0                         |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>190</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |                               |
| Missing          | 5                |                |                               |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>195</b>       |                |                               |

**Table 4: Need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC by Age Groups**

| <b>Date of Birth</b> | <b>Definitely<br/>Not</b> | <b>Probably<br/>Not</b> | <b>I Don't<br/>Know</b> | <b>Probably<br/>Yes</b> | <b>Definitely<br/>Yes</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1970-present         | Count                     |                         | 2.0                     | 4.0                     | 14                        | 4.60        | 20           |
|                      | Percent                   |                         | 10.0                    | 20.0                    | 70.0                      |             | 100.0        |
| 1960-1969            | Count                     |                         | 4                       | 26                      | 32                        | 4.45        | 62           |
|                      | Percent                   |                         | 6.5                     | 41.9                    | 51.6                      |             | 100.0        |
| 1950-1959            | Count                     | 1                       | 5                       | 13                      | 29                        | 4.46        | 48           |
|                      | Percent                   | 2.1                     | 10.4                    | 27.1                    | 60.4                      |             | 100.0        |
| 1940-1949            | Count                     |                         | 1                       | 3                       | 11                        | 4.67        | 15           |
|                      | Percent                   |                         | 6.7                     | 20.0                    | 73.3                      |             | 100.0        |
| 1930-1939            | Count                     |                         | 2                       | 3                       | 10                        | 4.53        | 15           |
|                      | Percent                   |                         | 13.3                    | 20.0                    | 66.7                      |             | 100.0        |
| Before 1930          | Count                     |                         | 3                       | 5                       | 10                        | 4.39        | 18           |
|                      | Percent                   |                         | 16.7                    | 27.8                    | 55.6                      |             | 100.0        |
| <b>Total</b>         | Count                     |                         | 1                       | 17                      | 54                        | 4.49        | 178          |
|                      | Percent                   |                         | 0.6%                    | 9.6%                    | 30.3%                     | 59.6%       | 100.0%       |

Closely related to peoples' perception of the need for Adult Sunday School is their evaluation of its potential value. Survey participants were asked to rate the personal value of Adult Sunday School if it changed according to their recommendations. Once again, we see that most people believe that Adult Sunday School has potential value for them personally with 18.2% saying it would have great value, 47% saying that it would have considerable value and 31.5% saying that it would have some value (see Table 5). As we break down these responses by age, we begin to see some differences amongst the age groups (see Table 6), although these differences are not statistically significant ( $p=.120$ ). The oldest group gave

Adult Sunday School a lower potential value than the other age groups. Their mean score was 3.21 compared to other mean scores ranging from 3.83 to 3.92. Age and related health concerns may play a part in the equation. Another theme that emerged from the surveys is that some mature Christians would prefer a more in-depth study of Scripture. Has this been a shortfall in Adult Sunday School in recent years which is now reflected in the lower scores given by the oldest age group? It is interesting to note that people may believe that there is a need for Adult Sunday School, but this may not translate into a belief that the program has great potential value.

**Table 5: Potential Value of Adult Sunday School at LEFC**

| <b>Responses</b>   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Cumulative<br/>Percent</b> |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| No Value           | 3                | 1.7            | 1.7                           |
| Little Value       | 3                | 1.7            | 3.3                           |
| Some Value         | 57               | 31.5           | 34.8                          |
| Considerable Value | 85               | 47.0           | 81.8                          |
| Great Value        | 33               | 18.2           | 100.0                         |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>181</b>       |                |                               |
| Missing            | 14               |                |                               |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>195</b>       |                |                               |

**Table 6: Potential Value of Adult Sunday School at LEFC by Age Groups**

| <b>Date of Birth</b> |         | <b>No Value</b> | <b>Little Value</b> | <b>Some Value</b> | <b>Considerable Value</b> | <b>Great Value</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1970-present         | Count   | 1               |                     | 4                 | 10                        | 5                  | 3.90        | 20           |
|                      | Percent | 5.0             |                     | 20.0              | 50.0                      | 25.0               |             | 100.0        |
| 1960-1969            | Count   |                 |                     | 20                | 27                        | 12                 | 3.86        | 59           |
|                      | Percent |                 |                     | 33.9              | 45.8                      | 20.3               |             | 100.0        |
| 1950-1959            | Count   | 1               |                     | 14                | 24                        | 9                  | 3.83        | 48           |
|                      | Percent | 2.1             |                     | 29.2              | 50.0                      | 18.8               |             | 100.0        |
| 1940-1949            | Count   |                 |                     | 5                 | 7                         | 3                  | 3.87        | 15           |
|                      | Percent |                 |                     | 33.3              | 46.7                      | 20.0               |             | 100.0        |
| 1930-1939            | Count   |                 | 1                   | 2                 | 7                         | 3                  | 3.92        | 13           |
|                      | Percent |                 | 7.7                 | 15.4              | 53.8                      | 23.1               |             | 100.0        |
| Before 1930          | Count   | 1               |                     | 9                 | 3                         | 1                  | 3.21        | 14           |
|                      | Percent | 7.1             |                     | 64.3              | 21.4                      | 7.1                |             | 100.0        |
| Total                | Count   | 3               | 1                   | 54                | 78                        | 33                 | 3.81        | 169          |
|                      | Percent | 1.8             | 0.6                 | 32.0              | 46.2                      | 19.5               |             | 100.0        |

I was pleasantly surprised by the responses of the 1960-1969 age group to this question. They had a mean score of 3.86. This is the age group that had the second lowest mean score as it related to the need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC. Apparently, this group believes that Adult Sunday School could have personal value if it changed according to their recommendations. The views of this particular age group are vital as they represent one of the largest age groups within the church. However, would they attend an Adult Sunday School that met their expectations?

The question on whether or not people would attend an Adult Sunday School that met their expectations was intended to draw the line between those who probably would never attend a class and those who might. The responses show that almost 80% of the respondents would seriously consider attending Adult Sunday School with 50.8% saying that they would probably attend and 28.9% saying that they would attend (see Table 7). Once again, no significant differences emerged between the age groups in their responses to this question ( $p=.099$ ). Of course, it is difficult to meet everyone's expectations and so the high percentage who said that they would attend, or probably would attend is more suggestive than predictive. It suggests that there is the possibility of increasing participation in Adult Sunday School

beyond the levels experienced this past year. Approximately 7% of the survey respondents attended Adult Sunday School three to five Sundays per month on average this past year and another 14.5% attended one to two Sundays per month (see Table 8). Of those who attended three to five times a month this past year, 75% said that they would definitely attend an Adult Sunday School that met their expectations. In the other categories, 53.6% of those who attended one to two times per month would attend, 29.2% in the one Sunday per month category and 16.2% of those who did not attend this past year. The relationship between past attendance and future attendance is significant at the .001 level (see Table 9). Those who attended Adult Sunday School on a regular, or semi-regular basis will likely come back to an improved program. The challenge is to convince non-attendees to give it a try and see if they like it.

**Table 7: Potential Attendance in an Adult Sunday School That Met Respondent's Expectations**

| <b>Responses</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Cumulative<br/>Percent</b> |
|------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| No               | 4                | 2.1            | 2.1                           |
| Probably Not     | 9                | 4.8            | 7.0                           |
| I Don't Know     | 25               | 13.4           | 20.3                          |
| Probably Yes     | 95               | 50.8           | 74.1                          |
| Yes              | 54               | 28.9           | 100.0                         |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>187</b>       |                |                               |
| Missing          | 8                |                |                               |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>195</b>       |                |                               |

**Table 8: Average Participation in Adult Sunday School Over the Past Year**

| Responses                        | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| 3-5 Sundays/month                | 13        | 6.7     | 6.7                |
| 1-2 Sundays/month                | 28        | 14.5    | 21.2               |
| Less than 1 Sunday/month         | 49        | 25.4    | 46.6               |
| Have not attended this past year | 103       | 53.4    | 100.0              |
| Total                            | 193       |         |                    |
| Missing                          | 2         |         |                    |
| Total                            | 195       |         |                    |

**Table 9: Relationship Between Past Attendance and Future Attendance**

|                              | Value  | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|--------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square           | 37.933 | 12 | 0.000                 |
| Likelihood Ratio             | 39.428 | 12 | 0.000                 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 26.053 | 1  | 0.000                 |
| N of Valid Cases             | 187    |    |                       |

How did the various age groups respond to the question about attending an Adult Sunday School that met their expectations? Not surprisingly, the oldest age group continued its reluctance to commit itself in a major way to Adult Sunday School with the lowest mean score of 3.50 (see Table 10). Those born after 1969 and those born between 1950-1969 appear to need convincing as shown in the relatively small percentage of respondents who said "Yes" (15.0 and 37.5%) and the relatively large percentage who said "Probably Yes" (75.0% and 53.3%). These two groups also had the lowest mean scores after the group born before 1930 (3.9 and 3.98). The most favorable response to this question as it related to a definite "Yes" response came from the "middle-agers" born between 1940-1959 and young seniors born between 1930-1939. These three age groups had between 37.5% and 46.7% of those who responded to the survey state that they would definitely attend an Adult Sunday School that met their expectations. This is the group least affected by two major hindrances to

attending Adult Sunday School which are age/health concerns and having children to accommodate on Sunday mornings.

**Table 10: Potential Attendance in Adult Sunday School by Age Groups**

| Date of Birth |         | Probably |      | I Don't Know | Probably |      | Mean | Total |
|---------------|---------|----------|------|--------------|----------|------|------|-------|
|               |         | No       | Not  |              | Yes      | Yes  |      |       |
| 1970-present  | Count   | 1        | 1    |              | 15       | 3    | 3.90 | 20    |
|               | Percent | 5.0      | 5.0  |              | 75.0     | 15.0 |      | 100.0 |
| 1960-1969     | Count   |          | 3    | 10           | 32       | 15   | 3.98 | 60    |
|               | Percent |          | 5.0  | 16.7         | 53.3     | 25.0 |      | 100.0 |
| 1950-1959     | Count   | 1        |      | 7            | 22       | 18   | 4.17 | 48    |
|               | Percent | 2.1      |      | 14.6         | 45.8     | 37.5 |      | 100.0 |
| 1940-1949     | Count   |          |      |              | 8        | 7    | 4.47 | 15    |
|               | Percent |          |      |              | 53.3     | 46.7 |      | 100.0 |
| 1930-1939     | Count   |          | 1    | 3            | 4        | 6    | 4.07 | 14    |
|               | Percent |          | 7.1  | 21.4         | 28.6     | 42.9 |      | 100.0 |
| Before 1930   | Count   | 1        | 2    | 5            | 7        | 3    | 3.50 | 18    |
|               | Percent | 5.6      | 11.1 | 27.8         | 38.9     | 16.7 |      | 100.0 |
| Total         | Count   | 3        | 7    | 25           | 88       | 52   | 4.02 | 175   |
|               | Percent | 1.7      | 4.0  | 14.3         | 50.3     | 29.7 |      | 100.0 |

The results from the survey population give us an idea as to the relative importance of each of the nine factors as they relate in a general sense to the whole church. However, is this same pattern demonstrated within each of the age groups? Table 11 shows the mean scores for each factor within the particular age categories and the rank order of the factors within the age groups. The first purpose of this study is to determine the factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School. To proceed towards the achievement of this goal, it is imperative that program planners are aware of some of the differences between age groups. Classes can then be tailored to attract people from across the age spectrum. It is important to note that there are no statistically significant relationships at the .05 level between the various age groups as it relates to the rating of the nine factors (see Chi-Square results in Table 11). This means that the groups are not significantly different from one another. The observed differences could be due to chance. However, there may be

trends in the data that are still useful to program planners as they design Adult Sunday School for maximum appeal.

**Table 11: Mean Scores for Nine Factors by Age**

|                       | 1970+ |   | 1960-69 |   | 1950-59 |   | 1940-49 |   | 1930-39 |   | <1930 |   | All  | Chi-   |
|-----------------------|-------|---|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|-------|---|------|--------|
|                       | Mean  | R | Mean    | R | Mean    | R | Mean    | R | Mean    | R | Mean  | R | Mean | Square |
| Spiritual Growth      | *4.45 | 2 | 4.65    | 1 | 4.52    | 1 | 4.8     | 1 | 4.77    | 1 | 4.56  | 2 | 4.60 | 0.807  |
| Relevance             | *4.45 | 1 | 4.48    | 2 | 4.47    | 2 | 4.47    | 2 | 4.33    | 3 | 4.64  | 1 | 4.45 | 0.326  |
| Practicality          | 4.30  | 3 | 4.30    | 3 | 4.33    | 3 | 4.33    | 3 | 4.08    | 4 | 4.50  | 3 | 4.29 | 0.499  |
| Teaching Style        | 3.85  | 4 | 3.98    | 4 | 3.92    | 4 | 3.73    | 4 | 4.50    | 2 | 4.38  | 4 | 3.98 | 0.500  |
| Share Experiences     | 2.95  | 6 | 3.21    | 6 | 3.15    | 5 | *3.53   | 5 | 3.73    | 5 | 3.50  | 5 | 3.22 | 0.926  |
| Social Contact        | 3.05  | 5 | 3.31    | 5 | 3.13    | 6 | *3.53   | 6 | 3.25    | 6 | 3.13  | 6 | 3.20 | 0.751  |
| Learning              | 2.85  | 7 | 2.63    | 8 | 2.50    | 8 | 2.60    | 7 | 3.23    | 7 | 2.75  | 7 | 2.70 | 0.387  |
| Intergenerational     | 2.45  | 8 | 2.61    | 7 | 2.63    | 7 | 1.93    | 9 | 2.33    | 8 | 2.31  | 9 | 2.49 | 0.336  |
| External Expectations | 2.00  | 9 | 1.95    | 9 | 1.89    | 9 | 2.14    | 8 | 2.08    | 9 | 2.50  | 8 | 2.00 | 0.626  |

R - Represents the ranking of each of the nine factors

\*When means were the same, the higher placement went to the factor which had the higher percentage of responses in the very significant category.

### *Those Born After 1969*

The youngest age group in the church born after 1969 placed a high premium on relevance. In this regard, they have a similar pattern of preference as the oldest group in the church born before 1930. It is interesting to note that the youngest group ranked spiritual growth as their second most important factor in attracting them to Adult Sunday School. However, the mean score was less than most of the other age groups which suggests that spiritual growth is not as important to them in an Adult Sunday School setting. They placed social contact over sharing experiences which was contrary to the general pattern within the survey population. The majority of respondents (60%) in the 1970-present age category are single. However, there is no significant difference between the rating of social contact by the single respondents and married respondents in this age category ( $p=.513$ ).

### *Those Born Between 1960-1969*

Those born between 1960-1969 clearly believe that spiritual growth is a very important factor in influencing their decision to attend Adult Sunday School. They are the busiest group

and perhaps they want their time to count. They also want the material to be relevant and practical. It is interesting to note that even though teaching style was fourth on their list of preferences, the average of their responses for this factor was lower than most of the other groups. This difference may indicate that those born between 1960-1969 have a stronger preference for content relevance over teaching style than some of the other groups. Those in this age group, like those born after 1969, placed social contact above sharing experiences. Why do these two age groups invert these two factors when compared to the rest of the survey population? Is this inversion a fluke, or are there reasons behind it? It is possible that those adults born after 1959 place greater importance on relationships within an educational context. They may even have experienced a more relational approach to formal education than those who went to school in former generations. This may result in an expectation for more interpersonal interaction in the classroom setting. Another possible reason that these age groups favor social contact over sharing experiences may be that in their relative youthfulness, they do not feel like they have a wealth of experience to share. This age group also placed the intergenerational aspect of Adult Sunday School above learning. Adults at this stage of life would likely have a stronger craving to be with children as a large majority (96.8%) have one or more children living at home. They are accustomed to learning together as a family and evidently see this as a more important component of Adult Sunday School than the general church population. As intriguing as these possibilities might be, it must be remembered that a statistical analysis did not reveal any major differences across age groups. Even when those born in 1960, or earlier were compared with those born before 1960, there were no significant differences in the rating of any of the nine factors.

#### *Those Born Between 1950-1959*

The survey results show that most adults born between 1950-1959 have children living at home. Only 4.1% of those who responded to the survey from this age category reported that they did not have any children living at home. It would be expected that this group along with

those born between 1960-1969 would have a keener interest in an intergenerational Sunday School than the rest of the church population. This expectation is shown to be true in the data. In fact, those with children rated the intergenerational factor significantly higher than those without children as we will see later in the section on family makeup. Those born between 1950-1959 gave intergenerational a seventh place ranking on the importance scale compared to an eighth place ranking by the rest of the church. The mean score is slightly lower than the mean score of those born between 1960-1969 which might suggest that parents of younger children feel slightly more comfortable learning together than parents of older children. How did parents with children in different age categories rank the importance of intergenerational Sunday School? Those with children between the ages of six and twelve (mean score of 2.84) are more likely to go to an intergenerational Sunday School class than those with younger (2.43) and older children (2.56). However, the result was not statistically significant ( $p=.057$ ). Those with younger children may think that their preschool children are not ready for family learning in a formal setting and those with older children may believe that their teenagers would not want to learn as a family in Sunday School.

#### *Those Born Between 1940-1949*

Those born between 1940-1949 gave the highest rating to spiritual growth of all of the age groups (4.80 mean score). Eighty percent said that spiritual growth was a very significant factor in determining whether or not they would attend Adult Sunday School and 20% said that it was a fairly significant factor (see Table 12). Why do these people in their 50's place such a high premium on spiritual growth? Perhaps, there is a greater sensitivity to spiritual matters at this particular stage of life. This age group is also more involved in small group Bible Studies than any other group which may suggest a greater spiritual hunger. Those born in the 1940's have an 86.7% participation rate in small group Bible studies compared to a range between 42.9% and 73.7% in the other age groups (see Table 13). Differences between small group attendance patterns across the age groups was not statistically significant.

( $p=.058$ ). It is interesting to note that those born between 1940-49 are not as involved in Sunday morning ministries as some other age groups which suggests that a strong desire for spiritual growth may not necessarily translate into serving others on Sundays. Almost 67% of the respondents in the 1940-1949 age category reported that they had no involvement in leading Sunday morning ministries (see Table 14). A Chi-Square test revealed that there is a significant relationship between the six age groups and their involvement in Sunday morning ministries ( $p=.010$ ). Those born between 1960-1969 have the most extensive involvement. Of course, it is possible that those born between 1940-1949 serve in other capacities, or perhaps did excessive service earlier in their lives. Another important observation for this age group which may have some bearing on the high rating of spiritual growth is their higher than average rating of external expectations. However, the relationship between spiritual growth and expectations of others is not significant in this study ( $p=.155$ ). Further studies might explore this relationship further.

