

Lesson #25: Care well for your teachers and they will come back.

Teaching is a big responsibility and often a tiring one. Many teachers burn out from frustration or lack of support. We try to train our teachers so they will be well prepared. And, we try not to overtax them by asking for a commitment from them that is greater than is reasonable or spiritually good for them. Here are ways we try to care for our teachers....and it helps them be ready to come back again and again.

#1 We Mentor Our Teachers

We try to mentor all new teachers, so that they see a teaching model before they start teaching themselves. This gives us a chance to observe their teaching before they teach to see if they are suited to teach. And, it allows them to try out teaching before committing to a class. As new teachers watch more experienced teachers, they can become familiarized with the curriculum and with effective teaching skills. This brings both greater continuity to the classroom and greater success among new teachers, which in turn helps our children learn.

#2 We Model Teach for Our Teachers

At least once a year, we model-teach in each classroom. We walk the teachers through lesson preparation before class, then have them watch us teach the lesson. Afterwards, we talk about what went well and what could have gone better. This give-and-take of loving criticism fosters an atmosphere of humility and teachability as well as helps us become better teachers. As teachers (and perhaps even more importantly as fellow believers in community together), we think it is important to model soliciting, giving and receiving this kind of healthy criticism. How will we grow if we are not willing to ask others to help us see not only areas in which we do well, but also those in which we need to grow?

#3 We Observe and Encourage Our Teachers

We try to observe teachers at least once a year. The point is not to be the perfection police, but to encourage them. Yes, often this also provides opportunities to give helpful feedback that will make for a better teaching and learning experience. If it causes too much anxiety in the teachers to be observed, we resort back to model teaching.

#4 We Teach Classroom Management Skills As Well As Provide Teacher-friendly Curriculum

We try to carefully choose materials that will help our volunteer teachers understand what to teach and how best to teach it. We also give our teachers tips on how to manage children's behavior in ways that help everyone learn and foster respect for the teacher and for the other students.

#5 We Have Our Teachers Teach in Teams Bigger than They Need

We form teams of teachers that partner together/switch off teaching a particular class of children. A typical team of Sunday School teachers at CHBC commits to one year of teaching. But because they are part of a team of four teachers, with only two teaching any week, they are really teaching twenty-six Sundays rather than all fifty-two Sundays of the year. This allows for teachers to teach a full year without getting burned out and provides built-in substitutes. In our other classroom settings, we have 2 to 6 teachers teaching at a time (depending on class sizes and ages of children). This also allows less experienced teachers to partner and learn from more experienced teachers, making hands-on teacher training a regular part of the classroom experience. It also creates the opportunity for teaching responsibilities within the classroom to rotate from week to week.

#6 We Train Our Teachers

Once a year, we hold training sessions for particular groups of teachers, such as preschool teachers, or elementary school teachers. We also have coordinators who oversee the large number of volunteer teachers who teach in the Praise Factory preschool and elementary school classes. A coordinator helps train new teachers for two, non-consecutive months a year (non-consecutive so that they do not get burned out, themselves!). They also help other teachers prepare and often team teach with them these months. The encouragement, advice and model-teaching of these coordinators often makes the difference in everyone's experience in the classroom. And, often makes the difference in whether a new teacher signs up for other teaching opportunity! Coordinators like these are simply invaluable!