

Section 1 **Developing a Vision for Ministry**

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Section 1 **Developing a Vision for Ministry**

Quick! In twenty-five words or less, why does your Sunday school exist? Often, Sunday school exists in a particular church because . . . well, just because. Offering a Sunday school program just because your church has always offered a program may work, but it may not be the best way to develop a vibrant ministry. Periodically every church needs to articulate and support a valid reason for its Sunday school program to exist.

That's what developing a vision for ministry is all about it. This is how church analyst George Barna defines vision:

Vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to his chosen servants, and is based upon an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances.

—George Barna, *The Power of Vision*, Regal Books, © 1992, p. 28.

So what's your vision? Before you answer that question, we recommend that you determine what your Sunday school ministry is like right now. It will give you the accurate understanding about which Barna writes.

Assessing the Here and Now

You could approach the task of assessing the what and why of your current Sunday school ministry from many different angles. You might pull together an education committee, or a group of teachers, or a focus group of parents, teachers, and other leaders in your church to brainstorm the good things about your program and the areas that need improving. Or you might prefer a more systematic process, using an assessment tool to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses.

We've provided an assessment tool ("Is Our Sunday School Really Great?", pp. 19-20) that you can modify to fit the needs of your situation or photocopy and use as is. Once you've determined your score for each of the seven tasks, you're ready to develop or refine the vision for your Sunday school program and focus on the areas that need the most attention.

Zoom In

The seven numbered tasks on the assessment tool "Is Our Sunday School Really Great?" (pp. 19-20) match the seven numbered sections in this book. Your scores will help you zoom in on the areas that need the most attention. For example, if your present Sunday school program scores low in the area of nurturing children (task 3), you'll find helpful information in section 3 to strengthen this area of your program. Even if you score well on Developing a Vision for Ministry (task 1/section 1), begin with your vision—review, refine, and renew your commitment to it.

Daring to Dream

Once you know the strengths and weaknesses of your Sunday school program, you are ready to define the “preferable future” (Barna) for the ministry program you’re leading. What vision is God imparting to you and others who nurture the faith of the children in your care?

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Metro Ministries— One Man’s Dream

Since 1980, Bill Wilson and Metro Ministries have pioneered the human wasteland of America’s forgotten inner cities. Their mission is to find and rescue the children left behind in the battleground of drugs, violence, abuse, and filth. After throwing out the old rulebooks, Bill developed an effective Sunday school ministry that had to work in the chaos and violence of the inner city. This was a struggle that could only be won with the power of God. With enormous faith and persistence, Bill began Sunday schools and the **Won-by-One Children’s Sponsorship Program**, a unique way to partner Christians across America with an inner-city child.

Along the way, Bill Wilson built a professional staff totally dedicated to changing America one child at a time. Each week, just by traveling within two miles of the ministry center in Brooklyn, their buses and buildings began filling with children who looked to Metro Ministries Sunday school as the best and brightest time of their week.

