

# Why is Sunday School in a funk in so many churches?

by NEIL McQUEEN

Excluding the number of "funks" that are locally self-induced by uninspired leadership and a congregation's overall local decline, the evidence suggests we are losing ground on many fronts:

- 1) Changes in the culture. If you thought the Baby Boomers weren't completely in-tune with church, wait until you meet their children – the 18-30 year olds.
- 2) Increased competition from Media, Family-time demands, and other churches.
- 3) The growing un-churched but nominally Christian culture providing more "cover" for skipping out on church commitments.
- 4) A long standing general lack of Bible literacy (or desire for it) has been undermining Sunday School's main premise – that a Biblical education is important.
- 5) The Church's rather monolithic and unchanging approach to programming styles, timeslots and outreach.

**These are not new problems.** Parents are working more hours, especially moms, and yet seem to be more intent on spending time with their kids. They are generally more tired on the week-ends and they are more mobile. The movement from a manufacturing to service industry has meant more weekend work too.

Parents don't think Sunday morning Sunday School is EXCLUSIVELY important to their child's spiritual upbringing. Waking up tired on Sunday morning with the prospect of attending a mediocre experience only helps make their decision to stay home that much easier.

In the first ever research done on Empty-Nest religious patterns, the Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religious Studies has released a report states: Just as family cycle transitions into parenting roles among the baby boom cohort exerted an upward push on worship attendance for this cohort over the last twenty years and helped stabilize overall religious participation rates in the United States over this same period, **the inevitable and relatively massive transition of the boomers out of active parenting roles should exert considerable downward pressure on over-all levels of religious participation for at least the next twenty years. Regular attendance for empty nesters is significantly less than for persons with either preteen or teenage children.** Social scientists refer to this phenomenon as "churches by choice" – as a matter of child rearing, not by conviction of faith

That study was conducted in 1996. If they're right about the effect of the "Boomers who become Empty Nesters," the Church is in a SHAKING OUT period through 2016. The Baby Boom Generation is a triple threat. They spiked our attendance when they were young, they drifted back to the church with their own children -but with a different attitude about us, and as soon as their children have left the nest the Boomers will drift off again.

**And the demographic groups coming after the Boomers** have even less interest in religious affiliation and church attendance and lower rates of volunteerism.