**Table 12: Importance of Spiritual Growth by Age**

| <b>Date of Birth</b> |         | <b>Somewhat Significant</b> | <b>Fairly Significant</b> | <b>Very Significant</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1970-present         | Count   | 2                           | 7                         | 11                      | 4.45        | 20           |
|                      | Percent | 10.0                        | 35.0                      | 55.0                    |             | 100.0        |
| 1960-1969            | Count   | 2                           | 18                        | 42                      | 4.65        | 62           |
|                      | Percent | 3.2                         | 29.0                      | 67.7                    |             | 100.0        |
| 1950-1959            | Count   | 3                           | 17                        | 28                      | 4.52        | 48           |
|                      | Percent | 6.3                         | 35.4                      | 58.3                    |             | 100.0        |
| 1940-1949            | Count   |                             | 3                         | 12                      | 4.80        | 15           |
|                      | Percent |                             | 20.0                      | 80.0                    |             | 100.0        |
| 1930-1939            | Count   |                             | 3                         | 10                      | 4.77        | 13           |
|                      | Percent |                             | 23.1                      | 76.9                    |             | 100.0        |
| Before 1930          | Count   | 1                           | 6                         | 11                      | 4.56        | 18           |
|                      | Percent | 5.6                         | 33.3                      | 61.1                    |             | 100.0        |
| Total                | Count   | 8                           | 54                        | 114                     | 4.60        | 176          |
|                      | Percent | 4.5                         | 30.7                      | 64.8                    |             | 100.0        |

**Table 13: Age Group Participation in a Small Group Bible Study**

| Date of Birth |         | Yes  | No   | Total |
|---------------|---------|------|------|-------|
| 1970-present  | Count   | 9    | 11   | 20    |
|               | Percent | 45.0 | 55.0 | 100.0 |
| 1960-1969     | Count   | 39   | 24   | 63    |
|               | Percent | 61.9 | 38.1 | 100.0 |
| 1950-1959     | Count   | 34   | 15   | 49    |
|               | Percent | 69.4 | 30.6 | 100.0 |
| 1940-1949     | Count   | 13   | 2    | 15    |
|               | Percent | 86.7 | 13.3 | 100.0 |
| 1930-1939     | Count   | 6    | 8    | 14    |
|               | Percent | 42.9 | 57.1 | 100.0 |
| Before 1930   | Count   | 14   | 5    | 19    |
|               | Percent | 73.7 | 26.3 | 100.0 |
| Total         | Count   | 115  | 65   | 180   |
|               | Percent | 63.9 | 36.1 | 100.0 |

**Table 14: Involvement in Sunday Ministries by Age Group**

| Date of Birth |         | 3 or more<br>Sundays/<br>month | 1-2<br>Sundays/<br>month | Less than 1<br>Sunday/<br>month | No<br>involvement | Total |
|---------------|---------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------|
| 1970-present  | Count   | 4                              | 1                        | 2                               | 13                | 20    |
|               | Percent | 20.0                           | 5.0                      | 10.0                            | 65.0              | 100.0 |
| 1960-1969     | Count   | 7                              | 24                       | 11                              | 21                | 63    |
|               | Percent | 11.1                           | 38.1                     | 17.5                            | 33.3              | 100.0 |
| 1950-1959     | Count   | 7                              | 10                       | 4                               | 28                | 49    |
|               | Percent | 14.3                           | 20.4                     | 8.2                             | 57.1              | 100.0 |
| 1940-1949     | Count   |                                | 3                        | 2                               | 10                | 15    |
|               | Percent |                                | 20.0                     | 13.3                            | 66.7              | 100.0 |
| 1930-1939     | Count   | 3                              | 3                        | 5                               | 4                 | 15    |
|               | Percent | 20.0                           | 20.0                     | 33.3                            | 26.7              | 100.0 |
| Before 1930   | Count   |                                | 3                        | 3                               | 14                | 20    |
|               | Percent |                                | 15.0                     | 15.0                            | 70.0              | 100.0 |

*Those Born Between 1930-1939*

The most notable distinction within this age category was their preferential treatment of teaching style as a factor in attracting people to Adult Sunday School. They ranked it as the second most important factor. In fact, 58.3% of those born between 1930-1939 ranked

teaching style as being very significant compared to a range of 13.3% to 46.2% for the other age groups. For this age group, the teacher plays a central role over and above the content of the class. This group also placed a higher than average value on learning with 7.7% of the respondents saying that learning for the sake of learning is very significant. The only other age group that had a higher percentage was those born after 1969 with 10%. Those born between 1930-1939 gave learning for the sake of learning the highest ranking in the fairly significant category with 46.2% compared to a range of 15% to 26.7% in the other age groups. Based on these trends, Adult Sunday School classes that hope to attract this group must emphasize "teacher appeal" and the learning process more than with the other age groups.

#### *Those Born Before 1930*

The ranking order of the nine factors by those born before 1930 shattered some preconceived notions I had about this group. Recognizing that only 20 people participated in the survey from this age group, we must be careful that we do not label everyone in this group with the responses given by a portion of the group. However, one finding that astonished me was the relatively low rating given to spiritual growth (mean score of 4.56), especially in light of the fact that relevance was given a higher overall rating (mean score of 4.64). In fact, this group of older seniors ranked relevance higher than any other age group. They also rated external expectations higher than the other age groups. This greater sensitivity to external expectations may be a carry-over response from past church experiences.

To view the nine factors which influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School from an age group perspective is helpful in determining which factors should be emphasized to attract different ages. All of the age groups ranked spiritual growth, relevance, practicality, and teaching style in the top four positions. The younger age groups placed social contact higher than sharing experiences. Those born between 1950-1969 ranked an intergenerational learning environment higher and those born before 1930 had a higher

score for external expectations. It is important to remember that the differences between age groups are not statistically significant and that any observed differences could be as a result of chance. The fact that the groups have similar preferences as it relates to the structure of Adult Sunday School is helpful for program planners. The program does not have to be markedly different to attract various age groups. One size fits all ages. However, observed similarities and differences may still be instructive as to subtle trends related to age and participation in Adult Sunday School.

### *Gender*

Are women and men attracted to Adult Sunday School for the same reasons? The mean scores for the nine factors addressed in this study show that the ranking order is almost the same for both genders (see Table 15). It is apparent that women and men view the relative importance of these factors in a similar way. However, it is interesting to note that, with every factor, the female respondents as a group gave a higher rating than the male respondents. Are men generally less generous in their rating of factors that influence their behavior? We will examine this issue and take a look at some of the discrepancies in the scores to see if they shed any light on what attracts females and males to Adult Sunday School.

**Table 15: Mean Scores and Rank for Nine Factors by Gender**

|                              | Females |      | Males |      | Combined<br>Mean | Chi-<br>Square |
|------------------------------|---------|------|-------|------|------------------|----------------|
|                              | Mean    | Rank | Mean  | Rank |                  |                |
| <b>Spiritual Growth</b>      | 4.68    | 1    | 4.49  | 1    | 4.60             | 0.058          |
| <b>Relevance</b>             | 4.53    | 2    | 4.35  | 2    | 4.45             | 0.326          |
| <b>Practicality</b>          | 4.36    | 3    | 4.21  | 3    | 4.29             | 0.576          |
| <b>Teaching Style</b>        | 4.04    | 4    | 3.90  | 4    | 3.98             | 0.106          |
| <b>Share Experiences</b>     | 3.33    | 5    | 3.06  | 6    | 3.22             | 0.232          |
| <b>Social Contact</b>        | 3.26    | 6    | 3.13  | 5    | 3.20             | 0.571          |
| <b>Learning</b>              | 2.84    | 7    | 2.51  | 7    | 2.70             | 0.047          |
| <b>Intergenerational</b>     | 2.63    | 8    | 2.30  | 8    | 2.49             | 0.245          |
| <b>External Expectations</b> | 2.13    | 9    | 1.82  | 9    | 2.00             | 0.064          |

The lower scores of the male respondents might suggest that they are less interested in Adult Sunday School. Therefore, their evaluation of the various factors would be tainted by this disinterest. However, if this disinterest in Adult Sunday School on the part of male respondents was an inherent part of this survey, it should have showed up in some of the other questions. In responding to the question about the need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC, 65% of the male participants said that there definitely is a need for Adult Sunday School while 55.5% of the female participants responded in the same manner. The mean score for the female respondents for this question was 4.43 compared to a mean score of 4.56 for the male respondents. The difference between the groups was not statistically significant ( $p=.461$ ). Even if the difference was important, the male respondents may have been thinking of others in the church who need Adult Sunday School. When asked to rate the potential value of Adult Sunday School if it changed according to their recommendations, 16.9% of the men said that the program would hold great value compare to 19.2% of the female respondents. The female participants in the survey also had a higher percentage who said it would have considerable value (49% versus 44.2%). The mean score for female respondents for the question on potential value of Adult Sunday School was 3.84 whereas the male mean score was 3.71. This difference would suggest that males are slightly more pessimistic about the

potential value of Adult Sunday School for themselves, although the difference is not statistically significant ( $p=.825$ ).

How does this apparent skepticism translate into action for the future? A higher percentage of males gave a "Yes" response to the question about whether they would attend an Adult Sunday School that met their expectations (32.5% versus 26.2%). The mean scores for this question was also higher for the males (4.04 versus 3.96), although once again the difference was not significant ( $p=.722$ ). Males may be less likely than females to admit that certain factors are important to them, but they are more willing to commit to attending an Adult Sunday School that meets their expectations. The attendance records for both genders over the past year show that males did attend Adult Sunday School more than females (see Table 16). The historical attendance pattern and potential attendance pattern indicate that the male group's tendency to rate the factors lower than the female group does not mean that they will be less attracted to Adult Sunday School. More studies on this difference in male and female responses may yield other explanations for this phenomenon.

**Table 16: Average Participation in Adult Sunday School Over the Past Year By Gender**

| Gender |         | 3 or more<br>Sundays/<br>month | 1-2<br>Sundays/<br>month | Less than 1<br>Sunday/<br>month | Have not<br>attended this<br>past year | Total |
|--------|---------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--|-------|
| Female | Count   | 7                              | 16                       | 27                              | 62                                     | 112   |
|        | Percent | 6.3                            | 14.3                     | 24.1                            | 55.4                                   | 100.0 |
| Male   | Count   | 6                              | 12                       | 22                              | 41                                     | 81    |
|        | Percent | 7.4                            | 14.8                     | 27.2                            | 50.6                                   | 100.0 |
| Total  | Count   | 13                             | 28                       | 49                              | 103                                    | 193   |
|        | Percent | 6.7                            | 14.5                     | 25.4                            | 53.4                                   | 100.0 |

The differences in mean scores between the male and female groups in their rating of the nine factors may give us a glimpse of the comparative importance of these factors. Males and females who participated in this survey gave a similar rating to social contact with the smallest difference in their mean scores (0.13). Interpersonal interaction holds almost the same value

for males and females. Based on a ranking of the factors, males gave social contact a more prominent placement as the fifth most important factor in attracting them to Adult Sunday School versus the females' placement of social contact in the sixth position. Both groups are fairly close in their ratings of teaching style (0.14), practicality (0.15), relevance (0.18) and spiritual growth (0.19). As we move into the 0.20 to 0.29 difference range, we see that women are influenced more by external expectations (0.21) and the opportunity to share experiences (0.27). The greatest discrepancies in mean scores were found in the categories of learning (0.33) and intergenerational (0.33).

The difference between how males and females rated the importance of learning just for the sake of learning is significant ( $p=.047$ ). In Table 17, we see that the number of male respondents who said that learning is somewhat significant, fairly significant, or very significant is considerably lower than the number expected with the opposite being true for the female group. Women in this study believe that learning just for the sake of learning is a more important factor in attracting them to Adult Sunday School.

The relationship between external expectations and gender was not statistically significant in this study ( $p=.064$ ). One of the difficulties in doing statistical analyses is not having enough data for comparative analyses. This particular factor did not garner a lot of support at the higher end of the rating scale with no respondents saying that it is very significant and seven female respondents saying that it is fairly significant. I decided to collapse the five rating categories into three categories to increase the number of responses in each cell. When this change is made, a Chi-Square test reveals significant differences between the female and male appraisals of this factor ( $p=.028$ ). The results in Table 18 show that women are more likely to be attracted to Adult Sunday School by the expectations of others than men.

**Table 17: Relationship Between Gender and Learning Just for the Sake of Learning**

| Gender |                   | Not significant | Of little significance | Somewhat significant | Fairly significant | Very significant | Total |
|--------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------|
| Male   | Count             | 15              | 25                     | 21                   | 12                 | 3                | 76    |
|        | Expected Count    | 14.1            | 17.1                   | 25.6                 | 15.8               | 3.4              | 76.0  |
|        | Percent           | 19.7            | 32.9                   | 27.6                 | 15.8               | 3.9              | 100.0 |
|        | Adjusted Residual | 0.4             | 2.9                    | -1.5                 | -1.4               | -0.3             |       |
| Female | Count             | 18              | 15                     | 39                   | 25                 | 5                | 102   |
|        | Expected Count    | 18.9            | 22.9                   | 34.4                 | 21.2               | 4.6              | 102.0 |
|        | Percent           | 17.6            | 14.7                   | 38.2                 | 24.5               | 4.9              | 100.0 |
|        | Adjusted Residual | -0.4            | -2.9                   | 1.5                  | 1.4                | 0.3              |       |

**Table 18: Relationship Between Gender and External Expectations**

| Gender |                   | Not significant or of little significance | Somewhat significant | Fairly significant, or very significant | Total |
|--------|-------------------|---|----------------------|---|-------|
| Male   | Count             | 53  | 16                   | 0                                       | 69    |
|        | Expected Count    | 47.1                                      | 18.9                 | 2.9                                     | 69.0  |
|        | Percent           | 76.8                                      | 23.2                 | 0                                       | 100.0 |
|        | Adjusted Residual | 2.0                                       | -1.0                 | -2.3                                    |       |
| Female | Count             | 59  | 29                   | 7                                       | 95    |
|        | Expected Count    | 64.9                                      | 26.1                 | 4.1                                     | 95.0  |
|        | Percent           | 62.1                                      | 30.5                 | 7.4                                     | 100.0 |
|        | Adjusted Residual | -2.0                                      | 1.0                  | 2.3                                     |       |

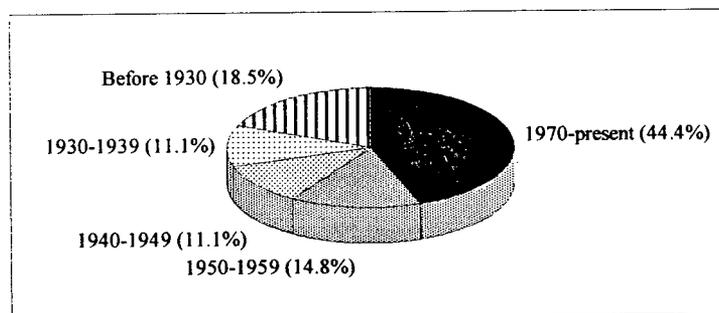
The results of the survey show that males consistently gave a lower rating to factors that would influence their decision to attend Adult Sunday School. It is impossible to determine the exact reasons for this pattern, but it may be related to a less enthusiastic attitude about the present and potential value of Adult Sunday School. However, we have seen that this propensity to rate the factors lower does not adversely affect participation in the program when compared to the attendance patterns of females. The similar rankings of the factors by both genders is a boon for program planners. In attracting both males and females, similar factors can be stressed for maximum participation. The results showed that there were significant differences in the way male and female respondents viewed the importance of learning just for the sake of learning and external expectations. These factors carry more

weight with women than with men. Program planners must be aware of these significant differences across genders.

### *Marital Status*

The survey gave people five options for stating their marital status which included single, married, divorced, separated, and widowed. The number of respondents in some of these categories was quite low, so I have grouped together those who selected single, divorced, separated, or widowed under the broad category of "Single." Within this "Single" category, 48.3% said they were single, 10.3% said they were divorced, 13.8% said that they were separated and 27.6% said that they were widowed. It is also important to realize what ages are represented within the "Single" category as the groups tended to be dominated by those in the youngest age group born after 1969 (44.4%) with some representation from the four oldest groups (see Figure 5). With this in mind, the results for the single category may reflect a younger perspective.

**Figure 5. Ages of those in single category**



The mean scores for single and married respondents revealed some interesting differences between these two groups (see Table 19). Single people rated spiritual growth lower than married people, but rated relevance higher. Practicality, teaching style and an intergenerational learning environment were given a similar rating by both groups. Social

contact was rated higher by those in the single group. The greatest discrepancy in mean scores occurred in the learning category with a difference of 0.59. When the rating responses are collapsed into three categories to increase the number of responses for each cell (see Table 20), the difference between how single people and married people rated learning is statistically significant ( $p=.020$ ). The single category is dominated by young adults who may have recently finished High School and may be participating in post-secondary education. Their more recent contact with formal learning may contribute towards a belief that learning has greater importance. However, when the single group is broken down into two age groups (those born between 1970-present and those born before 1970), there is no significant difference in the way the groups rate the importance of learning ( $p=.410$ ). The result indicates that single people, irrespective of age, place more importance on learning for the sake of learning in Adult Sunday School than married people.

**Table 19: Mean Scores and Rank for Nine Factors by Marital Status**

|                              | Single |      | Married |      | Combined | Chi-Square |
|------------------------------|--------|------|---------|------|----------|------------|
|                              | Mean   | Rank | Mean    | Rank | Mean     |            |
| <b>Spiritual Growth</b>      | 4.50   | 2    | 4.62    | 1    | 4.60     | 0.587      |
| <b>Relevance</b>             | 4.60   | 1    | 4.43    | 2    | 4.45     | 0.328      |
| <b>Practicality</b>          | 4.42   | 3    | 4.28    | 3    | 4.29     | 0.902      |
| <b>Teaching Style</b>        | 4.04   | 4    | 3.97    | 4    | 3.98     | 0.587      |
| <b>Share Experiences</b>     | 3.38   | 6    | 3.19    | 5    | 3.22     | 0.689      |
| <b>Social Contact</b>        | 3.46   | 5    | 3.16    | 6    | 3.20     | 0.305      |
| <b>Learning</b>              | 3.22   | 7    | 2.63    | 7    | 2.70     | 0.089      |
| <b>Intergenerational</b>     | 2.42   | 8    | 2.5     | 8    | 2.49     | 0.402      |
| <b>External Expectations</b> | 2.29   | 9    | 1.95    | 9    | 2.00     | 0.341      |

**Table 20: Relationship Between Marital Status and Learning Just for the Sake of Learning**

| Marital Status |                   | Not significant or of little significance | Somewhat significant | Fairly significant, or very significant | Total |
|----------------|-------------------|---|----------------------|---|-------|
|                |                   |   |                      |   |       |
| Single         | Count             | 5   | 7                    | 11                                      | 23    |
|                | Expected Count    | 9.4                                       | 7.8                  | 5.8                                     | 23.0  |
|                | Percent           | 21.7                                      | 30.4                 | 47.8                                    | 100.0 |
|                | Adjusted Residual | -2.0                                      | -0.4                 | 2.7                                     |       |
| Married        | Count             | 68  | 53                   | 34                                      | 155   |
|                | Expected Count    | 63.6                                      | 52.2                 | 39.2                                    | 155.0 |
|                | Percent           | 43.9                                      | 34.2                 | 21.9                                    | 100.0 |
|                | Adjusted Residual | 2.0                                       | 0.4                  | -2.7                                    |       |

*Family Makeup*

Langley Evangelical Free Church is dominated by young families. A study that was conducted in January, 1999 showed a comparison of the various groups at the church (see Figure 4 on p. 41). The chart clearly shows that children and their parents dominate the demographic landscape at LEFC. The reality of young family dominance in the church makes it imperative that their preferences are considered in the reconstruction of an Adult Sunday School program.

The mean scores of those who do not have children living at home and those who do once again provide a basis for comparison (see Table 21). The differences in the scores for most of the factors are negligible. As we have seen in some of the other group comparisons, those with children gave social contact a higher rating than sharing experiences. Could it be that those with young ones under their wings crave social contact? Do those without children have a greater desire to share experiences assuming that some in this group are older? It is not surprising that those with children gave a higher rating to an intergenerational learning environment. This difference is significant ( $p=.021$ ) as seen in the breakdown of responses in Table 22. Those with children living at home are more likely to be attracted to Adult Sunday School by an intergenerational flavor than those who do not have children living at home.

