

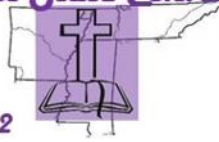
Mid-South Churches Cooperative Conference

Baptist State Convention

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2020 Sunday School Resource Guide



SUNDAY
SCHOOL

POST_{COVID}

Dr. Michael O. Minor, Editor

Foreword

August 2020

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Has COVID-19 cancelled Sunday School? Perusing congregations' Facebook and YouTube virtual Sunday streaming, we see much preaching, some singing, but very little Sunday School. When we do see Sunday School, it is an abbreviated version of itself. After nearly 300 years, are we witnessing the death of Sunday School?

As you'll read in the first article in this guide, Sunday School began in the 1750's in England. It was not the Sunday School we grew up with. It began as a means of keeping children occupied on Sunday mornings and to teach them how to read. The first American Sunday School classes began in the 1790s. Through the decades, Sunday School morphed into an expression of the Great Commission. Simply stated, today, the purpose of Sunday School is to change lives for Jesus Christ by evangelizing the lost and discipling those who respond to the Gospel through our classes.

So, with the absence or abbreviation of our traditional Sunday School classes due to the pandemic, have we foregone a prime avenue of evangelism and spiritual nurture? Since we are still getting use to the new normal, the jury is still deliberating. However, the evidence strongly suggests that traditional Sunday School is in trouble.

But the concept of Sunday School is as strong as ever! How can Sunday School be strong when I just shared about Sunday morning Sunday School deserts? The key word is "concept." The COVID-19 pandemic is fueling a Sunday School revolution. Sunday School as we know it will never be the same.

Is that a good or bad thing? Based upon my experience lecturing in the Sunday School Seminar series of the Sunday School Publishing Board Educators' Conference, I suggest that it is a providential thing. I heard from so many lamenting about the sad state of their congregation's Sunday School experience. They so wanted improvement. We never know how God will answer our prayers. Have we considered that God is using the COVID-19 pandemic to transform Sunday School?

In this resource guide supporting Mid-South Churches' 2020 Regional Sunday School Workshop, we include two background articles followed by three articles discussing Sunday School in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We conclude with a discussion of the multimodal approach to Sunday School. I trust that this guide will be a blessing in your teaching ministry.

Yours for the cause of Christ,

Dr. Michael O. Minor

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2020 Sunday School Resource Guide: Sunday School Post-COVID

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Disclaimer: Material in this booklet is a compilation of edited and original material. Inclusion of material is not necessarily an endorsement of all of a particular writer's or denomination's views.

Origin of "Sunday Schools"

Aymon de Albatrus

Source: No longer in print

(Editor's Note: William King started a Sunday school in 1751 in Dursley, Gloucestershire (England). It expanded to Gloucester England in the year 1780.) Robert Raikes became convinced by his work among prison inmates, that an early religious teaching for children would help keep them from a life of crime. By default, the schools were conducted on the one day of the week that children didn't work: Sunday. By the year 1791, the Sunday School movement had spread to the US. At the time of Raikes' death, there were some 500,000 children enrolled in Sunday School. Since then it has been engraved on the public consciousness. The average churchgoer would find the thought of life without Sunday School unimaginable. Even some non-religious people often send their children to Sunday School.

Sunday schools began as schools for the poor, run mostly by churches. The schools provided basic instruction to working people on their free day. By the 1790's, there were several of these schools in the United States and elsewhere, where these schools were organized for the benefit of such persons of either sex (and of any age) as cannot afford to educate themselves, were run by paid teachers to instruct pupils in reading and copying from the Bible.

These schools had the additional purpose of controlling children's activities. Employment of children in industries had brought together youth of similar ages who worked together on weekdays and spent their Sundays playing in alleys and wharves, to the great disturbance of the families in the vicinity of such places.

Sunday schools provided an alternative to Sunday rowdiness. The schools would also teach proper behavior, enforcing cleanliness, providing Sunday clothing, and reprimanding children for lying, swearing, talking in an indecent manner, or other misbehavior. We see then that Sunday School came about for a practical need to introduce poor and rowdy youngsters to basic religious teaching

Why Sunday School?

