

Impact Training challenges church leaders to 'pay attention to new members'

*By Lindsey Williams
Writing Specialist*

The 2024 Impact Trainings occurred in five locations across the state throughout August, focusing on the theme of "Building a Healthy Sunday School/Small Group Ministry" for church leaders, staff members, and volunteers.

Ken Braddy, Director of Sunday School and Network Partnerships for Lifeway Christian Resources, served as keynote speaker, alongside breakout leaders presenting various sessions for pastors and age-graded ministries.

"The Sunday School/Groups ministry is a key to the church's disciple-making ministry, aiding believers in growing as disciples and the church in its growth," said Dwayne Parker, Director of Discipleship/Sunday School of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB).

"Ken encouraged and challenged attendees based on evaluations, Facebook, and one-on-one conversations," continued Parker. "Because Ken serves as Sunday School Director in his local church, he can speak first-hand about why Sunday School matters. He truly was a highlight of this year's Impact Training. Mississippi Baptists are blessed to have had him at all five locations. In addition to Ken, we had fantastic breakout leaders who serve in various churches across Mississippi. And we are so grateful for the hospitality and generosity of the five churches who hosted Impact. We were amazed at the number of volunteers who assisted us at the various locations."

Breakout sessions included Wade Phillips, Senior Pastor at Northcrest Church, who led pastors in the best practices for raising up the next generation of leaders and the role of the pastor in relation to small groups; Ken Braddy, who led the Adults-focused session; Caleb Monaghan, Student Pastor at Northcrest Church, who led the Youth-focused session; Regina Wetzstein, Children's Minister of Poplar Springs Drive Church, who led the Children's-focused session; and Angie Boydston, MBCB Preschool/Children's Ministry Consultant, who led the Preschool-focused session.

Boydston, whose breakout emphasized how to be an engaging teacher, make connections with kids, and reach out to kids and families, affirmed the importance of implementing Sunday School ministry at the start of childhood. "Creating a healthy Bible study experience should begin as soon as the youngest child comes to church," said Boydston. "Teaching the Bible to a little one is much easier than most people think. Simply talking to them, as well as singing and telling them biblical truths, will lay a foundation for them to build upon as they get older. We want preschoolers to know from a very young age that people at church care about them and about their future relationship with Christ."



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Ken Braddy, Director of Sunday School and Network

Partnerships for Lifeway Christian Resources, speaks at thepa
Impact Training on Aug. 20 at Hardy Street Church, st
Hattiesburg. (Photo credit: Tanner Cade)

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“Everyone enjoyed their age group workshop and were excited to begin applying some of the ideas. I personally enjoyed Ken Braddy during the opening session. I am a huge advocate for Sunday School/Small Groups, and Ken really drove home their importance.

“Impact Training encourages me because it backs up what I tell my church about the importance and influence of our small groups and Sunday School ministry. This ministry is key to the health and growth of our people and our church. Ken Braddy shared a sobering statistic from Charles Arn (a leading expert on congregational growth). It says, ‘Over 80% of the people who leave a church do so within the first six months of their membership.’ This has deeply challenged me to pay attention to our new members and whether or not they are assimilating into the life of our church.”

“Impacting Training encouraged me in several ways,” said Louis Zinc, Student Pastor at First Church, Oxford, who attended the Longview Point training. “First, in the main session, I was reminded that Gospel ministry is strongly related to farming, and the conditions we see and feel are not always the final condition of His work. We must give ourselves to the seeds of Gospel ministry and trust God to give growth. Second, being in the breakout session helped me to see that everyone in churches of different sizes and contexts has the same worries, burdens, and challenges. There is simply no good achieved in comparing our church to another church, but there is much good in coming together with others and sharing both concerns and celebrations.

“The breakout session helped to lift my mind out of a thinking pattern I seemed to be stuck in. A lot of fresh ideas were shared, but one in particular really encouraged me to keep asking for servant leaders and to not be timid in the continual casting of a specific vision for small groups. I was reminded that I need to personally be convinced of and love the idea which I am communicating to others.”

“This year’s Impact Training confirmed my belief that small groups work to connect people, and we should be diligent in inviting worship attenders to get involved in a small group,” said Cindy Sansing, Minister of Preschool and Children at First Church, Flora, who attended the Morrison Heights

training. "I believe strongly that relationships made in small groups influence attendance and involvement in ministry opportunities. Small groups are the place to do life together and to strengthen personal relationships with Jesus.

Sansing also called attention to the Arn statistic. "This challenges me to pay attention to new members and to make sure they have opportunities to become involved in a small group. We must be diligent because the window closes quickly for connection. I have personally witnessed both scenarios – lives changed because of small groups, and people leaving because they did not get involved in small groups."

"There is no doubt that Sunday School is a part of every church's larger strategy to make disciples," said Jon Martin, MBCB Chief Strategy Officer. "Some will use Sunday School as one step on a Discipleship Pathway to help evangelize and help disciples grow deeper in their faith. So, when we offer trainings such as Impact, we are supporting the work of those local churches as they make disciples in their communities.

"We know church members who are active in a small group Bible study are likely to be more involved church members. They are also more likely to live on mission for Christ. Anything we can do to support that ministry is a great asset to the church. The Mississippi Baptist Convention exists to assist the local church, and trainings like Impact are one of the ways we can fulfill our mission to assist local churches."