**Table 21: Mean Scores and Rank for Nine Factors by Family Makeup**

|                              | Without Children |      | With Children |      | Combined Mean | Chi-Square |
|------------------------------|------------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------------|
|                              | Mean             | Rank | Mean          | Rank |               |            |
| <b>Spiritual Growth</b>      | 4.63             | 1    | 4.58          | 1    | 4.60          | 0.739      |
| <b>Relevance</b>             | 4.51             | 2    | 4.42          | 2    | 4.45          | 0.242      |
| <b>Practicality</b>          | 4.33             | 3    | 4.28          | 3    | 4.29          | 0.285      |
| <b>Teaching Style</b>        | 4.07             | 4    | 3.92          | 4    | 3.98          | 0.765      |
| <b>Share Experiences</b>     | 3.29             | 5    | 3.18          | 6    | 3.22          | 0.239      |
| <b>Social Contact</b>        | 3.21             | 6    | 3.2           | 5    | 3.20          | 0.393      |
| <b>Learning</b>              | 2.90             | 7    | 2.59          | 8    | 2.70          | 0.132      |
| <b>Intergenerational</b>     | 2.20             | 8    | 2.63          | 7    | 2.49          | 0.021      |
| <b>External Expectations</b> | 2.18             | 9    | 1.92          | 9    | 2.00          | 0.186      |

**Table 22: Relationship Between Family Makeup and Intergenerational Learning Environment**

| Marital Status |                   | Not significant | Of little significance | Somewhat significant | Fairly significant | Very significant | Total |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------|
|                |                   | Single          | Count                  | 25                   | 32                 | 26               |       |
|                | Expected Count    | 32.2            | 27.6                   | 27.6                 | 22.3               | 5.3              | 115.0 |
|                | Percent           | 21.7            | 27.8                   | 22.6                 | 20.9               | 7                | 100.0 |
|                | Adjusted Residual | -2.6            | 1.6                    | -0.6                 | 0.7                | 2.1              |       |
| Married        | Count             | 24              | 10                     | 16                   | 10                 | 0                | 60    |
|                | Expected Count    | 16.8            | 14.4                   | 14.4                 | 11.7               | 2.7              | 60.0  |
|                | Percent           | 40              | 16.7                   | 26.7                 | 16.7               | 0                | 100.0 |
|                | Adjusted Residual | 2.6             | -1.6                   | 0.6                  | -0.7               | -2.1             |       |

*Educational Level*

What is the relationship between educational attainment and the nine factors being addressed in this study? Is there any point in knowing if differences exist between groups based on their educational achievements? The value in understanding how different groups rate these nine factors is that the knowledge gleaned can be used to attract people within the various subgroups that exist in a church population. Certain subgroups may require a different approach than other groups. In most cases, the issue is the degree to which each factor is emphasized. However, in this study there are no significant differences between the various educational groups (see Table 23). Program planners can assume that education does

not have a significant impact on how people rated the nine factors as to their importance in attracting them to Adult Sunday School

**Table 23: Mean Scores and Rank for Nine Factors by Educational Level**

|                       | Less than High Sch. |   | High School |   | College Diploma |   | Bachelor's Degree |   | Master's/ Doctorate |   | All  | Chi-Square |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---|-------------|---|-----------------|---|-------------------|---|---------------------|---|------|------------|
|                       | Mean                | R | Mean        | R | Mean            | R | Mean              | R | Mean                | R |      |            |
| Spiritual Growth      | 4.71                | 1 | 4.65        | 1 | 4.54            | 1 | 4.63              | 1 | 4.42                | 1 | 4.60 | 0.636      |
| Relevance             | 4.50                | 2 | 4.46        | 2 | 4.38            | 2 | 4.58              | 2 | 4.33                | 2 | 4.45 | 0.971      |
| Practicality          | 4.27                | 4 | 4.44        | 3 | 4.21            | 3 | 4.34              | 3 | 4.00                | 3 | 4.29 | 0.777      |
| Teaching Style        | 4.42                | 3 | 4.04        | 4 | 3.93            | 4 | 3.89              | 4 | 3.82                | 4 | 3.98 | 0.460      |
| Share Experiences     | 3.50                | 5 | 3.28        | 6 | 3.21            | 6 | 3.08              | 5 | 3.18                | 5 | 3.22 | 0.513      |
| Social Contact        | 3.09                | 6 | 3.33        | 5 | 3.31            | 5 | 2.89              | 6 | 3.08                | 6 | 3.20 | 0.570      |
| Learning              | 2.42                | 7 | 2.69        | 8 | 2.73            | 7 | 2.83              | 7 | 2.50                | 8 | 2.70 | 0.367      |
| Intergenerational     | 2.10                | 9 | 2.74        | 7 | 2.46            | 8 | 2.24              | 8 | 2.58                | 7 | 2.49 | 0.336      |
| External Expectations | 2.25                | 8 | 1.90        | 9 | 2.14            | 9 | 1.92              | 9 | 1.75                | 9 | 2.00 | 0.629      |

R - Represents the ranking of each of the nine factors

### *Small Group Involvement*

The advent of small group Bible studies into church life has led to discussion amongst church educators as to the relationship between Adult Sunday School and small group Bible studies. LEFC launched their small group ministry several years ago. Are the needs that were previously being met in Adult Sunday School now addressed in these small group contexts? Do those who attend a small group view the nine factors differently than those who do not meet in a small group setting? These are important considerations for any church that offers adult education in both Adult Sunday School and small group Bible studies.

The majority of people (62.3%) who participated in the survey said that they attended a small group Bible study (see Figure 6). Of those who said that they participated in a small group study, 93% acknowledged that they attended a small group at least two times a month. A higher percentage of those who said they participated in a small group acknowledged that there is definitely a need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC (63.2% versus 54.3%). The mean scores for the question about the need for Adult Sunday School also show this pattern as those involved in small groups scored 4.54 and those not involved scored 4.40 (see Table 24).

This difference is not significant ( $p=.360$ ). A similar pattern was seen as it related to the personal value of Adult Sunday School if it changed according to their recommendations. A higher percentage of those who attended a small group (20% versus 16.2%) said that Adult Sunday School under these circumstances would be of great value (see Table 25). It is important to note that those who did not attend a small group did have a higher percentage of respondents who said that Adult Sunday School would have considerable value (51.5% versus 45.5%). The difference between the mean scores for this question was negligible with those involved in small groups scoring 3.82 and those not involved scoring 3.78. Once again, this difference is not statistically significant ( $p=.376$ ). According to the responses to the question about whether people would attend an Adult Sunday School that met their expectations, those who participate in a small group were more likely to say yes (30.1% versus 28.2%), or probably yes (52.2% versus 50.7%). In Table 26, we see that the mean scores were once again higher for those involved in small groups (4.05 versus 3.99). However, the difference in scores is not significant ( $p=.958$ ). When the Adult Sunday School attendance records of both groups are analyzed, there are no significant differences in attendance patterns ( $p=.292$ ). We can conclude from these results that those who attend a small group and those who do not have similar perspectives on the perceived need for Adult Sunday School, its perceived personal value and whether, or not they would attend the program in the future. The past attendance of these two groups does not give any reason to believe that their future attendance will be significantly different.

Figure 6. Participation in a small group bible study

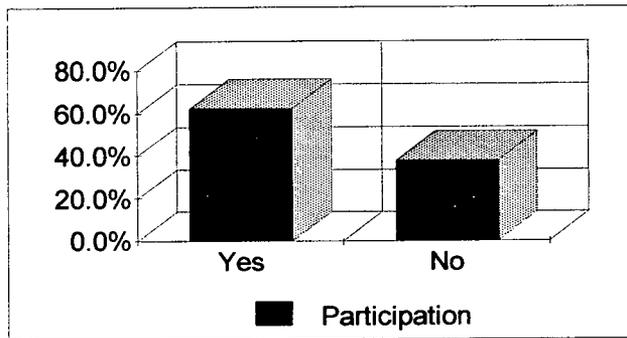


Table 24: Participation in a Small Group Bible Study Crosstabulated with Perceived Need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC

| Involvement in small group |         | Do you think there is a need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC? |              |              |                | Mean | Total |
|----------------------------|---------|---|--------------|--------------|----------------|------|-------|
|                            |         | Probably not  | I don't know | Probably Yes | Definitely Yes |      |       |
| Yes                        | Count   | 1   | 9            | 33           | 74             | 4.54 | 117   |
|                            | Percent | 0.9   | 7.7          | 28.2         | 63.2           |      | 100.0 |
| No                         | Count   |   | 10           | 22           | 38             | 4.40 | 70    |
|                            | Percent |   | 14.3         | 31.4         | 54.3           |      | 100.0 |
| Total                      | Count   | 1   | 19           | 55           | 112            | 4.49 | 187   |
|                            | Percent | 0.5   | 10.2         | 29.4         | 59.9           |      | 100.0 |

Table 25: Participation in a Small Group Bible Study Crosstabulated with Potential Value of Adult Sunday School

| Involvement in small group |         | If Adult Sunday School changed according to your recommendations, how valuable would it be to you? |              |            |                    |             | Mean | Total |
|----------------------------|---------|--|--------------|------------|--------------------|-------------|------|-------|
|                            |         | No value   | Little value | Some value | Considerable value | Great value |      |       |
| Yes                        | Count   | 2  |              | 36         | 50                 | 22          | 3.82 | 110   |
|                            | Percent | 1.8  |              | 32.7       | 45.5               | 20.0        |      | 100.0 |
| No                         | Count   | 1  | 2            | 19         | 35                 | 11          | 3.78 | 68    |
|                            | Percent | 1.5  | 2.9          | 27.9       | 51.5               | 16.2        |      | 100.0 |
| Total                      | Count   | 3  | 2            | 55         | 85                 | 33          | 3.80 | 178   |
|                            | Percent | 1.7  | 1.1          | 30.9       | 47.8               | 18.5        |      | 100.0 |

**Table 26: Participation in a Small Group Bible Study Crosstabulated with Potential Attendance in Adult Sunday School**

| Involvement in small group |         | Would you attend an Adult Sunday School that met your expectations? |              |              |              |      | Mean | Total |
|----------------------------|---------|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|------|------|-------|
|                            |         | No  | Probably not | I don't know | Probably yes | Yes  |      |       |
| Yes                        | Count   | 2   | 4            | 14           | 59           | 34   | 4.05 | 113   |
|                            | Percent | 1.8   | 3.5          | 12.4         | 52.2         | 30.1 |      | 100.0 |
| No                         | Count   | 1   | 4            | 10           | 36           | 20   | 3.99 | 71    |
|                            | Percent | 1.4   | 5.6          | 14.1         | 50.7         | 28.2 |      | 100.0 |
| Total                      | Count   | 3   | 8            | 24           | 95           | 54   | 4.03 | 184   |
|                            | Percent | 1.6   | 4.3          | 13.0         | 51.6         | 29.3 |      | 100.0 |

The mean scores that each group recorded for the nine factors provide some additional information as to the preferences of these two groups within the sample population (see Table 27). Small group participants rated spiritual growth higher than those not involved in a small group. As we look at the breakdown of responses in Table 28, we see that almost 20% more people in the small group category said that spiritual growth would be a very significant factor in determining whether or not they would attend Adult Sunday School (71.1% versus 52.9%). This is a noteworthy trend. From this study, it is impossible to tell if those who choose to attend a small group already have a predisposition towards spiritual growth, or if the small group learning experience cultivates this desire to grow spiritually.

**Table 27: Mean Scores and Rank for Nine Factors by Small Group Involvement**

|                              | Yes  |      | No   |      | Combined Mean | Chi-Square |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|---------------|------------|
|                              | Mean | Rank | Mean | Rank |               |            |
| <b>Spiritual Growth</b>      | 4.68 | 1    | 4.46 | 1    | 4.60          | 0.145      |
| <b>Relevance</b>             | 4.56 | 2    | 4.31 | 2    | 4.45          | 0.198      |
| <b>Practicality</b>          | 4.40 | 3    | 4.15 | 3    | 4.29          | 0.040      |
| <b>Teaching Style</b>        | 3.97 | 4    | 4.00 | 4    | 3.98          | 0.761      |
| <b>Share Experiences</b>     | 3.35 | 5    | 3.01 | 6    | 3.22          | 0.098      |
| <b>Social Contact</b>        | 3.14 | 6    | 3.30 | 5    | 3.20          | 0.136      |
| <b>Learning</b>              | 2.65 | 7    | 2.77 | 7    | 2.70          | 0.515      |
| <b>Intergenerational</b>     | 2.63 | 8    | 2.24 | 8    | 2.49          | 0.198      |
| <b>External Expectations</b> | 2.08 | 9    | 1.85 | 9    | 2.00          | 0.319      |

**Table 28: Participation in a Small Group Bible Study  
Crosstabulated with Spiritual Growth Factor**

| Involvement in<br>small group |         | Spiritual Growth        |                       |                     | Mean | Total |
|-------------------------------|---------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------|-------|
|                               |         | Somewhat<br>significant | Fairly<br>significant | Very<br>significant |      |       |
| Yes                           | Count   | 3                       | 30                    | 81                  | 4.68 | 114   |
|                               | Percent | 2.6                     | 26.3                  | 71.1                |      | 100.0 |
| No                            | Count   | 5                       | 28                    | 37                  | 4.46 | 70    |
|                               | Percent | 7.1                     | 40.0                  | 52.9                |      | 100.0 |
| Total                         | Count   | 8                       | 58                    | 118                 | 4.60 | 184   |
|                               | Percent | 4.3                     | 31.5                  | 64.1                |      | 100.0 |

Members of small groups rated six of the nine factors higher than those who do not attend a small group. In addition to spiritual growth, those who said that they were in a small group gave higher ratings to relevance, practicality, sharing experiences, intergenerational and external expectations. The mean scores for teaching style were almost the same, but those who are not small group members did rate social contact and learning higher. The only factor with significantly different scores was practicality ( $p=.040$ ). Table 29 shows that when the rating categories are collapsed into three categories, those who participate in a small group Bible study are more likely to be attracted to Adult Sunday School because of the practical nature of the content. It is uncertain why this is the case. Are small group participants more conditioned to receive instruction that is highly practical? Do they want some of that small group practicality transferred to the Adult Sunday School forum? Further studies could explore this relationship.

**Table 29: Relationship Between Small Group Involvement and Practicality of Content**

| <b>Small Group Involvement</b> |                   | <b>Not significant or of little significance</b> | <b>Somewhat significant</b> | <b>Fairly significant, or very significant</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|--------------|
| Yes                            | Count             | 0  | 7                           | 105  | 112          |
|                                | Expected Count    | 1.9  | 8.8                         | 101.3  | 112.0        |
|                                | Percent           | 0  | 6.3                         | 93.8   | 100.0        |
|                                | Adjusted Residual | -2.3   | -1.0                        | 2.0  |              |
| No                             | Count             | 3  | 7                           | 56   | 66           |
|                                | Expected Count    | 1.1  | 5.2                         | 59.7   | 66.0         |
|                                | Percent           | 4.5  | 10.6                        | 84.8   | 100.0        |
|                                | Adjusted Residual | 2.3  | 1.0                         | -2.0   |              |

The research model I have employed for this study acknowledged the important role of demographics and other factors in determining whether or not adults will participate in Adult Sunday School (see Figure 1 on p. 33). These factors can have a direct bearing on participation, or can exert their influence on mediating factors such as previous experiences in Adult Sunday School, or current involvement in the church. It is important for Christian educators to know the tendencies of groupings within the church. These groups can usually be quickly identified and attracted to Adult Sunday School on the basis of what is important to them. Any attempt to increase participation in Adult Sunday School must include a sensitivity to the needs and preferences of subgroups within the target population.

What factors influence adults' decisions about whether or not they will participate in Adult Sunday School? This study has focused on nine factors that exert varying degrees of influence on people as they make decisions about Adult Sunday School. The factors, ranked in order of importance in determining whether people will attend Adult Sunday School, are spiritual growth, relevance, practical content, teaching style, sharing experience, social contact, learning, intergenerational and external expectations. The comments of survey respondents have provided insight into what each factor looks like at a programming level. However, we have also seen that other factors such as age, gender, marital status, family makeup, educational level and small group involvement may effect the decision-making

process. The irony for program planners is that a program may be designed according to peoples' preferences and still fail to attract people in a maximum way. We must now move on to look at detracting factors, or barriers that can hinder participation in Adult Sunday School.

## **CHAPTER FIVE FACTORS THAT HINDER PARTICIPATION**

My analysis of attracting factors which influence adults' decisions about whether or not to participate in Adult Sunday School had a quantitative and qualitative base. One of the survey questions asked respondents to rate the importance of nine factors that might draw them to Adult Sunday School. Some of the open-ended questions were also designed to elicit responses related to factors that attract. However, when it came to determining barriers to participation I decided to forego a quantitative analysis and focus on the qualitative responses. In retrospect, it may have been helpful to have a question on the survey that asked respondents to rate the importance of several barriers. However, my decision to gather data about barriers from two open-ended questions did allow respondents to respond freely without being influenced about those factors which I thought were important.

I have broken down the respondents' comments about barriers into three categories which correspond to Cross' (1981) classic breakdown of barriers: situational barriers, institutional barriers and dispositional barriers. I have changed the titles "institutional barriers" and "dispositional barriers" to "organizational barriers" and "personal barriers" respectively. This semantic maneuver is an attempt to make the terms more understandable to religious educators practicing today.

### **Situational Barriers**

Situational barriers refer to those barriers that are generally context-specific and may change for an individual over time. The situational barrier that was mentioned most often by survey respondents was other commitments. Another barrier was family issues as several people perceived that children and spouse have a detrimental effect on their participation in Adult Sunday School. Other people stated that they did not have time to attend Sunday School. All of these barriers relate to peoples' priorities. Where does Adult Sunday School fit

into the scheme of things? Perhaps a closer look at the comments made by survey participants will reveal some important information about these barriers.

### *Other Commitments*

People living in urban settings in North America are typically characterized by over commitment and emotional fatigue. The possibilities for involvement are endless. Many people operate in several realms such as work, community and church which each area vying for their attention. The survey responses showed that people have other commitments both inside and outside the church which they believe hinders their participation in Adult Sunday School.

### *Non-church Commitments*

In past generations, Sunday was given sacred status in North American society. A Gallup poll conducted in 1946 showed that two-thirds of Canadians claimed to attend church weekly (Motz, 1990). The majority of people attended church and believed that Sunday should be a day for corporate worship and personal rest. The times have changed. Many businesses are open on Sundays. Sports and leisure activities abound on Sundays. The result has been that some people no longer commit to regular participation in church ministries on Sunday mornings. One survey respondent could make it to the church service, but could not attend Adult Sunday School because of work. Shift work mitigates against consistent attendance in Adult Sunday School, especially when coupled with the misconception that weekly attendance in the program is a necessary requirement. One person admitted that his role as a baseball coach made it difficult to attend Adult Sunday School. Several parents stated that their children's participation in sports negated their involvement in Sunday School. One respondent said, "Sunday is the only time our family can get together so we make time for them." Two of the people who filled out the survey stated that they brought people with them to church who only wanted to attend the worship service. One person confessed that a Christian television

program kept her away from Adult Sunday School. Other people cited situational barriers such as taking further education and planning a wedding as factors that hindered their participation in Adult Sunday School. All of these situational barriers are beyond the direct control of program planners. However, some of them can be addressed through tactful communication that helps people determine the right priorities for their lives. Adult Sunday School probably should not be a top priority for some people. As people are given more tools for making the right choices, it will either reinforce their current practice, or challenge them to make changes in keeping with new convictions. The goal would be to help people as much as possible to structure their lives according to informed personal values.

#### *Church Commitments*

Churches are constantly looking for personnel to run their programs. Sunday morning is often a busy time for churches. Staff is required for a host of ministries such as the nursery, children's and youth Sunday School, worship team, library and hospitality ministries such as ushering and greeting. One of the questions in the survey asked people to indicate their current involvement in Sunday morning ministries. The results showed that approximately 17% were involved in hospitality ministries, 6% in the church library, 14% in the nursery, 15% were teaching Sunday School or Wee College and 6% were committed to serving on the worship team. Some people may be even participating in more than one Sunday morning ministry. In fact, almost 9% of the survey respondents would fall into that category. It is important to realize that some ministry commitments represent a larger barrier to participation in Adult Sunday School than others. Greeting people before the service acts as a relatively small barrier compared to teaching a children's Sunday School class that runs concurrent with the adult electives. Table 30 gives a breakdown of how many Sundays a month people are involved in Sunday morning programs with 12.4% having heavy involvement (three or more Sundays/month), 24.2% with moderate involvement (one to two Sundays/month), 14.9% with light involvement (less than one Sunday/month) and 48.5% with no involvement. It is

instructive that 91.7% of those who said that they are involved in Sunday ministries three or more Sundays per month are worship team members and Children's Ministry workers. Another 70.2% of those involved in Sunday ministries one or two Sundays per month are also participants in these two major ministry areas. The two ministry areas that require the greatest time commitment on a Sunday morning are also the ministry areas that the majority of ministry participants engage in on a regular (three or more Sundays), or semi-regular (one or two Sundays) basis. It would be fairly safe to assume that the 55 people in this category are unlikely to attend Adult Sunday School within the current format. Those people involved in other ministries, or who lead a Sunday morning ministry less than one Sunday per month are more likely to attend Adult Sunday School. An evaluation of the entire Sunday morning ministry of the church is important in determining whether or not the current format could be changed so that those who are currently occupied with ministry endeavors could attend Adult Sunday School. Of course, any changes must not compromise other core values which are an inherent part of Sunday morning programming.