Rodney L. Pry

Source: No longer in print [circa 1994]

Have you ever stopped to think about why your church has a Sunday school? Most of us would like to see our Sunday school grow, but before we can expect to see such growth, we need to take the time to think about our purpose and the goals for our Sunday school.

During the past 20 years, the overall Sunday school attendance has declined by about 9 million (from 41 million to 32 million) in North America (according to the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*). This decline means that today roughly one in three persons attend church, but only about one in nine attends Sunday school.

In spite of this decline in Sunday school, many surveys tell us of the need and hunger for spiritual guidance that most people feel today. The Princeton Religion Center recently asked teenagers what they would like to study and discuss. The top three responses all had significant religious implications. 64% said, "Is there really a God?" 56% said, "What is the meaning of my life?" And, 55% asked, "Is there really a heaven or hell?" Another recent survey found that nearly half (46%) of all adults had at least one problem or question for which they had no answers or solutions.

The Bible has the answer to any problem or question that any of us might have about living our lives in the way that God wants. But, finding those answers can be difficult, especially for the person who doesn't know the Bible that well or how to apply it to their lives. That's exactly where the Sunday school should come in.

Establishing goals for our Sunday schools that help them meet the needs of the people of our churches and communities is a necessary part of building a foundation for growth, both in attendance and in spiritual commitment to our Lord. Here are several important goals to consider...

1. Help persons of all ages learn God's Word and how to apply it to their lives. One of the primary goals of any Sunday school should be to help people learn about the Bible and what it says. In addition, we should strive to help everyone learn how to apply the Bible to their daily life. What is God saying to each person and how can they apply His Word and His will to their lives? Memorization of the scriptures can be a part of this; however, understanding of the scriptures is much more important.

2. Evangelization. The primary goal of every church and every member of that church should be to see that everyone is led to Christ as Lord and Savior. The Sunday school provides a unique opportunity for everyone to learn, in depth, what it means to be a Christian and how to become a follower of Christ. In Sunday school, we have an opportunity to share our love for the Lord and personal experiences from our Christian walk to help lead others to Christ. Teachers should be reminded of the eternal importance of salvation and urged to make opportunities for commitment and recommitment to Christ a regular part of their class time.

3. Provide opportunities for Christian fellowship. It's hard to be a Christian on your own. That's why it's important to be a part of a church, the "family of God." Knowing that others have faced similar problems and that they have found the answers in the Bible and in Jesus Christ, is an important part of Sunday school. But, learning to really get to know the other persons of your church can sometimes be a problem. That's where fellowship events and activities for individual classes are so important. The fact is that most Christians say they don't have Christian friends that they can talk to and confide in. Getting to really know the people of your Sunday school can be extremely important for each of your members.

4. Provide opportunities for Christian service. A survey conducted a few years ago said that over half of all persons who were first involved in service to their church became involved in the Sunday school. Although this statistic may not be the same for all churches today, it certainly indicates the potential importance of the Sunday school to the overall program of the church. Sunday schools and individual classes can provide many opportunities for members to serve their Lord and their fellowman within the church and the community.

5. Provide opportunities for spiritual growth. It's a rule of nature – if something stops growing, it will soon die. The same rule applies to our churches and Sunday schools – if they stop growing spiritually, they are in danger of dying! A Sunday school that has seen the spiritual faith of its members grow stagnant will not grow, either in spirit or in attendance. For any Sunday school to remain vibrant, relevant and alive, it must have teachers, leaders and members who are excited about learning more about Jesus Christ, His Word and His will for their lives. They must be excited about "the Good News" that they have found for their lives and excited about sharing that same "Good News" with others. Sunday schools that work to promote the spiritual growth of their members will surely find the added bonus of an increase in attendance, too.

6. To be a part of the overall growth, outreach and mission of the total church. What should be our top priority? The church? The Sunday school? No, Jesus Christ should come first! The total program, outreach and ministry of any church and Sunday school should be established for Him. The total church program should work together in harmony. The worship service has one purpose, the Youth Group has another purpose, the Sunday school a different purpose, etc. However, even with the different methods and purposes of each part, they all should be working together for the One who is our primary focus, Jesus Christ!

Examine the purposes and goals that you have established for your Sunday school. Make sure your teachers, leaders and members are fully aware of those purposes and goals. And then make sure that your program is structured to establish those purposes and to pursue your goals. A clearer vision of whom we are and where we want to go can help every Sunday school establish a firm basis for growth, to the Glory of God!