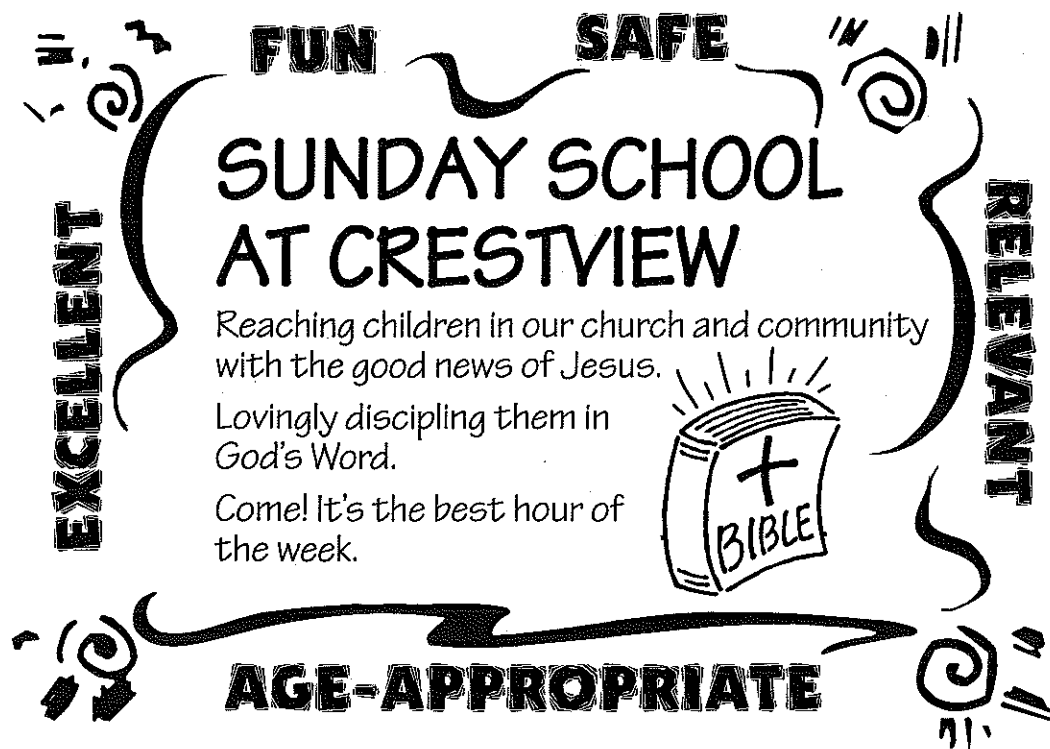
Today this program, used in over 400 cities around the world, reaches 23,000 children each week. And it all began with a vision of something better than the life of abandonment and struggle Wilson had experienced firsthand as a child.

—<http://www.metroministries.org>, Metro Ministries International, 2001

Perhaps your ministry is blessed with twenty-three children *total*; perhaps you can’t even imagine 23,000 children reached by *one* ministry. Like Bill Wilson, though, you can develop a vision for reaching one child at a time.

Drafting a Vision Statement

Once you’ve identified the strengths and weaknesses of your Sunday school program and dared to dream about what it could become, you’re ready to draft a vision statement. We’ll suggest a three-step process described in *Charting a Course for Your Church* (Dirk J. Hart, CRC Publications, 1997, now out of print). To illustrate how these elements fit together, we’ll share examples from the children’s ministry program at Crestview Christian Reformed Church in Boulder, Colorado.



Step 1: Core Ministry Values

Determining what's important in your Sunday school program is a good place to start the visioning process. Core ministry values tell who you are as a Sunday school ministry and why you behave as you do. Crestview wants its children's ministry to be

- Fun
- Age-appropriate
- Relevant
- Excellent
- Safe



Step 2: Purpose (Mission) Statement

A purpose statement tells why you have a Sunday school program in your church. Crestview's purpose is to "reach the children of our church and community with the good news of Jesus Christ and lovingly disciple them in God's Word."



Step 3: Vision Statement

The vision statement tells what you pray you will accomplish through your Sunday school ministry and what you expect it to become. Crestview's vision for its Sunday and midweek children's ministry is to "be the best hours of the week for the children of our church and community."

Once the vision statement is in place, you are ready to set goals and develop strategies to carry out your ministry. (We'll discuss goal setting and strategies in section 4.)

Even if you are *the* leadership team and don't have a lot of support, your vision for the Sunday school program is still important. What you hope to accomplish (your vision of a "preferable future") is what will guide your decisions and help you make plans for the improvement of the ministry and for the spiritual development of the children. One person with a God-planted and clearly stated dream, relying on God's strength, can do great things for God.

Dreaming Alone?

If you find yourself dreaming a future for your Sunday school program all alone, we suggest you work through the visioning exercise "Our Preferable Future" (pp. 21-22). If you're blessed with an education committee or a leadership team, consider using this exercise with the team or adapting it for a visioning retreat.