**Table 30: Involvement in Sunday Ministries per Month**

| <b>Responses</b>         | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Cumulative<br/>Percent</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| 3 or more Sundays/month  | 24               | 12.4           | 12.4                          |
| 1-2 Sundays/month        | 47               | 24.2           | 36.6                          |
| Less than 1 Sunday/month | 29               | 14.9           | 51.5                          |
| No involvement           | 94               | 48.5           | 100.0                         |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>194</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |                               |
| Missing                  | 1                |                |                               |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>195</b>       |                |                               |

*Lack of Time*

Time is a precious commodity. As we have seen, people make choices about how they spend their time. For some, their work schedule dictates their availability on Sundays. Others

have the luxury of charting their own destiny on Sundays with minimal constraints. Several people responded in the survey by saying that lack of time was a reality that undermined their attendance in Adult Sunday School. This may also have played a part in the decision-making process of those who said that they chose to go to the worship service instead of Sunday School. It is difficult to determine if the "lack of time" response refers to other concrete commitments on Sunday, or if it reflects a lack of interest in Adult Sunday School. The adage, "You make time for what is important to you," may provide insight into this category of responses. The underlying issue for some people may relate to the priorities they have knowingly, or unknowingly set for their lives. Public awareness should be raised as to the potential benefits of Adult Sunday School, so that people can make an informed decision as to whether or not they will attend. The conundrums many people experience as they wrestle with time shortages may also suggest that an adult class on time management may be a timely course offering.

#### *Family Issues*

Another set of barriers that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School are family issues. A recurring comment amongst parents of younger children is that it is hard to attend a service and Sunday School when you have children. This comment is supported in practice over the past year as 69.6% of the respondents with one or more children under six years of age did not attend Adult Sunday School compared to 46.7% of those without preschool children. It is interesting to note that there were no respondents with preschool children who said that they attended Adult Sunday School on a regular basis this past year. The needs of this young parent group must be considered as they represented over one-quarter of the survey population. One respondent said that attending a service and Adult Sunday School made it "too long to keep [a] preschooler in nursery." Another person maintained that with a small child they only have the "attention span to last one service." Several people mentioned that young children often need naps in the morning and so their

schedule determines parental involvement in Sunday morning programs. The needs of younger children can be an important barrier in determining parental participation in Adult Sunday School.

Families with older children were more likely to participate in Adult Sunday School than families with preschool children. In fact, families with children who are six years old, or older are much more likely to attend Adult Sunday School than the rest of the survey population. The results show that 36.1% of those with children between the ages of six and twelve did not attend Adult Sunday School this past year compared to 63.9% of those without children in this age category. The findings are similar for parents of children who are 13 years old, or older. Only 35.8% of the adults in this group did not attend Adult Sunday School this past year compared to 60.1% of those without children in this age category. Older children may have greater stamina and can last for three hours on a Sunday morning. The quality of the children's programs and their provision in both services may also encourage parents to attend their own class.

For those parents with older children, a reason for not attending Adult Sunday School that emerged from the survey comments was their children's involvement in sports and other activities. One parent said, "Our choice of when to attend church depends on sports schedules, so it changes every week." Another person simply replied that they did not attend Adult Sunday School this past year with the words, "Taxi service." A few parents also suggested that their school-age children do not like staying the whole morning. Fatigue may be a problem, but it was also suggested that the current children's programs are not always consistent enough to warrant ongoing participation on the part of children. The current format on Sunday mornings requires consistent and dynamic children's programs during both services, so that parents feel comfortable leaving their children for three hours on a day traditionally devoted to family activities.

Family issues that act as barriers to participation in Adult Sunday School were not limited to parental concerns. Some respondents mentioned spousal influence as a factor that had a

negative impact on their attendance in the program. One person bluntly stated that her "husband does not want to go to Sunday School." Another person said that her "husband is a non believer and he resents too much time spent at church." The barriers erected through spousal influence did not emerge as a strong theme in the comments made by survey respondents. However, it may be more pervasive than the comments reveal. How much influence do spouses have on each other when it comes to making decisions about participating in Adult Sunday School? Further studies on adult participation in Sunday School could more accurately measure the influence of this factor.

### **Organizational Barriers**

Organizational barriers are those factors that have their source in organizational structures, or procedures. Program planners usually have some control over these factors. Systemic problems within an organization may also cause barriers that are more difficult for program planners to address. I have categorized the organizational barriers mentioned by survey respondents into obstacles related to program relevance, program promotion and Sunday morning format.

### *Program Relevance*

Relevance is a key factor in determining whether or not people will attend Adult Sunday School. A perception of relevance reinforced by a relevant experience in Adult Sunday School can motivate people to attend. A negative perception which may or may not be informed by corroborating experiences can do just the opposite. Over 20% of the survey respondents stated that the topics represented one reason why they did not regularly attend Adult Sunday School during the past year. As one person clearly stated, "Class topics didn't interest me." Another person asserted, "There hasn't been a very good option of Sunday School Adult classes - often only a Newcomer's Class." Other respondents referred to their current needs by saying the "subject matter of studies offered - not applicable to perceived

needs" and the "topics weren't relevant to my life at that point." One person thought that the classes were geared to special interest groups while another person maintained that "LEFC Sunday School classes seem more applicable to men than women." A few people mentioned their disdain for certain types of teaching styles. It is obvious from these comments that Adult Sunday School must not only have relevant content that is taught in a relevant way, but it must be marketed in ways that highlight its relevance.

### *Program Promotion*

The perception of relevance often influences initial attendance in Adult Sunday School more than the actual relevance of the courses. The appropriate promotion of Adult Sunday School is an important issue in increasing participation in the program. Some people may not even know what is being offered, or that it is acceptable to attend on a periodic basis. Others may not think to get involved. An effective advertising campaign will not only inform as many people as possible about adult electives, but it will also present them in ways which accent their potential relevance for attendees.

### *Sunday Morning Format*

A number of format issues arose as people vented their frustration over the current Sunday morning schedule. Several people expressed their displeasure over having adult electives during the first service and children's Sunday School during the second service. One person summed up this sentiment by saying, "We attended the worship service while our children were in Sunday School. The options available to our children during the other service did not suit our children." Other respondents bemoaned the lack of consistency in the children's programs during the first service. Consistency in the adult offerings was also mentioned as a reason for attending Adult Sunday School more in the past. One respondent opined, "Adult Sunday School used to be predictable - it has evolved to its current sporadic state." Another person addressed the inconsistencies in the program by succinctly stating their

reason for attending more in the past, "There was adult S.S." Ouch! One person focused on the lack of a consistent teacher as a reason for avoiding the program while another thought that the quality of teachers was better when they used to attend more. Others attended Adult Sunday School more in the past because of the discussion-orientation of the classes. Some people reminisced about past experiences when the whole family could go to their Sunday School classes at the same time. For some it was easier to attend Sunday School when there was only one service preceded by Sunday School. Others found that the classes they found attractive were offered at a time that conflicted with their schedules. Some respondents mentioned that they used to attend Adult Sunday School more when it was grouped by age. One person said that they attended a homebuilder's class because "it was nice to meet with our friends for Sunday School." Some of these format issues can easily be addressed without violating core emphases within Adult Sunday School, or the church as a whole. Other recommended changes require a more careful analysis of possible ramifications to determine if the potential benefits outweigh the potential costs.

### **Personal Barriers**

Personal barriers refer to those internal factors that keep people away from Adult Sunday School. These dispositional factors are not always reported and so their representation in the survey results is noteworthy. Some people expressed their lack of connection with the church while others said that they were connected in other group settings which met their needs. Another set of personal barriers related to health issues such as physical and emotional well-being. Some people simply listed "age" as a reason for not attending Adult Sunday School. A final personal barrier that was suggested in the survey comments was a lack of commitment. Adult educational leaders can only begin to dismantle some of these barriers through a sensitive, needs-based approach to program planning that features extensive consultation and empowerment.

### *Lack of Connection*

I feel disappointed when I hear about people that do not feel connected in the church. I somehow feel responsible for their plight, even though I know that I can not force them into groups where they might establish meaningful relationships. Two people said that they had started looking for a new church and presumably did not want to start any other commitments at LEFC. This theme was repeated by a man who used to attend Adult Sunday School more when he was "more involved in the church." Some people believe that there must be some sort of commitment to the church before one can attend Adult Sunday School. One person did not attend because he was "new to the church" and probably did not feel comfortable breaking into established groups. Another respondent expanded on this notion by equating coming to a new church with a year of transition. Personal turmoil can act as a barrier to participation in Adult Sunday School. One distraught respondent when asked about why they were not a regular participant in Adult Sunday School this past year wrote, "Myself - inner conflicts." Personal barriers are often characterized by the messiness of life. Christian educators in the church must be active in building bridges with people so that they can experience the benefits of membership in a learning and growing community.

### *Needs Met Elsewhere*

Some people said they did attend Adult Sunday School because they did not feel connected while others did not attend because their needs were met in other ways. Based on the survey responses, a number of people believe that other small groups such as Growth Groups, or the women's Thursday morning Bible studies meet their needs. For these people, Adult Sunday School may appear redundant. The assumption is that Adult Sunday School meets the same needs as the other small groups in the church. One person claimed that their "spiritual needs fulfilled well at church service and my own reading." It is interesting that several people said that they used to attend Adult Sunday School more because of the fellowship. Does that mean that Adult Sunday School does not address this need anymore, or

have people found other ways to meet this relational need? As I have read the surveys and listened to peoples' feedback in the discussion groups, it has become apparent that Adult Sunday School can play a unique role in the life of the church. Worship services provide a venue for a one-way presentation of information. On the other end of the teaching spectrum are small group Bible studies which facilitate a discussion-based approach to adult education. Adult Sunday School can occupy the middle ground between these two important mediums in adult Christian education as it combines presentation with interaction. It does not have to be a redundant program.

#### *Age and Health Reasons*

Another set of personal barriers which can stymie participation in Adult Sunday School pertain to age and health considerations. The two factors are not necessarily directly related. Those who cited age as a reason for not attending Adult Sunday School may have experienced deteriorating health, or their age may be a barrier for other reasons such as lack of confidence. Unfortunately, the survey responses did not provide much insight into these factors related to age. Personal health certainly emerged as a deterrent to participation in Adult Sunday School. In at least one instance, a health-related reason was given by a younger woman who was "extremely nauseated due to pregnancy." One older respondent stated that her "loss of good hearing" influenced her decision to not attend Adult Sunday School. Another person said that "sitting through S.S. and then the worship service is just too tiring." One senior in her eighties asserted that she did not "like to get mobile too early." One person stated that the health of a family member was why he chose not to participate in Adult Sunday School. Some health concerns can never be fully addressed as they relate to participation in Adult Sunday School. However, format changes which shorten the amount of time spent in Adult Sunday School and a worship service may address some of the concerns related to aging.

### *Stressful Personal Life*

Those who cited stress as a reason for not regularly attending Adult Sunday School felt that they could not survive another obligation. Stress might originate at work, home, or other places. One respondent said that she "felt too overwhelmed with everyday things [like] work, house, husband, church, friends, bible study, family, etc. to get involved with anything else." Program planners within Adult Sunday School must be careful not to push people into participation beyond what they are capable of handling. Christian educators could also consider offering courses on stress management to help those on the brink of emotional suicide and to help prevent others from going down that slippery slope.

### *Lack of Commitment*

Commitment is a foundational component of participation in any educational program. Some people honestly expressed their lack of commitment as it related to attending Adult Sunday School. I applaud their openness. One person candidly gave their reason for not attending Adult Sunday School on a regular basis by saying, "I was lazy." Others placed a higher premium on sleep than participation in Adult Sunday School. Several people stated that they used to attend Adult Sunday School more in the past because they wanted to learn and grow. This may reflect Adult Sunday School's inability to provide learning and growing opportunities today, or it could reflect a waning desire to learn and grow on the part of these survey respondents. The latter possibility comes out in one respondent's reason for attending Adult Sunday School more in the past, "I wanted to learn more and be more like Jesus." Some people said that when they were new Christians they were more motivated to learn God's plan for their life and this passion to grow drew them to Adult Sunday School. Lack of commitment may not have been mentioned by the majority of respondents who did not regularly attend Adult Sunday School, but it is an important factor to consider as program planners seek to encourage long-term participation in Adult Sunday School.

Barriers impede progress. Barriers are important factors that must be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School. Extremely motivated people can be stopped in their tracks by an obstacle that appears insurmountable. Smaller barriers can have the same affect on those with less motivation. Personal and situational barriers are usually the most difficult barriers for program planners to address. They can be intensely personal and may require sensitive and sustained involvement on the part of program planners in the lives of potential attendees. Barriers of this nature are generally not responsive to "quick fix" solutions. A "wrecking ball" approach must be replaced with that of a potter who carefully and gradually shapes the clay in appropriate ways. Organizational barriers can often be addressed in a more forthright manner. Topics and schedules can sometimes be changed in a matter of minutes. Other changes involve many stakeholders and may require prolonged diplomatic consultation. It is imperative that program planners determine a plan of action for addressing barriers to participation in Adult Sunday School, so that a maximum number of people can participate in this potentially life-changing venue for adult education in the church.

## **CHAPTER SIX A GAME PLAN FOR CHANGE**

The second major purpose of this research study was to determine what changes could be made to increase participation in Adult Sunday School at Langley Evangelical Free Church. The surveys provided data about individual preferences that translated into some collective themes. I could have tried to prioritize these themes, but this process would have been fraught with my own biases. As people were filling out the survey, they had the option of volunteering to participate in a discussion group which would explore the implications of the survey results. I was amazed by the response. In all, 31 people participated in six discussion groups spread out over a three week period. These groups discussed the purposes of Adult Sunday School at LEFC and five areas that could be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School at LEFC. Their responses provided valuable insight into what changes could be made in Adult Sunday School to increase participation.

### **Discussion Groups**

My role in the discussion groups was that of a moderator. I tried to minimize my own contributions to the discussion while keeping the group focused on the topic at hand. This attempt to reduce researcher bias became more difficult as discussion groups met and certain themes began to emerge. I had to fight against the urge to get subsequent groups to say the same things as previous groups. Refreshments were served prior to each meeting to help people feel comfortable interacting with each other. At the start of the meetings, I made it clear that a summary of the survey results which I had placed in their church mailboxes would be the starting point for all of our discussions (Appendix E). I wanted to make sure that group members realized that they were not in the group to promote their own agendas, but rather to make sense of the collective wisdom of those who had returned their surveys. I then reminded each group about the purposes of my research and we read through the summary of

the responses to the four open-ended questions on the survey. Some people had not checked their mailboxes at the church and so for them this was the first time that they had seen the summary. The process of reading through the summary and explaining anything that was unclear helped form a framework for the ensuing discussion.

Each group was asked four questions about Adult Sunday School. The first question was, "Based on the survey results, what would you see as the purposes of Adult Sunday School at LEFC?" The intent of having each discussion group address the purposes of Adult Sunday School was to uncover some of the deeper issues that affect participation in Adult Sunday School. I thought it would also be important to make sure that people had an understanding of some core values which must be kept in focus when talking about factors that could be addressed to increase participation. For the purpose of my research, I wanted to develop a prioritized list of core values for Adult Sunday School which would provide a framework for all program planning. In every group, I let each person respond in turn so that everyone had a chance to contribute their ideas. As people were giving their input, I constructed a rough draft of a purpose statement based on the comments made by group members. After everyone had shared, I read the proposed purpose statement which was then refined by some of the groups. In most cases, I read the statement near the end of the meeting to once again get the group's endorsement.

The second question that each group tackled was, "Based on the survey results, what are five significant factors that could be addressed to increase the participation level in Adult Sunday School at LEFC?" In all but one of the groups, I went around the circle and let each person express their thoughts. The group that did not follow this protocol was a very expressive group that found it more difficult to follow established procedures. At least one person in another group misunderstood the question and thought it referred to interaction levels within an Adult Sunday School class. In subsequent groups, I clarified the intent of the question by defining participation in terms of attendance in Adult Sunday School.

The third question sought to add flesh to the five factors discussed in question two by asking, "What changes could be made in these five areas which might increase participation?" The comments for this question were often detailed and gave specific recommendations for massaging the various factors to increase participation levels. I did not prescribe any order to the discussion of the last two questions, but let people contribute in a spontaneous fashion as many times as they wanted.

The final question was, "Based on the survey results and group discussion, what would an 'ideal' Adult Sunday School program look like at LEFC?" Most groups found that this question had already been covered in the previous discussion. However, it did allow group members the opportunity to contribute any other ideas that might have been missed. A rough draft of a summary of the group discussion was sent out to group members, so that they could make additions, or revisions as necessary. I wanted to make sure that my summary captured the major themes that were discussed. No one contacted me with recommended changes, so I have assumed that the summaries must have been acceptable to those who read them.

I did not directly approach anyone to be in a discussion group. All of the participants responded affirmatively to the question about participating in a discussion group in the survey. I also had little control over who was in each group. I sent out a letter that listed six meeting times and people were supposed to choose one of those options. I was pleased with the diversity of people who responded to the query. I felt it was important to have a fairly equal representation from males and females and to have different age groups and ethnic groups represented in the discussion groups. Of the 31 people who participated in the discussions, 14 were females and 17 were males. My estimates on the age breakdown of groups members is shown in Table 31. It is noteworthy that there was representation from the youngest and oldest age categories as these groups reported the lowest regular (three to five Sundays/month) and semi-regular (one to two Sundays/month) attendance levels in Adult Sunday School over the past year (see Table 32). The largest age group in the church is those born between 1950-1969 which had good representation in the discussion groups. It is

interesting to note that only 3.2% of those born between 1960-1969 claimed that they attended Adult Sunday School on a regular basis and yet they had the largest number of participants in the discussion groups based on my estimates. This group, perhaps more than any other group, has the potential to increase participation levels in Adult Sunday School. However, as changes are made in Adult Sunday School, it is critical that the factors that are currently attracting people to Sunday School are not abandoned. Those survey respondents born between 1940-1949 are the most regular attendees of all the groups. Their participation in the discussion groups may have helped to give some balance between changing Adult Sunday School to attract new people and keeping some features in place to placate those who are presently attending.

**Table 31: Approximate Age of Discussion Group Members**

| <u>Approximate Birth Date</u> | <u>Number of Participants</u> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1970-present                  | 4                             |
| 1960-1969                     | 11                            |
| 1950-1959                     | 6                             |
| 1940-1949                     | 6                             |
| 1930-1939                     | 1                             |
| Before 1930                   | 3                             |

**Table 32: Average Participation in Adult Sunday School Over the Past Year by Age**

| <u>Date of Birth</u> |         | <u>3 or more<br/>Sundays/<br/>month</u> | <u>1-2<br/>Sundays/<br/>month</u> | <u>Less than 1<br/>Sunday/<br/>month</u> | <u>Have not<br/>attended this<br/>past year</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------------|---------|---|-----------------------------------|--|---|--------------|
| 1970-present         | Count   |   | 2                                 | 7  | 11  | 20           |
|                      | Percent |   | 10.0                              | 35.0                                     | 55.0  | 100.0        |
| 1960-1969            | Count   | 2                                       | 10                                | 20                                       | 31  | 63           |
|                      | Percent | 3.2                                     | 15.9                              | 31.7                                     | 49.2  | 100.0        |
| 1950-1959            | Count   | 9                                       | 7                                 | 12                                       | 21  | 49           |
|                      | Percent | 18.4                                    | 14.3                              | 24.5                                     | 42.9  | 100.0        |
| 1940-1949            | Count   | 1                                       | 3                                 | 1  | 10  | 15           |
|                      | Percent | 6.7                                     | 20.0                              | 6.7                                      | 66.7  | 100.0        |
| 1930-1939            | Count   | 1                                       | 4                                 | 4  | 6   | 15           |
|                      | Percent | 6.7                                     | 26.7                              | 26.7                                     | 40.0  | 100.0        |
| Before 1930          | Count   |   | 1                                 | 2  | 16  | 19           |
|                      | Percent |   | 5.3                               | 10.5                                     | 84.2  | 100.0        |

Langley Evangelical Free Church is mainly comprised of Caucasians with some African Canadian and Asian Canadian members. I was hoping that this ethnic mix would be reflected in the discussion groups and I was not disappointed. The discussion groups were dominated by Caucasian participants, but there was representation from two Filipino Canadians and one African Canadian. The discussion process also benefited from the contributions of a fairly recent immigrant from South Africa. The contributions of people from different ethnic groups are important as Adult Sunday School at LEFC seeks to be more multicultural in its approach to adult education.