5 Things COVID-19 Is Teaching Us About Sunday School

Ken Braddy

Source: <https://churchleaders.com/coronavirus-updates-stories/379775-5-things-covid-19-is-teaching-us-about-sunday-school.html>

It may seem hard to fathom, but a microscopic virus is doing some good things in the church's most important ministry – Sunday School. It's difficult to say when churches will officially return to the campus to reopen Bible study groups (some are already doing this – others are on the verge – and still others are watching and waiting for their opportunity to restart groups on campus). In the meantime, COVID-19 is teaching us 5 things about Sunday School.

If we'll all pay attention and learn from these things, Sunday School can be stronger and more vibrant than ever – if we are paying attention. Has COVID-19 taught you anything about your church's Sunday School ministry? I've come to understand five things about Sunday School, especially relevant in our COVID-19 world. When groups return to the church campus, here are some things we'll need to keep in mind:

1. Groups will need to intentionally reclaim people.

It's hard to believe, but some adult Bible study groups have not met since March! Whether because of technology challenges or a belief that the church would quickly return to the church campus, some groups have gone 16 to 18 weeks without meeting. Even now there are reports of "Zoom fatigue" among those people meeting online, and attendance in those virtual Bible studies has diminished. Some Christians are growing out of the habit of meeting regularly with their Bible study groups.

The church is going to have to reclaim its own members when Bible study groups restart on our church campuses. Savvy group leaders are reaching out to every member on their group's ministry list to maintain contact and to encourage them to stay plugged in prior to the return to on-campus groups. It's almost unthinkable, but we are going to have to go plow our own fields and harvest our own people, without losing sight of the thousands of people all around our churches who are not members of any church or any Bible study group! There's going to be a lot of needed ministry, and it's going to require us to reclaim people who once sat down the row or across the circle from us.

2. Group and individual Bible study is more important than most of us realized.

Church leaders are discovering (or rediscovering) that groups are just as important – and some would say even more important – than the church's worship gathering. Robby Gallaty, pastor of a large church in the Nashville area, said in his book *Growing Up*, a book on Christian discipleship, that preaching to make disciples is like going to the church's nursery, spraying the kids with milk, and saying, "I just fed the kids."

In a similar way, Dr. Brad Waggoner's research for his book *The Shape of Faith to Come* presented what it takes for a person to grow as a disciple. He wrote, "The number one factor...most correlated to the highest maturity scores is the practice of reading the Bible...the simple discipline of reading the Bible has a major impact on Christians. Spiritual leaders need to take note of this. We put a lot of time and energy into preparing sermons, as we should. But we make a huge mistake if we think our sermons, regardless of their quality, are enough to create

sustained life transformation...our people need daily exposure to the life-transforming power of God through His revealed Word” (p.68).

Online groups, on-campus groups, groups that meet in homes, and groups that meet in other places provide much-needed relational glue for the church. People connect people – programs don’t connect people. Studying apart and then studying together fuels the life transformation brought about as the Holy Spirit leads and guides Christians into all truth. Couple the group experience with a daily Bible reading and study experience and you have postured people to grow as disciples.

Since this is true, why have so many groups taken the summer off? What have we let COVID-19 keep us from gathering in some form or fashion (there are ways to practice physical distancing and to put other safeguards into place!). I am sensitive to people who do not want to regather because of health concerns related to the virus – my son had COVID (he lives in our home) just six weeks ago and has recovered, so I understand the dangers. What I have a hard time understanding is why so many groups have taken an extended break from being together when they could have been meeting some other way – either online or in a modified in-person way. COVID hasn’t kept us from running errands, eating out, going on summer beach trips, and everything else under the sun. But when it comes to church, it’s stopped us in our tracks.

