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Sunday School Spaces

By Robert C. Foreman, Architect

Is Your Sunday School Really Out of Space?

Are your Sunday School teachers telling you that their classrooms are "maxed out". Are you certain that you have a problem? There are guidelines for space utilization which are generally accepted as the "rules" for capacity for various age groups. "Capacity" is defined as the maximum number of people that will comfortably fill a meeting space so that there is little or no room left to add any more people. As you add more people above capacity, it becomes very difficult to achieve the objectives which you have for that space. There is a cultural factor to the capacity of space with some cultures feeling more comfortable with more people and some feeling less comfortable. However the biggest factor is age group, with the following guidelines for each age grouping:

Babies through 5 year olds - 25 to 35 square feet per child and 12 square feet for each adult worker.

First grade through fifth grade - 25 square feet per child and 12 square feet for each adult worker. Assembly rooms used for short periods of time can have around 12 to 15 square feet per child.

Middle School and High School Youth need about 15 square feet per person in smaller classroom groups with less space being needed for larger assembly groups (over 20 persons).

College age and most adults can do fine at 12 square feet per person. Anything less than 10 square feet per person will seem crowded.

Senior Adults (age 60 and above) often express dissatisfaction when spaces are filled at a ratio of 15 square feet per person or less. They want a little more

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room.

To determine if a classroom has reached capacity, measure each classroom, excluding built-in cabinets, shelves, etc. and calculate the area in square feet. Average the high attendance for each month during the past year and divide that number into the room area. For an additional verification, take the maximum attendance for any Sunday during the last year and divide that number into the room area. If the average high attendance of the year exceeds the room capacity (room area divided by rule of thumb area per person) by more than 15%, then you really are out of space in that room. Also, anytime a space reaches 80% of capacity, people will start to feel crowded and will feel that more space is needed. When you are regularly exceeding 80% of capacity in many of your Sunday School rooms, it is past time to start planning for more space.

In rapidly growing churches, when attendance starts to exceed 70% of capacity, planning for more space should already be well underway. By the time new space is ready, you may already exceed capacity in many departments. If you fail to begin planning soon enough, by the time you have reached capacity, your growth will have slowed to a stop.

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