#### *Group One*

Group One was made up of three males and two females. I did not include myself in any of the group tallies as my purpose was to facilitate discussion while trying to minimize my influence as much as possible. Based on my appraisal of the group, there was representation from every age group, except from those born after 1969 and those born between 1950-1959. The ethnic mix included one African Canadian and one Filipino Canadian. The group met on a Sunday night from 7:00-9:30. The group was more alert than some groups which may be due to the Sunday night meeting time and that none of the group members worked that day. The group discussed the purposes of Adult Sunday School and five factors that could be addressed to increase participation in the program at LEFC.

#### *Purposes of Adult Sunday School*

Each person in the group was given an opportunity to express what they believed were the purposes of Adult Sunday School at LEFC. One person stressed the importance of correlating the topics. This notion of a coordinated program could feature a graduated approach to instruction which would lead people through consecutive levels of education with a "mini-school" feel to it. Other group members maintained that spiritual growth should be a foundational purpose of Adult Sunday School. As one person asserted, we need to learn how

to "walk the talk." An older member of the group emphasized the importance of teaching with the assumption that knowledge is the precursor to spiritual growth. Others talked about topical relevance. After everyone had contributed their ideas, I proposed a preliminary purpose statement which was then refined during the subsequent group discussion. The refined purpose statement which was endorsed for a second time at the conclusion of the meeting reads:

*"Adult Sunday School exists at LEFC to provide a context for spiritual growth through structured instruction that is both in-depth and relevant to personal needs."*

Some discussion followed on the possibility of changing the name of Adult Sunday School to something like "Christian Education." This would facilitate the offering of classes on days other than Sunday and may be a more attractive label for those looking for something other than a "school" experience. There was also discussion on the phrase "structured instruction" which did not sound right to some group members. However, a suitable alternative was not forthcoming and so the phrase remained in the purpose statement.

#### *Factors to Address*

How does the purpose statement correlate with the five factors that were discussed in the second and third questions? Three of the factors covered all of the core values mentioned in the mission statement. The group asserted that a Bible focus, a progressive program structure, and topical relevance are factors that could be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School at LEFC. The underlying assumption is that these non-negotiable aspects of Adult Sunday School are currently being neglected. The group also recommended a format change which would see Adult Sunday School inserted into a larger middle block between services.

The group strongly advocated a move towards a much stronger Bible focus in Adult Sunday School. Bible classes should be offered on a regular basis and topical classes should have a strong Biblical base. Teachers for these classes would be required to have advanced Biblical knowledge and spiritual maturity. The suggestion was made that teachers of this caliber could be recruited from Christian training institutions in the area if there was a shortage of available candidates within the church.

The group discussed the idea of developing a longer-term focus for Adult Sunday School. The perception is that the current program is a "hit and miss" approach with a mixed bag of course offerings. It was suggested that the program could have a core curriculum which participants would progress through over a certain period of time. This core curriculum could represent Adult Sunday School in its totality, or it could be one track within an Adult Sunday School program that offered other electives.

The group struggled with the issue of relevance. What does it mean to have an Adult Sunday School program that is relevant to the personal needs of people? Does it mean focusing on spiritual needs which are common to all, or does it mean focusing on felt needs which often have an emotional base and are more dependent on individual circumstances? The group acknowledged that both were important, but that Adult Sunday School could perhaps be the best venue for focusing on spiritual needs through strong Biblical teaching.

The group discussed the possibility of creating a one hour block between services for Sunday School. This would give Sunday School a stronger presence on Sunday mornings as it would have its very own block of time. In fact, the dynamics would be similar to when LEFC had only one worship service prior to September, 1993 which was preceded by Sunday School. The Adult Sunday School program thrived within that format. It would be important to make sure that those involved in Sunday Morning programming including the church staff, worship team, and Sunday School teachers are sold on the idea before making drastic changes to an established format. The group discussed the importance of having a good children's program during the proposed middle block between services. If Children's

Sunday School was moved to a middle block, decisions would have to be made as to what would be offered for children during the first and second services. Kid's Choir could still be offered during the first service from September to December. A Junior Church program could also be offered during one, or both services. Children could attend the first part of the Worship Service and then be dismissed to their age-specific program.

Most of the factors outlined by this group appear to be consistent with the survey results on Adult Sunday School. Spiritual growth and relevance of the content are at the top of the rating charts as it relates to importance in determining whether or not adults will attend Adult Sunday School (see Table 2 on p. 51 ). It is evident from the comments made in the open-ended questions that many people want a strong Bible focus in Adult Sunday School. There is also a substantial number of people who are open to a middle block option for Adult Sunday School (see Table 33). The total percentage of those who would give the middle block option a rating of excellent, good, or satisfactory is 62% which is comparable to the 65% for the first service and 63% for the second service (see Table 32). This high rating for a middle block option is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that most respondents would have had no advance knowledge of this possibility. The group also focused on the development of a more structured Adult Sunday School program that would feature a progressive approach to learning. The main element of a more progressive program would be a core curriculum which would equip participants with the essential knowledge and skills of the Christian faith. The survey did not specifically ask people about this issue and so it is hard to determine if this perspective would have a large following. Minimal interest in greater coordination of Adult Sunday School was expressed in the open-ended questions. However, it did not surface as a major factor in the survey results.

**Table 33: Responses to Creating a One Hour Block  
Between Services for Adult Sunday School**

| <b>Response</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Cumulative<br/>Percent</b> |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Excellent       | 16               | 11.0           | 11.0                          |
| Good            | 45               | 31.0           | 42.0                          |
| Satisfactory    | 29               | 20.0           | 62.0                          |
| Fair            | 13               | 9.0            | 71.0                          |
| Poor            | 42               | 29.0           | 100.0                         |
| Total           | 115              | 100.0          | 100.0                         |
| Missing         | 50               |                |                               |
| Total           | 195              |                |                               |

**Table 34: Responses to Different Time Options for Adult Sunday School (%)**

| <b>Times for Adult Sunday School</b> | <b>Excellent</b> | <b>Good</b> | <b>Satisfactory</b> | <b>Fair</b> | <b>Poor</b> | <b>Mean</b> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| During the First Service             | 22.3             | 28.7        | 14.0                | 17.2        | 17.8        | 3.20        |
| During the Second Service            | 17.8             | 29.3        | 15.9                | 15.3        | 21.7        | 3.06        |
| One Hour Block Between Services      | 11.0             | 31.0        | 20.0                | 9.0         | 29.0        | 2.86        |
| Saturday Morning                     | 0.0              | 2.8         | 3.5                 | 7.1         | 86.5        | 1.23        |
| Sunday Night                         | 4.8              | 15.8        | 12.3                | 11.0        | 56.2        | 2.02        |
| Week Night                           | 4.2              | 13.4        | 13.4                | 12.7        | 56.3        | 1.96        |

*Group Two*

The second discussion group had equal representation of males and females with two representatives from each gender. The age representation was somewhat polarized according to my estimations with one person born between 1960-1969, one person born between 1950-1959 and two people born before 1930. The ethnic configuration of the group was strictly Caucasian with one member having come from South Africa in the last two years. The group met on a Saturday morning from 9:00-12:00 and attacked the questions with enthusiasm, despite the early meeting time.

### *Purposes of Adult Sunday School*

The members of the group were given a chance to express their beliefs about the purposes of Adult Sunday School based on the survey results. Personal and spiritual growth were common themes that at least three of the four group members mentioned. Adult Sunday School can provide a firm foundation for what you believe and why you believe it. It can be a place for spiritual enrichment that provides another source of nourishment different than the Worship Service. The comment was made that the more of God's Word we have inside of us, the wiser we will become. Adult Sunday School can also help participants to identify truth from non-truth. Another core value that surfaced in the discussions was that of fellowship. One person added that Adult Sunday School is like a "support group." At the conclusion of the discussion on this question, I stated a preliminary purpose statement for Adult Sunday School based on the preceding comments. The statement was approved at that time and before the meeting adjourned. The second discussion group's purpose statement reads:

*"The purpose of Adult Sunday School is to provide a place for spiritual nourishment and fellowship that helps people know and apply Biblical truth in a highly participatory fashion."*

The purpose statement refers to important core values that group members felt must be an integral aspect of Adult Sunday School. By the time this group met, I had added in my opening remarks a section on the importance of the Biblical framework for our discussions. This is in keeping with the overall purpose statement of the church. The group emphasized spiritual growth and fellowship. They also affirmed the centrality of Scripture as a source of knowledge. Adult Sunday School should not simply disseminate knowledge, but should help people apply this knowledge to their lives. The classes, themselves, should be highly participatory as people interact with ideas and come to call them their own.

### *Factors to Address*

The factors brought forward by the second discussion group have only a modicum of similarity with the purpose statement. The desire to create a greater sense of fellowship and community in Adult Sunday School is the only factor that is directly connected to a core value mentioned in the purpose statement. One explanation for this lack of connectedness may be that group members felt that most of the core values were adequately demonstrated in the current Adult Sunday School program. Another explanation is that the group may have thought that the values did not have to be operative to attract people. The group discussed the importance of commitment on the part of leaders and potential attendees. They also saw the merits of offering classes that are not only interesting, but are perceived as being interesting through appropriate advertising. Another factor that might attract people to Adult Sunday School is the recruitment of people to be involved in various levels of leadership within the program. The group also advocated a middle block option for Sunday School between the two services. These factors emerged as their five factors that could be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School.

Concern was expressed over the apparent lack of commitment on the part of leaders and potential attendees in Adult Sunday School. Leaders should be committed to teaching every Sunday and be willing to invest in the lives of present and potential attendees. Commitment amongst the members of the class could be strengthened by having an informal, or more structured accountability program in place. For example, a buddy system could be implemented whereby a member in the class would follow up with someone who missed a class. The commitment level of potential attendees could also be increased by highlighting Adult Sunday School in a public way, so that people realize that the program is worthy of their allegiance. This could take the form of a Commitment Sunday where the leaders of the classes are acknowledged and commissioned in their ministry.

Adult Sunday School should provide a place where people can get to know others in a deeper way. When people feel good about their experience in Adult Sunday School, they are

more likely to invite others. It is also important to promote an atmosphere conducive to fellowship by having refreshments and perhaps even going out for lunch as a class. Dyet (1980) stresses that little things can mean a lot as we try to build learning bridges with adults. A teacher's warm welcome can set the tone for future social contact in the class. A community spirit will go a long way in making people feel welcome and attracting new people who are looking for a place to belong.

The content of the classes should be Bible-centered which could take the form of expository teaching on a passage of Scripture (e.g. study of James), or it could feature a more topical approach (e.g. parenting teens). This two-pronged strategy is the same one used by many preachers who alternate between an inductive and deductive approach in their sermons. Teachers in Adult Sunday School should also be able to teach in a way that has widespread appeal. An Adult Sunday School program that delivers relevant content in an interesting manner will draw people into its educational fold. However, for some people there is a perception that Adult Sunday School is irrelevant and they may never try it out to test their hypothesis. The suggestion was made that perhaps Adult Sunday School at LEFC needs a facelift. There may be a perception that Sunday School is for children. The name could be changed to something like Adult Education, Adult Bible Class, or the Family Bible Hour. Whatever Adult Sunday School is called, the main goal must still be to teach the Word. The focus of the classes must also be clearly communicated to the congregation, so that they realize the relevance of what is being offered.

A mentoring approach to Adult Sunday School would have at least three levels. The first level would be to involve people in the class in various leadership responsibilities such as organizing refreshments, so that they grow as ministers of Jesus Christ. The second level would be to recruit potential teachers who would be challenged to use their teaching abilities in an Adult Sunday School class. As people are more involved in Adult Sunday School, they acquire greater ownership of the program. The result is that they become more committed to participating in the program themselves and more likely to encourage others to do the same.

A third level of mentoring would occur in a committee that was discharged with the responsibility of coordinating Adult Sunday School. Ownership of the program at the planning level would give program planners a greater vested interest in the program. Others in the congregation may also respond more positively to a program that is designed by lay people and not just the paid staff.

There was some discussion about creating a middle block of one hour between the two services for Sunday School. This would give Sunday School a greater profile in the church as it would have its own time slot. The group did not spend a lot of time exploring the ramifications of such a change, but did support the move in principle.

One of my concerns about leading the discussion groups was that the discussions might become derailed by personal opinions that were not substantiated by the research results. However, as more groups met, I realized that the survey results did not tell the whole story. Several people may have stated that they did not have time to attend Adult Sunday School, but is there a deeper issue behind those statements? The second discussion group contended that many of the barriers that keep people from attending Adult Sunday School could be reduced if leaders and potential attendees had a greater sense of commitment. The notion of commitment was not a dominant theme in the survey data, but it could be an important factor related to several themes that surfaced in the data. Some parents said that their children can not endure three hours of children's programs on Sunday morning. Would a higher level of commitment to Adult Sunday School be sufficient in overcoming this barrier for some people? Some people said that they did not have time, or they were not available. How does Adult Sunday School fit into their priorities? Would they attend if Adult Sunday School was higher on their priority list? The factors of relevance and fellowship are clearly supported in the survey responses. The notion of mentoring is not a recurrent theme in the survey data and it is difficult to justify its place as an important factor influencing participation. The inclusion of more people at different levels of the program may contribute to the perception of program relevance. The middle block option has support from the congregation as we saw in Table 33

(p. 126). These five factors were highlighted by the second discussion group as areas that could be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School.

### *Group Three*

The third discussion group had a fairly heavy concentration of "middle-aged" people with approximately three people born between 1940-1949 and one person born between 1950-1959. I would guess that the other two were born in the 1960-1969 and 1970+ groups respectively. The male-female ratio was equal in this group with three people in each group. This Caucasian group met on Tuesday night from 7:00-9:30. As was the case in some of the other groups, one group member was late and missed some of my opening remarks. The group was relaxed as they tackled the fate of Adult Sunday School at LEFC.

### *Purposes of Adult Sunday School*

Many of the people who participated in the discussion groups expressed an unusual passion in their convictions about Adult Sunday School. It became increasingly obvious to me that people have a vested interest in the future of this historic pillar of adult education in the church. The third discussion group focused on the importance of interaction and dialogue within an Adult Sunday School class. The program should also be Bible-focused with the result that people grow in their knowledge of how the Bible applies to their lives. Adult Sunday School can help weave people into community by fostering a relaxed atmosphere conducive to fellowship. People should not only learn, but have fun in Adult Sunday School. I tried to capture these ideas in a preliminary purpose statement which was then refined by group members. The revised purpose statement reads:

*"Adult Sunday School exists at LEFC to foster a community of growth as people are grounded in the Bible in a relaxed atmosphere that features interactive dialogue and practical application."*

The core values expressed in this purpose statement revolve around the major themes of growth and fostering a sense of community. The core value of growth is achieved through Biblical grounding, interactive dialogue and practical application. Dialoguing with other Christians and applying knowledge in relevant ways is an important and necessary extension of Biblical grounding that leads to personal growth. The concept of a growing community goes beyond the traditional understanding of fellowship. Community is more than just meeting with people and providing support and encouragement when necessary. A Christian community features a "weaving" of its members as one group member stated. People are in the lives of other people in a major way. A relaxed atmosphere in the classroom can set the stage for this kind of intimate interaction. For this group, growth is not achieved in isolation, but is realized when people study and apply the Bible in a communal setting.

#### *Factors to Address*

The factors emphasized by the third discussion group bear a striking resemblance to the group's purpose statement for Adult Sunday School. Three of the five factors are core values in the purpose statement. Program planners must pay special attention to comments that indicate shortcomings in a program's ability to advance its core values. An adult educational program that does not live out its core values runs the risk of not living at all. The core values that were equated with areas that could be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School included having a Bible-centered program, relevant course offerings, and a spirit of fellowship. The group also tackled the issue of commitment. How do we increase commitment to Adult Sunday School? The group went on to discuss the option of having all of the Sunday School classes at the same time and offering adult electives at other times besides Sunday mornings. These five factors were nominated by the third discussion group as factors that could be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School.

The group strongly stated that Adult Sunday School must be focused on the Bible. Bible classes should be offered that look at a particular book of the Bible. Topical studies such as

"Managing Your Money" should have a Scriptural foundation and could be offered for a specified time period. Current issues could be explored in light of Scripture. It should also be made clear that people can attend the classes at any time, so that periodic attendees still feel free to come.

Sunday School no longer attracts large masses of people on the basis of its name, or its historical track record within church-based adult education. For many people today, the classes must touch their lives before they will come. Any promotion of the classes should make it clear that the classes are relevant and how they are relevant. The suggestion was made that Adult Sunday School should initially try to appeal to a larger segment of the church population by offering classes with widespread appeal such as a Bible book study, or the study of Christian apologetics. An Adult Sunday School planning committee should be established with a good representation from the various age groups in the church. This committee could make recommendations about relevant topics and appropriate teachers. They could also have a part in promoting the program which may help to communicate a greater sense of personal relevance to potential attendees.

The group discussed various format issues related to Adult Sunday School. Sunday nights might be an alternate time for an Adult Sunday School class. A class could be offered for a few weeks as an experiment to see what kind of interest exists. One advantage of this option is that those who serve on Sunday mornings would have the option of attending Adult Sunday School at another time. Another possibility is to create a one hour block between services which would feature Sunday School for all ages. This possibility is problematic in that it would create a need for more children's programs. It was suggested that we are already stretched too thin with all of the programs we try to run on Sunday mornings. The idea of having all of the Sunday School classes during the same service was also discussed. This option would give families an opportunity to go to the worship service together and attend Sunday School at the same time.

Adult Sunday School should provide a safe, community atmosphere where people are encouraged to visit with one another. The suggestion was made that it might be easier to visit in the more structured atmosphere of a Sunday School class than during the half hour coffee time in the foyer that currently exists between services. It would be important that the class makes people feel welcome and that refreshments are provided.

Lack of commitment is a problem that plagues our society. Many people do not want to have a long-term commitment to anyone, or anything. On the one hand, we should help people change their perspective from, "What's in it for me?" to "What can I give?" On the other hand, it is important that people realize what Adult Sunday School can offer them. A relevant program may garner support and increase attendance levels. Relevant content may lead to greater commitment to Adult Sunday School.

Most of the factors discussed by the third discussion group have support in the survey data. We have already seen from the data that there is strong support for an Adult Sunday School that is relevant and Bible-centered. Fellowship as couched in the terms, "social contact," did not receive a resounding endorsement as a factor that attracts people to Adult Sunday School. However, fellowship did receive a fairly high degree of coverage in the comments made by survey respondents. Most survey respondents did not describe fellowship in intimate terms such as "community," but fellowship could have this meaning for some people. The issue of commitment surfaced again in this discussion group. This unsolicited reference to commitment by two discussion groups is noteworthy. It means that several people saw a lack of commitment as a causal factor in keeping people away from Adult Sunday School. All five of these factors must be carefully compared with the other group results to determine how program planners can best allocate their resources to bring about an increase in participation levels in Adult Sunday School.