3. Bible study curriculum can be a strategic part of a discipleship strategy.

Bible study groups that have weathered the COVID-19 storm have done two things. First, those groups have continued to meet (primarily via Zoom). Second, they have remained committed to studying the Bible by using an ongoing Bible study series. *[Editor’s Note: The Sunday School Publishing Board has a number of curricula to support discipleship building beginning with the Faith Series Sunday School literature and including the Living the Baptist Faith Series, S.E.E.D., and, because many churches cancelled VBS this summer, the 2020 Get on Board Vacation Bible School material is an excellent resource too.]*

4. Smaller groups have advantages in disciple-making.

Jesus’ plan for making disciples was simple: he focused on relationships with 12 men, plus a smaller inner group of 3 men. He spent most of his time instructing them, relating to them, and participating in ministry with them. If large gatherings were the model for making disciples, Jesus would have held many more open-air hillside teaching events than he did. *Instead, he knew the power of small.*

Today, smaller Bible study groups have disciple-making advantages, especially during and after COVID-19. Groups can meet in places that larger ones cannot (physical distancing in large groups has made it almost impossible for them to gather during COVID-19). Living rooms, backyards, parks, pavilions, and side rooms in restaurants have provided the meeting spaces that smaller groups have used to their advantage while larger groups have not been able to meet. Discipleship has continued, even during COVID, through smaller groups that proved to be nimble, agile, and flexible.

Thankfully, many larger groups are beginning to reorganize into smaller ones – groups within the group. These new groups are under the leadership of someone from the class who stepped up

to teach and lead 1/3 or 1/2 of the group. Now the formerly large group has a fighting chance for its people to meet, especially if COVID-19 flareups cause states to roll back to “phase 1” restrictions on gathering this autumn.

5. Sunday School is getting a once-in-a-lifetime reset.

Yes, we may be witnessing history in the making. COVID-19 has given us the chance to experience a “hard reset” in Sunday School. In computer terms, a hard reset restores a device (phone, tablet, laptop) to its original factory settings. Sunday School may get a needed reset and go back to its roots of evangelism, outreach, teaching, training, and multiplying by starting new groups.

Now there are numerous opportunities for Sunday Schools to do things they haven’t been doing, but should have been, as groups return to the church campus. Churches are discovering that through technology like Zoom, a regular cadence of training can take place online; training is going to be easier, less expensive, and more accessible than ever in a virtual environment. Some groups are going to reorganize, dividing their adult groups into much needed care groups (which should have been done pre-COVID).

The focus on outreach, assimilation, and evangelism could return to the forefront of why churches have a Sunday School in the first place. If the church misses this opportunity to do a hard reset, it will miss one of the biggest opportunities to institute a course correction in its largest and most important ministry.

Yes, COVID-19 is instructing us. It’s telling us how to improve Sunday School. It’s serving as a teacher to students who are paying attention in the classroom of life. COVID-19 is showing us where we’ve been weak, and how to improve. If the church’s Bible study groups return to the campus and do business as usual, then we will have missed a great opportunity to restart our groups with a focus on Sunday School’s roots.

The Future of Sunday School

Darryl Wilson

Source: <http://www.sundayschoolrevolutionary.com/the-future-of-sunday-school/>

What does the future hold for Sunday School? What will Sunday School look like in the days ahead? Will the COVID-19 pandemic result in some permanent changes?

Future of Sunday School Possibilities. I challenge you to stop and take out pen and paper to jot down a few of your thoughts about the future of Sunday School. Allow me to share seven of the possibilities that I envision:

1. **Increased Eagerness to Attend.** Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Groups have missed one another. Many will be eager to see one another face-to-face. Eagerness will be high, BUT some (including teachers) will be hesitant to return due to fear and ill health. In addition, some formerly regular attenders will struggle to regain the habit of rising early enough to attend at the church building.
2. **Desire to Continue Online Meetings.** Attendance in many classes on Zoom and other providers has been higher than face-to-face meetings in the church building were before COVID-19. (This has been true for the class I attend.) Some classes and individuals will desire to continue meeting online even when meeting in the church building is possible. In fact, some classes will do both: meet at church and online. And some will share the link to the recording of the meeting with those who miss class that day.
3. **New Definition Results in Increased Attendance.** Attendance will include people in the church building, away from the church building, online, and even those who watched (or listened to) a recording of the class.
4. **Planning and Training Delivered Online.** Higher percentages participated in online Sunday School planning and training during COVID-19. With the comfort in using online tools, like Zoom, this will be a common approach to planning and training in the days ahead.
5. **Increased Use of Electronic Curriculum.** Some teachers and attenders will prefer to receive electronic (digital) versions of the Sunday School lesson. This will result in some churches asking members to order and pay for their own curriculum subscription. This may be further necessary due to decline in tithes and offerings.
6. **Social Distance Results in Meeting Other Days.** Desiring to maintain social distance, some groups will choose to meet in larger spaces (such as the fellowship hall, etc.). Because only one group can meet on Sunday morning in that space, some groups will meet on Sunday afternoon or evening and on other days of the week. This will have to be scheduled and spread out to allow appropriate cleaning between usage.
7. **Classroom Cleaning Will Be Expected.** Due to COVID-19, rooms will be kept cleaner than before. A group will be hesitant (or refuse) to return to room in a week where the room was unable to be cleaned.