### *Group Four*

The fourth discussion group met on a Thursday night from 7:00-9:30. The group was comprised of three females and one male. The group was fairly young with approximately two people born between 1960-1969 and two people born between 1950-1959. The ethnic mix of the group was mainly Caucasian with one Filipino Canadian in attendance. As was the case with all six groups, refreshments were served at the beginning of the meeting which allowed people to interact on a more casual level. It was important to "break the ice" before the meeting so that people felt that they could freely contribute their ideas. I believe it also served to even out the playing field, so that everyone could contribute as equals in the ensuing discussion.

### *Purposes of Adult Sunday School*

The fourth discussion group continued the trend of emphasizing the importance of personal growth as a core value of Adult Sunday School. The Bible should be taught, so that we can grow in learning. As we apply Biblical knowledge and become more like Jesus, we will be able to serve him better. One group member acknowledged that Adult Sunday School should help people in their spiritual walk. Another group member stated that Adult Sunday School should provide opportunities to equip Christians to be disciples of Jesus. The group also iterated the core value of fellowship that is characterized by support and accountability. The purpose statement that assimilated these values and which was endorsed by everyone in the group reads:

*"Adult Sunday School exists at LEFC to facilitate spiritual growth where disciples are made in a supportive and accountable context of fellowship."*

The purpose statement clearly extols the core value of spiritual growth. The connection between spiritual growth and disciple-making is noteworthy. The concept of spiritual growth

may conjure up a host of related and unrelated meanings for people. The fourth discussion group clarified their understanding of spiritual growth by tying it to the process of becoming a better disciple of Jesus Christ. The implication is that Adult Sunday School should help people become more like Jesus as they follow him. The group also stressed the importance of fellowship that provides support and accountability. The one side of fellowship is supportive and caring whereas the other side seeks to challenge others to reach new heights in personal growth. Adult Sunday School should seek to provide this kind of two-edged fellowship which can assist individuals in their desire to grow spiritually as disciples of Jesus.

#### *Factors to Address*

The five areas that this group addressed are not directly related to the core values contained in their purpose statement for Adult Sunday School. Some of the other groups placed relevance in a prominent position in their purpose statement, but the fourth discussion group saw it more as a factor that holds great potential for increasing participation in the program. Two structural issues surfaced as important areas to be addressed. Moving to a middle block for Sunday School and establishing a more systematic structure within Adult Sunday School are options which should be explored. The group also expressed a desire to see more classes offered which would then attract different groups of people to Adult Sunday School. They felt that a key aspect of being able to offer more classes would be to alleviate some of the fears associated with teaching Adult Sunday School. The fifth factor that was mentioned was interaction which may be indirectly related to fellowship. A context of fellowship would presumably set the tone for meaningful interactions within the class. All of these factors were deemed important in terms of enticing people into Adult Sunday School.

The topic of timing arose as a major issue in the group discussion. When should Adult classes be offered? Should the overall format on Sunday mornings be changed? The comment was made that when the church went to two services in 1993, a greater emphasis was placed on children's ministry to the detriment of Adult Sunday School. The program has

suffered ever since as we have driven adults out of Sunday School on the basis of how we do church. It was suggested that some, or all of the Sunday School classes should be offered at the same time to attract those who prefer to attend Adult Sunday School at the same time as the children. One way of doing this would be to have all of the Sunday School classes during one of the existing worship services. There was also discussion on the possibility of creating a middle block between services for Sunday School. Many young families and older people find it too difficult to stay the entire morning. A middle block may be the best option for increasing attendance in Adult Sunday School, but would other important aspects of church life suffer as a result? Format changes of this nature would have to be discussed with the church board who could determine whether the potential gains of increasing attendance in Adult Sunday School in this manner outweigh the potential losses.

Providing numerous adult classes that cover a diversity of topics might help Adult Sunday School be more relevant to various groups within the church. Classes on the Bible should be promoted with eye-catching descriptions, so that people realize that a study of Scripture can be very relevant to their lives. Perhaps even the name, "Sunday School," should be changed to capture the interest of those who are not attracted to a "school" format.

Concern was raised over the haphazard approach to Adult Sunday School in the church. It was suggested that the program should have a clear purpose and direction. This could take the form of a core curriculum which would cover the essentials of the faith over a specific time period. The core courses could be offered in a two year cycle. Qualified people who take the course one year could be challenged to teach the course when it is offered again. Electives could also be offered in addition to the core courses. The comment was made that the program should not look too structured as that might scare away periodic attendees. The classes themselves could also have a more systematic structure with the use of prescribed curriculum.

There is definitely a shortage of teachers for Adult Sunday School. The result is that only a limited number of classes can be offered at a given time. How does this affect attendance

levels? Would more classes attract more people to Adult Sunday School? Steps should be taken to train new teachers so that more classes can be offered in the future. Having an established curriculum may also help people feel less intimidated about teaching Adult Sunday School.

Learning is enhanced through participation. It was suggested that if someone feels that they are learning, they will be more likely to return to the class. Teachers should encourage this kind of interaction as a way of promoting learning and exposing more people to life-changing truth.

The suggestion that all of the Sunday School classes should meet at the same time in not without support in the survey data. Several people expressed their longing to be able to attend a worship service with their children and then go to their Sunday School classes. Moving most, or all of the classes to the same service may be an interim step leading to the implementation of a middle block for Sunday School in the future. The issue of relevance has substantial support in the survey responses. The move towards a more systematic structure in Adult Sunday School is advanced in the survey data to the extent that the program has a clearer direction. The notion of a core curriculum which provides an essential coverage of Christian doctrine is barely mentioned in the survey results. However, it could be argued that a core program would help people study the Bible and grow spiritually which were factors mentioned by survey respondents. The fourth discussion group asserted that people are afraid to teach which has reduced the number of classes that can be offered at a given time. This dearth of relevant classes was an issue that was raised by some survey participants. The final factor mentioned by the group was interaction. Interaction was a "buzz" word that came up repeatedly in the surveys. It is obvious that people do not want another sermon in Adult Sunday School, but want an opportunity to interact with the teacher and other members of the class. Group number four maintained that when these factors are addressed according to their recommendations, participation will increase in Adult Sunday School.

### *Group Five*

The fifth group was a lively group made up of five males and two females. The group was fairly young with approximately one person born after 1969, four people born between 1960-1969, one person born between 1950-1959 and one person born between 1940-1949. The group met on a Monday night from 7:00-10:00. One of the male participants had to leave about one hour into the discussion. I found that this group was the most animated in their discussions and I found it difficult to set up the same parameters I had used with previous groups. For all of the other groups I had gone around the circle to get peoples' responses to the first and second questions. I managed to impose this structure on group five for the first question, but their aggressive spontaneity which increased as the meeting progressed, made it difficult to implement a similar format for the second question. Many ideas were expressed and the group proved to be a rich source of data for determining the purposes of Adult Sunday School and factors to be addressed in increasing participation in the program.

### *Purposes of Adult Sunday School*

The mission of Adult Sunday School at LEFC is multifaceted and the fifth discussion group addressed several purposes they felt should be included in this mission. They asserted that personal growth and learning should characterize Adult Sunday School. The learning should be relevant to peoples' lives which would entail the personal application of Biblical truths. One of the older members of the groups shared that Adult Sunday School should help people regurgitate the truths from God's Word, so that the truths become more relevant and applicable. Another person commented that the program can be a prime source for discipling. A young adult in the group liked the idea of different age groups learning together, so that older people can teach the younger people. Fellowship and interaction within the class also emerged as important purposes for some group members. One of the participants commented that they wondered if the results of the survey could be trusted because many surveys were completed by people who may have had little prior experience in Adult Sunday School. The

comment helped me to realize afresh the importance of the discussion groups as a filter for determining appropriate purposes of Adult Sunday School. As the discussion progressed, one group member summed up the purposes of Adult Sunday School by saying that it should "provide time sensitive, focused instruction for members to delve into the Bible and apply Biblical principles to their lives." I tried to use this statement as a starting point for the purpose statement which I later proposed to the group. The proposed purpose statement which was endorsed at this juncture of the meeting and near the conclusion of the meeting reads:

*"Adult Sunday School exists at LEFC to help people grow as they learn and apply Biblical truths in an interactive setting characterized by relevant instruction."*

The chief core value espoused by the fifth discussion group is growth. The term "growth" is commonly used in church circles and is generally thought to mean growth in Christlikeness, or to become more like Jesus. Of course, this process of modeling one's life after Christ requires a careful and ongoing examination of the Bible to learn what God expects of his followers. The fifth group carefully distinguished between learning and application. We can amass a huge amount of information in our mental storehouses, but its value to us and others is dependent on how we use it. Of course, we can apply any type of information in inappropriate ways. I would presume that the application process mentioned in the fifth group's purpose statement is a healthy application resulting in growth. The statement is rather limiting due to its use of the term, "Biblical truths." Does that mean that Adult Sunday School can only address truth that is specifically mentioned in the Bible? What about other truth? The group goes on in its purpose statement to give credence to interaction and relevant instruction. The term "relevant instruction" is helpful in that it goes beyond the idea of topical relevance. A class may be billed as having a relevant topic, but the instruction may minimize this relevance at the classroom level. Relevant instruction would guarantee that any content

would be delivered in a way that has maximum meaning for those participating in the class. This group maintained that an interactive and relevant context are important ingredients in stimulating Biblical application and personal growth.

### *Factors to Address*

The issue of relevance came up again in this group as a factor that could be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School. It is obvious that the program is perceived as largely irrelevant by many people in the church. Relevance was a core value for the fifth discussion group and its prominence as a changeable factor makes it even more noteworthy. If relevance truly is a core value of Adult Sunday School and the program is irrelevant then changes must be made to address the situation. The fifth group also stated that the quality of the classes was an important factor affecting attendance. Instruction was mentioned in the group's purpose statement, but their notion of excellence in the classroom is based more on the qualifications and experience of the teacher than instructional methods. Of course, the methodologies that teachers employ is impacted by who they are as people. It is interesting to note that some people wanted fellowship included in the purpose statement, but a unanimous decision could not be reached and so the term was dropped. The group strongly advocated a move towards a middle block between the two services and discussed the importance of a more systematic approach to Christian education within Adult Sunday School. A final factor that was mentioned was promotion. The middle block option, a more systematic approach to learning within Adult Sunday School, and effective promotion of classes were not included in the group's purpose statement, but would presumably make the purpose statement easier to achieve.

The group discussed how the current two service format is an impediment for adults to attend Sunday School. Numerous group members strongly supported the idea of creating a middle block between the services which would feature Sunday School classes for children, youth, and adults. It would be important to have solid children's programs during both

services in addition to this middle block. The workload for Children's Ministry workers could be reduced by having the children attend the first part of each worship service and then be dismissed for their children's program. Another option related to scheduling sought to improve attendance in Adult Sunday School within the existing format. This would involve having a full complement of both children's and adult programs during both services on a consistent basis.

The group discussed the importance of communicating to people what Adult Sunday School is all about. What is the master plan? People need to see that the program, as a whole, is seeking to meet their needs. At the classroom level, topics need to be very relevant to peoples' lives. The suggestion was made that another survey could be sent out with a specific list of topics, so that people could select topics that interest them. Another possibility is to recruit a search committee which would try to determine peoples' current needs and recommend relevant topics on that basis. The comment was made that it is hard to gauge true relevance from a survey and other methods should be employed to determine what topics are meaningful to people.

The promotion of Adult Sunday School as a viable educational program in the church and the marketing of specific classes is an important aspect of increasing participation levels. The teachers should be given the opportunity to tell the congregation about their classes in the worship services. Teachers and other self-appointed ambassadors within the classes could increase attendance by personally inviting people to come. This "personal touch" could also be employed by people such as greeters who would let people know about the Adult Sunday School classes as they enter the church lobby. It would be important that potential attendees realize that it is acceptable to come anytime, so that they do not feel like they have to be there every week to attend a class.

The group talked about the possibility of creating a more systematic approach to Christian education within Adult Sunday School. The suggestion was made that a core curriculum could be developed that would take people through a cycle of learning which

would focus on the "essentials" of the Christian faith. This core program would repeat itself after a predetermined amount of time. Electives could still be offered at the same time as the core program for those who have already taken the core program, or for those who would prefer a different learning opportunity.

The quality of Adult Sunday School is influenced by the quality of the teaching staff. Teachers with a certain level of expertise could be recruited from within the church, or from Christian learning institutions in the area. Local Bible Colleges and Seminaries would be logical sources for trained teachers. Someone asked if the church would be looking for students in these institutions to teach Adult Sunday School. Another person responded to the question by saying that the church would want to recruit the teachers from these schools. They would likely be the ones most able to provide advanced instruction that even the most seasoned Christian would enjoy. The recruitment of teachers from outside the church would require advanced planning to insure their availability.

The surveys provided data that supports a focus on relevant topics. The promotion of these topics is intertwined with their perceived relevance. An effective marketing campaign will help people realize that a topic is relevant. Of course, there is always the danger of false advertising which promises more than a program can deliver. The factor which the fifth discussion group labeled as, "Quality Classes," assumes that the instruction comes from someone who is knowledgeable, spiritually mature, and a good communicator. Teaching style was ranked fourth in the nine factors that were tested in the survey. However, it was only mentioned a few times in the questions that allowed for open-ended responses. We have already seen the statistical and philosophical support for a middle block option. The group's plan to implement a more systematic approach to Adult Sunday School has some support in the survey results. Based on the survey results, it would still be important to offer electives in addition to a core curriculum. My sense from the surveys is that a large number of people want as many options as possible when they consider participating in Adult Sunday School. A core curriculum may be a prudent directive from a church leadership perspective as it may be

a good way of insuring that people have the knowledge and skills necessary in the Christian life. However, it may not be a significant factor in increasing participation in Adult Sunday School.

### *Group Six*

I met with the sixth discussion group 17 days after I met with the first discussion group. It was a whirlwind time for me, but I wanted all of the groups to meet fairly close to each other. I knew that once the groups started meeting that information would travel fairly quickly down the church grapevine. I did not want subsequent group discussions to be influenced by those that had already occurred. To a large degree, I believe I was successful in keeping these types of influences to a minimum.

The final group met on a Wednesday night from 7:00-9:00. It was the shortest meeting of them all and perhaps reflected greater efficiency on my part in facilitating the discussion, or maybe I was too fatigued to care. The group consisted of two females and three males. The ages of the group members were mixed with approximately two people born after 1969, one person born between 1960-1969, one person born between 1950-1959 and one person born between 1940-1949. One of the participants is new to the Christian faith and to the church which provided a unique perspective on Adult Sunday School that was lacking in the other groups. The group was somewhat subdued and unresponsive at times. Some of the ideas lacked the detail which I had become accustomed to in the other groups. However, the group provided some insight into Adult Sunday School's purpose and factors that might increase participation in the program.

### *Purposes of Adult Sunday School*

The sixth discussion group grappled with the purposes of Adult Sunday School. Why does the program exist? One person shared that he believed that Adult Sunday School can provide a small group atmosphere to learn about Christianity. Another person expressed her

desire to "learn God" which is to apply the character of God to our lives. Two of the people maintained that it is beneficial to learn together with like-minded people who are passionate about God. One person went as far as to say that Adult Sunday School "separates the sheep from the goats." The program attracts people who are more committed to God and learning about the Bible. Others in the group saw Adult Sunday School as a forum for interaction and asking questions. It allows for "two-directional interaction." Another person attested to Adult Sunday School's role as a place for meeting people. The group refined a preliminary purpose statement that I had proposed based on their comments and the finished product reads:

*"Adult Sunday School exists to provide a context to learn and apply God's Word in an interactive setting with like-minded people who can sharpen others."*

The purpose statement drafted by the sixth discussion group highlights some core values that group members believe should be woven into the fabric of Adult Sunday School. Like the previous group, they chose to limit Adult Sunday School's educational scope by focusing exclusively on learning and applying God's Word. Extra-Biblical truth is disregarded for usage in Adult Sunday School. I honestly do not know if this was the intention of the groups, or if it was an oversight on their part. The sixth group concurs with the statements of other groups when it includes the dynamic of interaction. The group goes on to add two entirely new concepts to the list of purposes of Adult Sunday School. The umbrella term, "fellowship," could include the practice of meeting together with "like-minded people." The sixth discussion group included a clear explanation of fellowship in their purpose statement. They go on to say that this meeting together of like-minded people allows them to sharpen others. This statement is fairly nebulous, but I believe that the rationale behind it is based on Proverbs 27:17 which says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." The practice of sharpening in this verse refers to the process of helping others grow through one's

example and encouragement. In other words, Adult Sunday School's role does not stop when people leave the classroom. An effective Adult Sunday School program will teach and inspire participants to help others grow in Christlikeness.

### *Factors to Address*

How do the core values contained in the sixth group's purpose statement correspond to the factors they selected to increase attendance in Adult Sunday School? The group evidently thought that their purposes for Adult Sunday School were being achieved, or that the core values did not necessarily have a huge bearing on participation levels. The factor that came closest to resembling a core value was consistency. The notion of like-minded people mitigates against mediocre Christianity. Those who are attracted to Adult Sunday School are generally more committed and the leaders within the program should have this same commitment level, or higher. The teachers within the classes should be of outstanding quality. The topics in Adult Sunday School must be relevant and should be clearly communicated using a diversity of mediums. Some of the group members heartily endorsed a middle block option, or moving all of the Sunday School classes into one service. Changing the Sunday morning schedule, ensuring consistency in course offerings, providing quality teachers, communicating to the church about available classes and offering relevant topics are all factors that the sixth discussion group nominated as factors that could be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School.

The group was concerned that the current Sunday morning format does not allow for maximum participation in Adult Sunday School. It was suggested that all of the Sunday School classes could be held during one service which would reduce confusion and allow families to attend classes at the same time. With this option, it might be wise to offer a more activity-oriented program for the children during one of the services, so that the morning is not too long for the children. The group also explored the option of creating a middle block

between the two services. The middle block option could be realized by starting the first service sooner, or by cutting back on the 75 minutes allotted for each service.

Concern was raised over the lack of consistency in the Adult Sunday School program in the past. The group stressed the importance of making sure that there are classes every week and that the teachers are committed to being there, or having an appropriate substitute in place when they are absent. One person expressed the desire to see teachers in place for as long as possible which gives attendees the chance to adjust to their teaching style. Classes must be provided week after week, no matter what the cost.

It is important that the Adult Sunday School program attracts teachers who are both knowledgeable and able to stimulate peoples' minds. A church-wide search could be conducted in an attempt to find people who have the heart and ability to teach Adult Sunday School. It was also suggested that the teachers should use simple language so that people can understand and apply the material.

The group discussed the important of communicating what is happening in Adult Sunday School to everyone in the church. People should have advance notice of upcoming topics, so that they can make plans to attend the classes of their choice. The ideal situation would be to let people know about classes at least six months in advance. Cooper (1982) has suggested that adults are more motivated to attend a learning experience if they know about the topics in advance. Perhaps there would be value in sending out a specific list of the topics in a given class to potential attendees and highlighting the topics for each month in the church bulletin.

Adult Sunday School should offer classes that "meet people where they are at." How does Christianity relate today? The group discussed the possibility of offering a "Basics of Christianity" class which would help both new Christians and veterans of Christianity go over the fundamental truths and practices of Christianity. For example, the class could teach people different ways of having personal devotions. A survey could be sent out to adults in the church to get more specific feedback on the topics that would be relevant to them. The

result would be an Adult Sunday School program that is more successful in addressing personal needs which may have a positive impact on participation levels.

Most of the factors brought forward by the sixth discussion group have already been explored as to their compatibility with the survey results. Relevance was a key issue in the survey results. The perceived irrelevance of Adult Sunday School has often served as a barrier to participation. That is where effective communication can come in. People must be convinced repeatedly that Adult Sunday School is relevant and worthy of their allegiance. The main challenge is to get people through the door of the classroom for the first time. The current schedule may also be hindering some people from attending Adult Sunday School. Would those with children be more likely to attend Adult Sunday School if it was offered at the same time as their children's Sunday School classes? Would adults be more likely to come to a middle block if it meant that they would be spending less time at church than if they went to Sunday School in the current format? Regardless of how the barriers to participation are addressed, Adult Sunday School must be characterized by consistency. Excellent teachers should be recruited for every course and they must be committed for the duration of their teaching assignment. When carefully monitored, these factors can have a bearing on participation in Adult Sunday School.