What Will Sunday School Be Like Post-COVID 19?

Ken Braddy

Source: <https://kenbraddy.com/2020/05/22/what-will-sunday-school-be-like-post-covid-19/>

Why not rush in where angels fear to tread? People are asking, so I'm addressing the topic "What will Sunday School be like post-COVID 19?" Although we can't see the future with absolute clarity, we can take educated guesses and in most cases get pretty close. Based on conversations with pastors and Christian educators, group leaders, books I'm reading, and my 25+ years in church education/discipleship ministry, here are some things I believe could be part of our "new normal" in Sunday School:

1. **Classrooms will become Zoom rooms** – Because of the success most groups have experienced during initial COVID-19 sequestering, the Zoom experience will transfer to on-campus classrooms. Teachers will use iPads, laptops, or smartphones to broadcast live via Zoom. This will allow absentee members and guests to continue meeting with a group when work, play, or illness takes them away on Sundays.
2. **New Zoom room roles will emerge** – As groups go live through Zoom, new roles will emerge for group members. Traditional roles include class secretary, care group leader, fellowship leader, prayer leader, and others. But in our new Zoom rooms, groups will need a Zoom co-host to monitor the Chat feature, let people in when they assemble in the Waiting Room, and watch for hackers.
3. **Some teachers will be slow to return to the classroom** – Older teachers who have pre-existing conditions may not be comfortable serving in more crowded pre-COVID conditions. Some will return slowly, and others won't return until there is a vaccine. This means we'll need to recruit and train new leaders.
4. **Physical distancing will mean adding groups and hours** – If physical distancing guidelines keep us at 6 feet of physical distance, classrooms won't be able to accommodate pre-COVID groups. Removing or blocking chairs will mean that only 1/3 to 1/2 of the members will have a seat – so we'll have to create new groups, add an hour of Sunday School, or encourage groups to meet on a day and time other than Sunday morning.
5. **Some groups will remain online and not return to the campus** – My groups is already asking the question, "Do we have to go back?" We have found meeting online to be convenient and effective. This isn't all bad, because our empty room could be used to start a new group, or for another group to divide up and use it for some of their group members.
6. **Training will focus on digital competencies** – The church was forced to move online quickly at the beginning of COVID-19 sequestering. Many Bible study leaders didn't feel comfortable using Zoom technology (and still don't). In the very near future, training will shift to help group leaders keep up with changing technology.

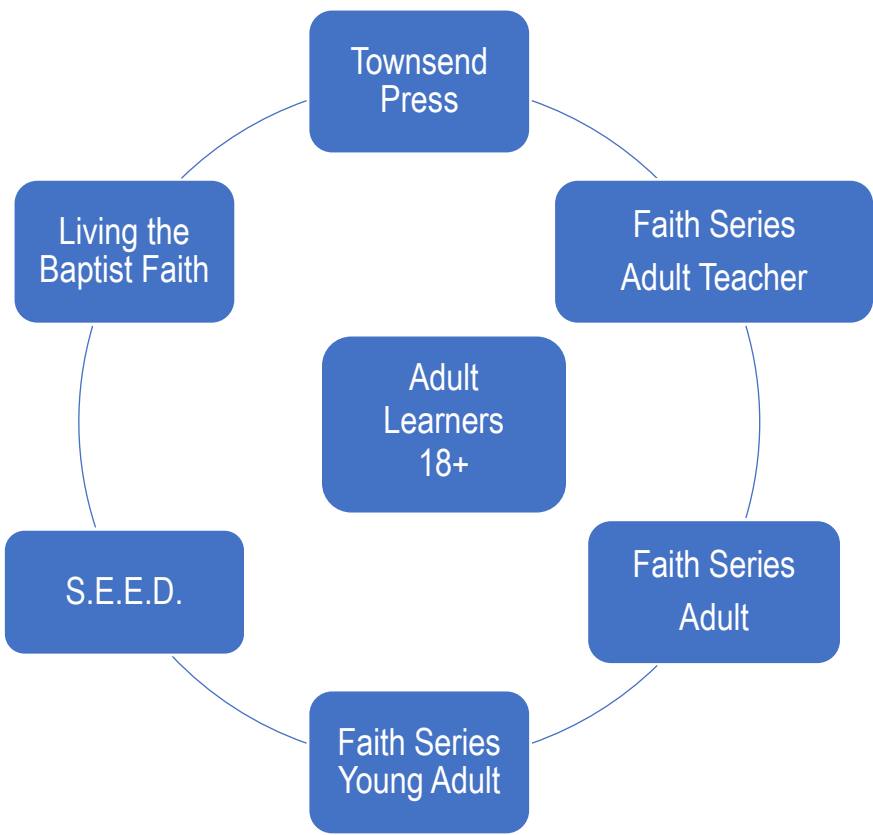
7. **Digital curriculum options may become more important to groups** – Because of our experience during the early days of COVID-19 sequestering, and because many groups may not initially go back to the church campus until late summer, we're all seeing the value in providing leaders and members with digital versions of their curriculum.
8. **Cleaning and sanitizing of rooms will be a priority** – Your church members are being trained to expect greater levels of clean because of companies like Taco Bell and Wal-Mart. Employees of those companies wear masks, sanitize grocery carts, and hold card readers out the drive-through window so there is no hand contact. As your member's expectations about cleaning and sanitizing rise, they will also rise in regards to how your church approaches this.
9. **Training will move online** – Training has not been a strong suit in many churches, but now Zoom allows teachers to easily get together online for a time of training each month. One church I know in Richardson, TX., just recruited 20+ experts from around the country to be guests on successive weekly training meetings. So far teachers are attending at almost a 100% rate!
10. **Groups will be smaller** – Because of people's hesitancy to return to campus, social distancing rules, and new acclimation to online group meetings, on-campus groups have the potential to be smaller than pre-COVID attendance patterns. This isn't all bad. If true, this will make room for new people in on-campus groups.
11. **Groups won't feel compelled to meet on Sundays** – During COVID-19 we have learned that Sunday School groups don't necessarily have to meet on Sunday mornings. I love this. In most of our towns, 22-245 of people work on Sunday morning and cannot attend worship or Bible study. By meeting on Sunday evening or a night during the week (seniors could meet during the daytime) we could reach new people.
12. **D(iscipleship)-Groups will find new life in online meetings** – Because so many Bible study groups have moved online, smaller triads and quads of people now realize they, too, can meet online for a deeper level of accountability and Bible study. These closed groups no longer have to meet at a restaurant or coffee shop early before people go to work, or on a weeknight after the kids get to bed. Now these groups can meet online whenever it's convenient.

A Multimodal Approach: 360° Sunday School
Dr. Michael O. Minor, Southwest 1 Regional Coordinator
Sunday School Publishing Board
www.sspbnbc.com

Limited to Sunday and called “Sunday School,” the traditional church school model is fairly rigid. The needs of participants are secondary with the primary focus fixed on age brackets not believer maturity.

Open to any day of the week and called by many different names including Sunday Church School, Discipleship Academy, and Life Applications Institute, the multimodal approach church school or 360° model is flexible. In contrast to the traditional model, the needs of participants are primary and based upon believer maturity not fixed age brackets.

To meet the needs of the multimodal approach to virtual church school, the Sunday School Publishing Board has a diversified curriculum. The diagram below shows how the SSPB’s adult learner curriculum supports the multimodal approach.



Sunday School Publishing Board Diversified Adult Learner Curriculum

Townsend Press Commentary – church school annual

- Commentary
- Pastor's Edition
- Teacher's Edition

Faith Series – church school quarterly

- Adult Teacher
- Older Adult (55+ or 65+)
- Adult (35-55 or 65)
- Young Adult 18-35

S.E.E.D. (80 lessons) – contemporary topics

Living the Baptist Faith (formerly BTU) (78) – foundations of denominational beliefs