All of the discussion groups contributed important ideas in determining a game plan for change. For many in the groups, the discussions took on passionate qualities as they discussed a program very dear to their hearts. The overwhelming message was that Adult Sunday School at LEFC must be revived. This once mighty giant of Christian Education in the church still has a crucial role to play. Some of the factors that need to be addressed to increase participation can be readily implemented. Others will take time. We must now move towards a prioritization of the factors based on a synthesis of the proposed core values of Adult Sunday School and a comparison of the five factors addressed by each group.

### **Core Values of Adult Sunday School**

The first question addressed in the discussion groups sought to uncover core values in the form of purposes for Adult Sunday School. It was imperative that each group member have a voice in this process. As group members shared, I wrote down a purpose statement that attempted to capture the emergent thinking. My goals in proposing a purpose statement were to make sure that I had heard what had been said and to give the group a concrete framework for the rest of the discussion. The resultant purpose statements also gave me a more definite basis for comparing the core values espoused by each group.

A summary of the six purpose statements is found in Table 35. What are the similarities as we compare the purpose statements? How do the core values differ? Table 36 lists the core values contained in the purpose statements and which groups gave them prominence by including them in their purpose statement. I would propose that those core values mentioned by three, or more groups must be emphasized in an Adult Sunday School program at LEFC. These core values represent the non-negotiable aspects of Adult Sunday School that must be operative regardless of their impact on participation. Five groups insisted that Adult Sunday School must be growth-oriented. This holistic growth encompasses all dimensions of human personality, but is ultimately grounded in one's relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Two-thirds of the discussion groups also emphasized the importance of fellowship, interaction, the learning of Biblical truth, and practical application in their purpose statements for Adult Sunday School. These factors must not be undermined in any way as program planners seek to make changes that will increase participation in Adult Sunday School.

**Table 35: Summary of Purpose Statements**

1. Adult Sunday School exists at LEFC to provide a context for spiritual growth through structured instruction that is both in-depth and relevant to personal needs.
2. The purpose of Adult Sunday School is to provide a place for spiritual nourishment and fellowship that helps people know and apply Biblical truth in a highly participatory fashion.
3. Adult Sunday School exists at LEFC to foster a community of growth as people are grounded in the Bible in a relaxed atmosphere that features interactive dialogue and practical application.
4. Adult Sunday School exists at LEFC to facilitate spiritual growth where disciples are made in a supportive and accountable context of fellowship.
5. Adult Sunday School exists at LEFC to help people grow as they learn and apply Biblical truths in an interactive setting characterized by relevant instruction.
6. Adult Sunday School exists to provide a context to learn and apply God's Word in an interactive setting with like-minded people who can sharpen others.

**Table 36: Core Values Contained in Purpose Statements**

| Core Values                  | Gp. 1 | Gp. 2 | Gp. 3 | Gp. 4 | Gp. 5 | Gp. 6 | Total |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Growth-oriented</b>       | x     | x     | x     | x     | x     |       | 5     |
| <b>Fellowship</b>            |       | x     | x     | x     |       | x     | 4     |
| <b>Interactive</b>           |       | x     | x     |       | x     | x     | 4     |
| <b>Learn Biblical Truth</b>  |       | x     | x     |       | x     | x     | 4     |
| <b>Practical Application</b> |       | x     | x     |       | x     | x     | 4     |
| <b>Relevant</b>              | x     |       |       |       | x     |       | 2     |
| <b>Accountability</b>        |       |       |       | x     |       |       | 1     |
| <b>Disciple-making</b>       |       |       |       | x     |       |       | 1     |
| <b>In-depth</b>              | x     |       |       |       |       |       | 1     |
| <b>Like-minded People</b>    |       |       |       |       |       | x     | 1     |
| <b>Relaxed Atmosphere</b>    |       |       | x     |       |       |       | 1     |
| <b>Sharpen Others</b>        |       |       |       |       |       | x     | 1     |
| <b>Structured</b>            | x     |       |       |       |       |       | 1     |
| <b>Supportive</b>            |       |       |       | x     |       |       | 1     |

x Shows that this core value was contained in this group's purpose statement

A foundation for change has been laid. The core values establish the parameters for change. These boundaries must not be breached lest the integrity of Adult Sunday School be compromised. Within this essential framework, we can now analyze the factors recommended by the discussion groups. It is important to evaluate their merit not only on their potential for

increasing participation in Adult Sunday School, but on their compatibility with the core values of the church.

### Factors That Could Increase Attendance

Each discussion group recommended at least five factors that could be addressed to increase attendance in Adult Sunday School. Some factors that were mentioned could be broken down into multiple factors and that explains why some groups have more than five factors listed (see Table 37). The first discussion group had two separate factors which were later combined by other groups under the heading, "Middle Block for Sunday School." The preliminary discussion on purposes of Adult Sunday School was intended to provide a framework for the discussion of factors.

**Table 37: Factors Recommended by Discussion Groups**

| Factors                          | Gp.1 | Gp. 2 | Gp. 3 | Gp. 4 | Gp. 5 | Gp. 6 | Total |
|----------------------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Relevant                         | x    | x     | x     | x     | x     | x     | 6     |
| Middle Block for Sun. Sch.       | x    | x     |       | x     | x     | x     | 5     |
| Systematic Approach              | x    |       |       | x     | x     |       | 3     |
| Bible Focus                      | x    |       | x     |       |       |       | 2     |
| Commitment of leaders/attendees  |      | x     | x     |       |       |       | 2     |
| Fellowship                       |      | x     | x     |       |       |       | 2     |
| Promotion of Ad. Sun. Sch.       |      |       |       |       | x     | x     | 2     |
| Quality Teachers                 |      |       |       |       | x     | x     | 2     |
| Sun. Sch. During One Service     |      |       | x     |       |       | x     | 2     |
| Consistency                      |      |       |       |       |       | x     | 1     |
| Interaction                      |      |       |       | x     |       |       | 1     |
| Mentoring Approach               |      | x     |       |       |       |       | 1     |
| People are Afraid to Teach       |      |       |       | x     |       |       | 1     |
| Sun. Sch. Offered at Other Times |      |       | x     |       |       |       | 1     |

x Shows that this factor was contained in this group's list of factors

It is obvious from Table 37 that relevance is a key factor as it relates to increasing participation in Adult Sunday School. The classes must not only be relevant in nature, but they must be perceived as relevant by the church population. The format on Sunday mornings also came up as an issue that must be considered in regards to the numerical growth of Adult

Sunday School. Most groups suggested that the current format is strangling Adult Sunday School. Should a larger middle block be inserted between the two services to accommodate Adult Sunday School and to give it more prominence in the life of the church? Would Adult Sunday School be more accessible in a middle block? There is also considerable support for a more systematic approach to Adult Sunday School that features a cohesive program that leads people towards the accomplishment of Adult Sunday School's mission. Of the factors that were mentioned by two of the groups, Bible focus and fellowship are also major core values that were expressed in various groups' purpose statements. As core values, these factors must play a central role in any Adult Sunday School program. Two of the groups also highlighted the importance of commitment amongst program leaders and potential attendees. The promotion of Adult Sunday School could also be improved so as to increase participation. Creative advertising can be instrumental in arousing peoples' curiosity about a program. Of course, once people arrive at a class it is important that quality teachers are present to guide them in their learning experience. Another format issue that grabbed the attention of two groups related to offering all Sunday School classes during one service.

The remaining factors were mentioned by only one group out of the six. These factors included consistency, interaction, mentoring approach, helping teachers overcome their fears and offering adult electives at other times besides Sunday mornings. It would be premature to dismiss factors that were mentioned by a smaller number of groups. Some factors are easier to implement than others and this may be an important consideration in prioritizing the factors. The next step, which was beyond the scope of this study, was to form an Adult Sunday School Planning Team with representatives from each discussion group. This Planning Team determined which factors should be addressed and how to address them as they developed a long-term strategy for Adult Sunday School.

The pathway of change is rarely smooth. The Adult Sunday School discussion groups have sketched out some initial drawings for change. More detailed blueprints must still be drawn up. However, the discussion groups have informed program designers by supplying a

list of non-negotiable items that must be a part of Adult Sunday School. The program must foster personal growth in a community atmosphere where people learn and apply truth in an interactive setting. This mission must guide all decisions about what factors are to be addressed and how they are addressed to increase participation. The top three factors recommended by the discussion groups included relevance, a middle block for Sunday School and a systematic approach to program execution. If these factors are addressed in ways that are compatible with Adult Sunday School's mission, the program has the potential to attract participants in increasing measure while maintaining program integrity.

## CHAPTER SEVEN SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The genesis for this research project began years ago. My feelings about Adult Sunday School have ranged from intense excitement about its potential to utter discouragement over its apparent minimal impact. My research into the factors that affect participation in Adult Sunday School and changes that can be made to increase participation have given me hope for this bastion of Christian education. The program can have a tremendous impact in the lives of people! In this final chapter, I will summarize the process of my research, discuss the findings and recommend areas for future research.

### Summary

The process of research is often more valuable than the end results. I found this maxim to be true in my research into Adult Sunday School. I greatly benefited from interacting with people about the program and reading other peoples' perspectives. My philosophy of church-based adult education was shaped through this learning process. As people filled out surveys on Adult Sunday School and participated in discussion groups, I was amazed at the synergy that was generated. People got excited about Adult Sunday School and making it better. People met together in discussion groups who had never interacted with each other in a prolonged fashion. Relationships were forged as people rallied around a common cause. An Adult Sunday School Planning Team was formed with the expressed purpose of developing a long-term strategy for Adult Sunday School. The process of doing the research proved to be extremely valuable not only for Adult Sunday School, but for the church as a whole.

The theoretical framework I laid out in Chapter Three provided focus for the study (see Figure 1 on p. 33). My goal was to determine those factors that increase and hinder participation in Adult Sunday School and what changes could be made to increase participation. I was primarily concerned with those factors that were directly related to the

structure of Adult Sunday School and attitudes toward the structure. In a general sense, I wanted to know what kind of program structure would attract the most people to Adult Sunday School. Survey respondents rated the importance of nine factors that represent structural components within Adult Sunday School. Respondents also listed barriers that might hinder their participation in the program. The data about barriers and the rating of the nine factors helped me to determine how to structure Adult Sunday School so that it is more appealing to the general church population.

I was also interested to see if subgroups within the church have different preferences as it relates to Adult Sunday School. I looked at subgroups based on age, gender, marital status, family makeup, educational level and small group involvement. These factors can directly impact peoples' preferences about the structure of Adult Sunday School. In fact, they can even bypass structural preferences and directly dictate participation in a program. I also included previous experience in Adult Sunday School and current involvement in the church as mitigating factors which can be influenced by peoples' demographic background and family makeup. These mitigating factors can then exert influence on how Adult Sunday School is structured. All of these factors can impact peoples' attitudes towards the structure which can play an important role in determining whether or not someone will participate in the program.

As we have seen, the research model I employed for this study sought to explore several factors that might affect adults' decisions about whether or not to participate in Adult Sunday School and what changes could be made to increase participation. I collected data from three sources: research participants, a third party and myself. The participants in the study were those who filled out a survey and those who participated in the discussion groups. I had a 53% response rate with the surveys on Adult Sunday School as 195 people returned their surveys. I carefully coded and sorted the data for analysis. The 31 people who participated in the six discussion groups helped me to make sense of the data. They provided valuable insights into the factors that could be addressed to increase participation in Adult Sunday School. They helped to prioritize my findings and to recommend a course of action that was

consistent with the findings and a realistic appraisal of what could be accomplished in the church. In many ways, my research initiated a grass roots movement for change. The discussion groups were instrumental in building the momentum necessary for any substantive and lasting change.

### **Findings**

Adult Sunday School must change to meet current needs without compromising its core values. The resounding message I received from my research is that many people believe in Adult Sunday School. Instead of ringing its death knell, the majority of people appear to believe that it is worth reviving. Adult Sunday School can occupy a unique place of ministry in the church. The program has the potential to meet needs that are not currently being met in worship services, or in small group Bible studies. Adult Sunday School is standing at a crossroads in many churches. At Langley Evangelical Free Church, the most pronounced road sign at this juncture points forward towards a more prominent role for Adult Sunday School in the life of the church.

The underlying assumption in my research study is that participation in a program is indicative of its perceived and actual effectiveness in meeting needs. A basic goal of my research has been to increase participation in Adult Sunday School which required a careful study of those factors that could be addressed to increase participation. How can the program be structured for maximum appeal? What changes could be made to capitalize on those factors that are attractive to adults in the church? What changes could be made to minimize barriers that hinder participation? The results of the study have provided some answers to these questions which are useful to program planners at LEFC and to educational administrators in other churches exploring the same issues.

The study addressed nine factors that influence adults' decisions about whether or not to attend Adult Sunday School. The nine factors are not sacred in nature. Other factors could have been added to the list. I chose the nine factors that were included in the study based on

other research I had read and the specific context at LEFC. These nine factors are not necessarily the most important factors in determining participation in Adult Sunday School. However, program planners have limited time and I was interested in studying a manageable number of factors so that program changes could be readily implemented. I wanted to know the power of each factor in attracting people to Adult Sunday School. I set out to determine how the factors impacted the church as a whole and subgroups within the larger church population. The results paint a clear picture of what factors are important to people as they make decisions about attending Adult Sunday School.

Spiritual growth emerged as the most important factor influencing peoples' decisions about attending Adult Sunday School. It is expected that an Adult Sunday School program will help people develop their relationship with God and help them live in accordance with His standards. Growth is not accomplished with sterile teaching that has no application in peoples' lives. Adult Sunday School must also be relevant. It should provide a diversity of topics that engage people where they are at. The structure of each class should provide ample opportunity for interaction, so that people can attach personal meaning to the information being presented. Relevance makes the content meaningful, but Adult Sunday School should also help make the material useable. The practicality of the content was rated as the third most important factor. Teaching style came next with a strong emphasis on teachers who are not only qualified, but interesting in their approach. The people who participated in the study also gave credence to the sharing of experiences as the fifth most important factor. Social contact was the sixth factor which suggests that fellowship has value, but does not have to be a major component of Adult Sunday School to attract people. Learning just for the sake of learning came in as the seventh most important factor, although some people saw learning as the precursor to personal growth. An intergenerational Sunday School is not a huge drawing card for the church as a whole, although it may be an attractive option for some families in the church. People gave the external expectations of others the lowest rating of the nine factors.

Most people do not respond well to coercion. Placing inappropriate expectations on potential attendees may have adverse affects on long-term participation in Adult Sunday School.

The rating of the nine factors gives program planners a general blueprint for designing Adult Sunday School in the church. I was also interested in knowing if other factors such as age, gender, marital status, educational level, family makeup and church involvement influenced the rating of these nine factors. The top four factors for the general church population were consistently found in the top four factors for the different subgroups that I studied. In some cases, a particular subgroup ranked the four factors in a different order. As I analyzed the relationship between the nine factors and other demographic factors, I discovered that most of the relationships were not statistically significant. For example, the results of this study showed that there is not a significant relationship between age and the nine factors. This means that the age groups did not rate the importance of the nine factors in ways that were significantly different. Based on these results, program planners can attract adults from any age group if they structure the program according to the preferences of the general survey population. When it came to gender differences, women scored learning for the sake of learning and external expectations significantly higher than men. Women are more likely to be attracted to Adult Sunday School by the prospect of learning. They are also more susceptible to the expectations of others. My analysis of differences based on marital status revealed that single people are more likely to attend Adult Sunday School because of its learning orientation than married people. Those who have children living at home are more likely to attend an intergenerational Sunday School than those who do not have children living at home. A look at the differences between those who participate in a small group Bible study and those who do not revealed that small group participants are more likely to attend Adult Sunday School because of the practical nature of its content. These significant relationships are helpful to program planners as they seek to design adult education programs with maximum appeal.

Some Adult Sunday School programs attempt to group adults by age, or stages of life. The results of this study provide important information for designing a program that attracts a specific target group. A Senior's class should look and feel different than a class for young adults. Other churches, like LEFC, who offer adult electives that are open to all adults can also benefit from this research on specific subgroups. The challenge for these churches is to offer a balanced approach to Adult Sunday School which attracts as many people within the various subgroups as possible. This generic approach must be constantly fine-tuned to insure that certain groups are not being overlooked. The approach must also be flexible, so that classes such as "Parenting Skills" which attract certain groups can be structured so as to attract a maximum number of people from within those groups.

Attracting people to Adult Sunday School is only half the battle. A program may be structured for maximum appeal. People may even want to come and yet something holds them back. There are factors that attract people to Adult Sunday School and there are factors that act as barriers to participation. The reality for program planners is that highly motivated people may never darken the door of an Adult Sunday School class. It is imperative that program planners have a working knowledge of some of the barriers that block participation and to discern which barriers can be addressed to increase attendance levels.

Organizational barriers are barriers that program planners can usually address within the structural climate of the church and Adult Sunday School program. The barrier of irrelevance was the most important organizational barrier addressed by the participants in this study. The topics must be relevant and promoted as such. Another major organizational barrier that was highlighted in the discussions is the current Sunday morning format. LEFC has two services back-to-back with Adult Sunday School offered during the second service. Five of the discussion groups suggested that the present format is hindering participation in Adult Sunday School. The program is hidden away beneath other programming and does not have the prominence and accessibility for large-scale attraction. The issue of relevance can be readily addressed by offering classes more compatible with peoples' interests. The research study

indicated that most people prefer to have classes that focus on the Bible, family, outreach or current issues. The recommended change in format requires a much more involved process because it would affect everyone who participates in Sunday morning programs. The core values of other programs must be considered. Will the proposed changes compromise the integrity and effectiveness of other programs? Extensive consultation is required at every level of church life to determine the viability of a format change of this nature.

Personal and situational barriers are directly related to peoples' current experience in life. Program planners are often hard-pressed to minimize these barriers, especially when a short-term approach to change is attempted. We can not automatically make people feel better, or change their situation. Some personal barriers mentioned by participants in the study included a lack of connection, needs met elsewhere, age and health concerns, a stressful personal life and a lack of commitment. Situational barriers included other commitments both inside and outside the church, family issues such as not being able to attend a service and Sunday School because of children, and a lack of time. All of these factors represent real, or imagined concerns that people have. Program planners are in a good position to ask if organizational changes can be made to address some of these concerns. Perhaps a format change that reduced the total amount of time to attend a worship service and Adult Sunday School would minimize barriers related to time. Of course, there are many barriers that can not be addressed from an organizational standpoint. Program planners in the church must sensitively help people develop, or reinforce appropriate priorities for their lives. The promotion of Adult Sunday School should convey its importance and relevance, so that people will participate or not participate on the basis of an informed decision based on established values. Adult Sunday School may not be for every adult in the church. However, potential attendees should be challenged to make a clear decision, so that those who do not attend are doing so by choice and not by default.

The discussion groups which met to discuss the implications of the survey results provided a wealth of information related to the purposes of Adult Sunday School. Each group constructed a purpose statement for the program. These six statements were laden with core values. A danger in examining factors that affect participation in a program is that a restructuring of the program may lead to a violation of its core values. A Sunday morning aerobics class might attract large numbers of people, but is it compatible with the core values of the program? I wanted to make sure that any recommendations made did not compromise these non-negotiable aspects of Adult Sunday School. The goal of increased participation must never undermine the established core values of a program.

The six core values mentioned most often by the discussion groups were a growth orientation, a spirit of fellowship, interaction, the learning of Biblical truth, practical application and relevance. Changes can be made to the program as long as these qualities remain an integral part of Adult Sunday School. Most of these core values were also highlighted by one, or more discussion groups as factors that could be addressed to increase participation. It is apparent that not only is Adult Sunday School failing to attract people, but it is also out of alignment with its own core values. The encouraging aspect of this dichotomy is that a stricter observance of its core values will likely result in greater participation in the program.

### **Recommendations**

This study is not exhaustive. Numerous other avenues of research could be pursued to broaden the findings. Nine factors were selected in this study to see how important they are in determining participation in Adult Sunday School. Other factors such as interaction within the class and group support could be explored in future studies. In fact, any one factor could be highlighted and studied more in-depth. For example, the factor called spiritual growth could be analyzed as to its deeper meanings. How does spiritual maturity affect participation in Adult Sunday School? What does spiritual growth look like and what must occur to make

people believe that they are growing spiritually? This study also looked at barriers to participation in Adult Sunday School. These barriers came primarily from responses to open-ended questions. Future studies could prioritize these barriers with a more quantitative approach. It would also be interesting to focus future research on the barrier of having children. Many parents mentioned that their children and child-oriented activities kept them from attending Adult Sunday School. Program planners must know how they can help parents overcome this barrier if they want this group represented in a substantial way in Adult Sunday School.

Additional research could also be conducted on the various subgroups represented in this study. Why did the female survey respondents, as a group, consistently rate the nine factors higher than the male respondents? The differences between the responses of female and male respondents were significant in relation to learning for the sake of learning and external expectations. Why is learning more important to women? How do these gender differences impact how a program should look and operate to attract women and men? What role does empowerment play in helping women and men deal appropriately with the expectations of others? Single people are more likely to attend Adult Sunday School because of its learning component than married people. Why is this the case? Are single people more involved in learning ventures because they do not have family commitments? The fact that single people were less likely to attend Adult Sunday School in the past year also suggests that more research on the needs of this group might improve their attendance record in the program. The significant relationship between family makeup and a preference for an intergenerational learning atmosphere could also be explored further. How do the ages of the children affect a parent's desire to attend an intergenerational Sunday School class? Those involved in small group Bible studies are more attracted to Adult Sunday School by its practicality than those not involved in small groups. Are small group participants conditioned to expect practicality because of their small group experience? Do those who attend small groups have an inherent desire for practicality? Much more research could be done and must be done on Adult

Sunday School. However, the results of this study have provided valuable information for designing a blueprint for change at LEFC which may help to inform decision-makers in other churches who are looking into reviving Adult Sunday School.

The findings of this research study indicate that Adult Sunday School at LEFC should be revived. It is an honorable program that can play a unique and important role in the life of the church. Certain needs may not be met in any other educational venue. The unique orientation of Adult Sunday School must be maintained through strict observance of its main core values. The focus of the program must not be compromised. However, the structure of Adult Sunday School must reflect an understanding of those factors that affect adults' decisions about whether or not to participate in the program. The structure should reflect the ranking of the nine factors in this study. Differences within subgroups should be taken into consideration when trying to attract people from these subgroups. It is also important for program planners to go beyond addressing factors that increase participation and to address the factors that hinder participation. Planners must prioritize these barriers to participation according to their impact and the planner's ability to address them. These barriers should then be minimized in appropriate ways that do not violate program integrity, or jeopardize the effectiveness of other programs. Changes made to increase participation must be based on an evaluation of the current program and which factors can be addressed to achieve maximum increases in participation. It is assumed that the ongoing process of evaluation and change requires sustained involvement on the part of people in the church. Program planners must be in a constant mode of consultation and evaluation to help insure that Adult Sunday School meets needs in a maximum way. This requires a long-term approach to planning. Relationships must be forged as program planners work with current and potential attendees to promote understanding about the program and to overhaul, or fine-tune the program when necessary. The ultimate goal is not to increase participation so much as it is to see a growing number of people impacted in a life-changing way.

Adult Sunday School stands at a threshold. Its success in the past can not be questioned. However, in recent times, this giant of adult Christian education in the church has begun to stumble. For many churches, the future of Adult Sunday School is unclear. Should the program be scrapped in favor of more contemporary approaches to adult education? Should it be maintained to appease those who embrace its virtues? This study has shown that Adult Sunday School has considerable value for the people of Langley Evangelical Free Church. It has the potential to meet needs that may not be met by existing programs. Adult Sunday School may be an old program, but it can be reconstituted as a major educational force in the church. What is required? Adult Sunday School must adhere to its core values while making changes that capitalize on those factors that attract people and minimizing those factors that act as barriers to participation. When this occurs, Adult Sunday School will achieve maximum participation and have the potential for maximum life change.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Doctrinal Statement of the Evangelical Free Church of Canada**

**SCRIPTURES** - We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men, and the Divine and final authority for all Christian faith and life.

**GOD** - We believe in one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**JESUS CHRIST** - We believe that Jesus Christ is the true God and true man, having been conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. Further, He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He is now our High Priest and Advocate.

**HOLY SPIRIT** - We believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and during this age to convict men, regenerate the believing sinner, indwell, guide, instruct and empower the believer for godly living and service.

**SIN** - We believe that man was created in the image of God but fell into sin and is therefore lost and only through regeneration by the Holy Spirit can salvation and spiritual life be obtained.

**SALVATION** - We believe that the shed blood of Jesus Christ and His resurrection provide the only ground for justification and salvation for all who believe, and only such as receive Jesus Christ are born of the Holy Spirit, and thus become children of God.

**BAPTISM AND LORD'S SUPPER** - We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances to be observed by the Church during the present age. They are, however, not to be regarded as means of salvation.

**CHURCH** - We believe that the true Church is composed of all such persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the body of Christ of which He is the Head.

**MEMBERSHIP** - We believe that only those who are thus members of the true Church shall be eligible for membership in the local church.

**HEAD OF THE CHURCH** - We believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head of the Church, and that every local church has the right under Christ to decide and govern its own affairs.

**RETURN OF CHRIST** - We believe in the personal, premillennial and imminent coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and that this Blessed Hope has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer.

**RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD** - We believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead; of the believer to everlasting blessedness and joy with the Lord; of the unbeliever to judgment and everlasting conscious punishment.

# Standing at the Crossroads

## Where Does Adult Sunday School Go From Here?

*The purpose of this survey is to evaluate Adult Sunday School at Langley Evangelical Free Church. It is my desire as your Associate Pastor of Christian Education to provide quality educational programs that support our mission as a church which is to preach the Gospel and make disciples of Jesus Christ. I would greatly appreciate it if you would take the time to thoughtfully respond to the following questions. Your feedback is important to me!*

### SECTION A - PERSONAL INFORMATION

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Are you (check one)?</p> <p>Male ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>1</sub></p> <p>Female ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>2</sub></p> <p>2. What is your marital status (check one)?</p> <p>Single ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>1</sub></p> <p>Married ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>2</sub></p> <p>Divorced ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>3</sub></p> <p>Separated ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>4</sub></p> <p>Widowed ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>5</sub></p> <p>3. In what year were you born? 19_____</p> | <p>4. What is the highest level of education that you have achieved (check one)?</p> <p>Less than a High School Diploma ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>1</sub></p> <p>High School Diploma ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>2</sub></p> <p>College, or Technical Institute Diploma ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>3</sub></p> <p>Bachelor's Degree ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>4</sub></p> <p>Master's Degree ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>5</sub></p> <p>Doctorate Degree ..... <input type="checkbox"/><sub>6</sub></p> <p>5. How many children do you have living at home and what are their ages?</p> <p>Number of children living at home - _____</p> <p>Ages - _____</p> |
|---|--|

### SECTION B - CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

6. How would you describe your average attendance at Sunday morning worship services over the past year (check one)?
- 3 or more Sundays/month ..... <sub>1</sub>
- 1-2 Sundays/month ..... <sub>2</sub>
- Less than 1 Sunday/month ..... <sub>3</sub>
7. Which of the following Sunday morning ministries are you involved with (check yes or no for each one)?
- |   | Yes                                   | No                                    |
|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Hospitality (ushering/greeting/hosting) ..... | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> |
| Library .....                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> |
| Nursery .....                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> |
| Teaching Sunday School/Wee College .....      | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> |
| Worship Team/Sound .....                      | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> |
| Other - .....                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub> | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> |

If you answered no for all of these, please go to Question 9.

8. How many Sundays a month during this past year, on average, are you involved in the ministry or ministries you identified in Question 7 (check one)?

- 3 or more Sundays/month .....   
1-2 Sundays/month .....   
Less than 1 Sunday/month .....

9. Do you participate in a small group Bible Study (e.g. Growth Group, LAMB, Promise Keepers)?

- Yes .....   
No .....

If yes, how often do you participate? \_\_\_\_\_

---

**SECTION C - ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL**

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10. How would you describe your average participation in Adult Sunday School over the past year (check one)?

- 3 or more Sundays/month .....   
1-2 Sundays/month .....   
Less than 1 Sunday/month .....   
Have not attended this past year .....

11. Was there a time when you attended Adult Sunday School more frequently (check one)?

- Yes .....   
No .....

[If no, go to Question 13]

12. Why did you previously attend Adult Sunday School more frequently?

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |

13. Do you think that there is a need for Adult Sunday School at Langley Evangelical Free Church (please check one)?

- Definitely Not .....   
Probably Not .....   
I Don't Know .....   
Probably Yes .....   
Definitely Yes .....

[If you checked any of these first three choices, please go to Question 15]

14. Why do you think there is a need for Adult Sunday School at Langley Evangelical Free Church?

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

15. How significant are each of the following factors in determining whether you would want to participate in an Adult Sunday School class (check one for each factors)?

| Significance Level: |                        |                      |                    |                  |
|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Not significant     | Of little significance | Somewhat significant | Fairly significant | Very significant |

- a. Social contact .....
- b. Teaching style .....
- c. Opportunity to share experiences .....
- d. Spiritual growth .....
- e. External expectations (what others want me to do) .....
- f. Practical nature of content .....
- g. Relevance of content .....
- h. Learning just for the sake of learning .....
- i. Intergenerational (children and adults together in class) .....
- j. Other - \_\_\_\_\_

16. If you were not a regular participant in Adult Sunday School this past year (3 or more Sundays/month), what were the primary reasons that you did not attend on a regular basis?

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |

17. What topics would be of most interest to you in an Adult Sunday School format?

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

18. What are the best times for you to attend an adult class that interests you (please check one box for each option)?

| Meeting Time Rating |      |              |      |           |
|---------------------|------|--------------|------|-----------|
| Poor                | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |

- a. During the first service (9:15-10:30) .....
- b. During the second service (11:00-12:15) .....
- c. Between services (one hour block) .....
- d. Saturday morning .....
- e. Sunday night .....
- f. A week night .....
- g. Another time: \_\_\_\_\_

Just a few more questions on the back of this page.

19. If Adult Sunday School changed according to your recommendations, how valuable do you think it would be to you (check one)?

- No Value .....  <sub>1</sub>
- Little Value .....  <sub>2</sub>
- Some Value .....  <sub>3</sub>
- Considerable Value .....  <sub>4</sub>
- Great Value .....  <sub>5</sub>

20. Would you attend an Adult Sunday School that met your expectations (please check one)?

- No .....  <sub>1</sub>
- Probably Not .....  <sub>2</sub>
- I Don't Know .....  <sub>3</sub>
- Probably Yes .....  <sub>4</sub>
- Yes .....  <sub>5</sub>

21. Additional comments

22. Would you be interested in participating in a Discussion Group that will meet two times in the next three months to discuss the survey results and to make recommendations as to the future of Adult Sunday School (the total time commitment would be approximately two to four hours)?

- Yes .....  <sub>1</sub>
- No .....  <sub>2</sub>

If you checked yes, please print your name on the line at the bottom of the page. The bottom portion of this page will be removed to insure the anonymity of each person who does the survey.

*Thanks for filling out this survey! Please return the survey to Pastor Randy's mailbox, or to the church office as soon as possible. Summaries of the survey results will be made available once the results have been processed.*

-----  
Your Name (if you checked yes for Question 22): \_\_\_\_\_

**SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS FROM THE SURVEYS  
ON ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL - July 13, 1999**

**Most people believe that there is a need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC.**

From the surveys received so far, 59% responded with "definitely yes" there is a need for Adult Sunday School at LEFC and 30% responded "probably yes."

**Most people do believe that Adult Sunday School has personal value if it is changed according to their recommendations.**

Great value - 19%    Considerable value - 47%    Some value - 30%

**Most people indicate that they will attend adult electives if they meet their expectations.**

Yes - 30%    Probably yes - 51%

**The majority of people want classes that stimulate spiritual growth in areas that are highly practical and relevant to their lives. Many people also believe that teaching style is an important factor in motivating them to attend an adult elective.**

The average scores (out of 5) of the top four factors affecting motivation to attend Adult Sunday School were:

1. Spiritual growth - 4.6
2. Relevance of content - 4.5
3. Practical nature of content - 4.3
4. Teaching style - 4.0

**Although many people do believe that social contact does play a part in Adult Sunday School, it would seem that there is not a strong desire to make Adult Sunday School like a Growth Group. There appears to be a desire to receive instruction while still allowing for interaction which is more teacher-oriented than group-oriented (e.g. asking the teacher questions about the topic at hand).**

**Several major themes seem to emerge from the question dealing with the topics that people would like covered in adult electives:**

1. Classes that focus on a Bible book, or theme
2. Marriage and family classes
3. Evangelism and apologetics (including missions)
4. Practical classes that deal with finances, being a Christian in the workplace, etc.

**There is a great deal of diversity in the times that people would be willing to attend an adult elective.**

|                                 | Excellent | Good  | Satisfactory | Total |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-------|--------------|-------|
| During first service            | 22.8%     | 29.5% | 14.1%        | 66.4% |
| During second service           | 18.1%     | 30.2% | 16.1%        | 64.4% |
| One hour block between services | 10.9%     | 32.8% | 19.0%        | 62.8% |
| Sunday night                    | 5.1%      | 16.1% | 13.1%        | 34.3% |
| Week night                      | 3.7%      | 14.2% | 13.4%        | 31.3% |

## **SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

What unique role can Adult Sunday School play at LEFC?

What would make Adult Sunday School classes more attractive to people at LEFC?

Are there changes that could be made to the Adult Sunday School program as a whole to make it a more viable option for people?

When should adult electives be offered?

\*These questions may be modified and/or new ones added based on an ongoing evaluation of the survey results.

## **GROUP ACTIVITY**

Based on the survey results and the group discussion, design an "ideal" Adult Sunday School program for 1999-2000 (September - June).

**Why did you previously attend Adult Sunday more frequently?  
Categorization of Responses**

Note: Those who had previously attended Adult Sunday School more than they had this past year were asked to respond to this question. As you look at a summary of the responses, it is important to remember that some of the responses may refer back to previous churches that individuals attended. However, the responses do give us insight into the factors that were once important to people in drawing them to Adult Sunday School.

- The Topics were of Interest to Me (40)
- I Was Not as Involved in Church Ministries, or Other Activities (23)
- It's Hard to Attend a Service and Sunday School When You Have Children (21)
- I Wanted To Learn and Grow (21)
- I was More Available (13)
- I Went to Have Fellowship (11)
- There was Greater Continuity in the Classes Offered (9)
- The Classes were Grouped by Age (9)
- We Went to Sunday School as a Family (9)
- I Was Younger and/or Healthier (8)
- The Children's Sunday School was at the Same Time as the Adult Sunday School (6)
- It Used to Be Easier to go to Sunday School When There Was Only One Service (6)
- There was a Greater Variety of Classes (5)
- The Teacher was Interesting (5)
- The Timing for the Classes Was More Convenient (4)
- I Felt More a Part of this Church (3)
- There was Opportunity for Discussion (3)
- There Used to Be Regular Children's Programs in Both Services (1)
- I Didn't Attend a Growth Group (1)
- I Was Doing Better in My Personal Life (1)
- My Spouse Does Not Want To Go to Sunday School (1)
- I Wanted to Add Variety to Sunday Morning (1)

\*The numbers in brackets give the approximate number of responses in each category.

## **Why do you think there is a need for Adult Sunday School at Langley Evangelical Free Church? Categorization of Responses**

Note: A question of this nature can sometimes get at some of the deeper needs that people have and that might be met in an Adult Sunday School format.

### **ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CAN PROVIDE A FORUM FOR PERSONAL GROWTH**

#### **Adult Sunday School can Challenge the Mind (Cognitive Level)**

1. Adult Sunday School can help meet peoples' need to learn (36)
2. Adult Sunday School can help people have a better understanding of the Bible and other life issues (26)
3. Adult Sunday School can provide a safe atmosphere to learn (13)
4. Adult Sunday School may be the best place to learn in a group setting for some people in the church (3)
5. Adult Sunday School can help new Christians find out more about Christianity (7)
6. Adult Sunday School can help the church as a whole grow together (4)

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Challenge the Heart (Spiritual Level)**

1. Adult Sunday School can help people develop their relationship with God (26)
2. Adult Sunday School can help people deal with personal issues in their lives (3)

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Challenge Peoples' Behavior (Practical Level)**

1. Adult Sunday School can help people put their knowledge into practice (10)
2. Adult Sunday School can help equip people for more effective service (4)

### **ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CAN PROVIDE A FORUM FOR FELLOWSHIP**

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Help People Get to Know Others (9)**

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Help People Grow Together (6)**

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Help People Have a Sense of Belonging (2)**

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Provide Encouragement and Support (8)**

### **ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CAN PROVIDE A FORUM FOR ADDRESSING RELEVANT TOPICS**

#### **The Adult Sunday School Program Can Provide Group Relevance by Offering a Variety of Topics (14)**

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Provide Personal Relevance Through Group Discussions and Interaction (57)**

### **ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CAN COMPLEMENT OTHER EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN THE CHURCH**

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Be An Extension of the Small Group Ministries (12)**

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Provide Another Learning Opportunity For Those Already Participating in the Sunday Morning Service (7)**

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Address Peoples' Needs in a Unique Manner (8)**

#### **Adult Sunday School Can Set a Precedent for the Children (2)**

\*The numbers in brackets give the approximate number of responses in each category.

**If you were not a regular participant in Adult Sunday School this past year (3 or more Sundays/month), what were the primary reasons you did not attend on a regular basis?  
Categorization of Responses**

Note: This question was designed to draw out responses as it relates to barriers to attending Adult Sunday School.

- Other Church-Related and Non Church-Related Commitments (60)
- Not Interested in the Classes (50)
- It's Hard to Attend a Service and Sunday School When You Have Children (47)
- No Time (18)
- Chose to go to Worship Service Instead of Adult Sunday School (18)
- Age and Health Reasons (16)
- The Children's Sunday School is at a Different Time Than the Adult Sunday School (11)
- I Do Not Feel Connected to the Church (11)
- The Timing for the Classes Was Not Convenient (9)
- Unaware of Classes (8)
- Needs Already Met in Other Group Settings (6)
- Spousal Influence (6)
- Didn't Think to Get Involved (5)
- Like Sleeping In (4)
- Stressful Personal Life (4)
- Lack of Commitment on My Part (2)
- Lack of Age-Specific Classes (2)
- Unable to Attend Regularly (2)
- Lack of Continuity of Teachers

\*The numbers in brackets give the approximate number of responses in each category.

**What topics would be of most interest to you in an Adult Sunday School format?  
Categorization of Responses**

Note: As you have probably noticed from the responses to these first three questions, interest in topic is an important factor in determining whether or not people will participate in Adult Sunday School. In anticipation of this finding, I asked another open-ended question that dealt with topics that would be of most interest to people.

**BIBLE CLASSES**

Book studies (55)

Topical studies (53)

1. Personal Growth (12)
2. Prophecy/End Times (12)
3. Doctrine/Theology (7)
4. Spiritual Gifts (6)
5. Knowing God's Will (4)
6. Character of God (3)
7. Other (those mentioned only once or twice)

Character studies (10)

Survey studies (4)

**CLASSES ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**

Parenting (39)

Marriage (15)

**OUTREACH CLASSES**

Apologetics (16)

Witnessing (12)

Missions (9)

**ISSUES CLASSES**

History (10)

Finances (9)

Current Events (5)

Creation vs. Evolution (4)

Leadership (4)

The Christian in the Workplace (4)

Time Management (3)

Helping the Aging (2)

The Roles of Men and Women (2)

Other (those mentioned only once) (14)

\*The numbers in brackets give the approximate number of responses in each category.