

## Coffee Chat 1:

# Renew Rebuild - Rotation.org back to school Coffee Chat

July 19, 2021

## Breakout session recaps, Chat comments, and links

### We spent some time in breakout groups, talking about two questions:

- First breakout question:  
"What have you learned about your Sunday school ministry during the pandemic that you will carry forward?"
- Second breakout question:  
"How can we encourage families to return to Sunday school, worship, and midweek programs? --especially this fall when most programs traditionally "restart"?"

### Recaps of conversation about those two questions from the five breakout groups:

#### Robin's Group:

Some great ideas. One church was already using a lot of media to be virtual (Impact Church in Atlanta) –she shared some great ideas. Drive-throughs, virtual, online.

We talked about the value of teacher training, including hybrid.

Family connections are clearly important: different ways: porch deliveries, drive-thrus, yard play dates. Lots of contact with families through virtual or otherwise.

Concentration on mission that will be continued; that seems to engage families. There was a mission activity at Church on Sunday, and it was expanded to include the community on Monday- it was a great way to reach out. Example – blanket making for homeless (tied blankets – accessible activity). (Phyllis)

One group had a teacher teaching virtually during pandemic, she is homebound, so she can't come back but she can continue to be involved in future teaching online – a blessing that came out of the challenges.

Launching programs across the community Youth activities – combine with others in community – to pull youth together who may not have a group in their home church. Hopeful and exciting.

### Carol's Group: (Margie Price shared)

During introductions we talked about Zooming and kids feeling Zoomed out. Worried about losing volunteers; had hard time getting them in past. Getting volunteers back will be a challenge. So looking to restructure based on what we went through. Some in our group are using rotation, some using Spark. Everyone is trying to blend and find right fit for their setting.

One of the most essential things coming out of pandemic: tight relationships developed with Sunday school kids, families, and parents – even if just virtual we were more connected than we were before. We need ways to maintain developing relationships, more so than we were before.

Storytelling was very powerful in settings – personal and other types. It was a useful tool we want to hang on to in the future.

Communications still an issue. Everyone wants it in a different way. Challenge to find right way to connect with everyone – phone calling again helped develop better relationships and better getting-to-know-yous.

How do we start bringing people back? How to restart? Cognizant of safety issues. Covid is not gone. Juggling spaces. How do we bring people back for in-person when space is limited – how to keep safe distances?

How to do hybrid, knowing some really want to be back and some don't feel safe yet. Want to kick around ideas about how to do hybrid in SS as many do in worship?

Another thing many are doing to try to bring people back is reimagine worship services to make them more inviting for families. More welcoming for the younger ones. Trying to figure out how to have worship experience together as well as faith formation.

### Cathy's group:

Things we learned about moving forward – two churches used drama or puppets in a useful way. One gave a puppet kit to a family and had them retell a Bible story which they recorded. It was edited and shared not only in SS, but also gave congregation a chance to see what the kids are doing. Another church did something similar with their Advent Christmas program. This is a way of sharing stories that could be carried forward on occasion (not all the time).

Put together activity kits, especially early on, for families to use early on. (Not sure if families used them.)

Looking to returning: starting outdoors while we can or large indoor spaces with masks. Concern that congregations are divided on what is safe and not, on masking and other protocols. Fact that families and kids are getting tired of Zoom so it is not the main way to return.

Coming up with more special events and service projects to create more interest and for more of a splash to start the program.

We need to do this well so we can carry on.

Focus on publicity and communication on what we are doing.

#### Luanne's Group:

What we learned: those who did things online found it did not go over well, wasn't preferred. Some sent monthly packets with weekly activity folders. The problem was time involved delivering packets because each family wanted to chat. Some churches did more of a one room schoolhouse approach. Some found recorded messages got more interest.

Someone did Zoom as a Holy experiment, 6-8 active families with about 12 kids. One church started in-person in October, meeting only every other week and transitioned to weekly on Easter.

One church found regularly sending postcards was a hit with kids. With questions. For example - a Picture of the galaxy and question about God and the universe.

In-person summer fun days.

Most of our group thinking of opening in Sept.

Did not get much time spent on second question. An idea we did have was that we should all send postcards in mid-August saying, "We can't wait to see you on \_date\_"

Meeting in a park was big hit with kids and family. (many had not met as a group outside of church before).

Don't think only Sunday but think about midweek programs. (Luanne had success, beginning three years before the pandemic with Monday night girls' group ages 6-12 with 15 girls weekly.)

### Neil's group:

Our group came up with some of the same things other groups had.

Consensus was to be personal, connect, reach out, build bridges – this doesn't always get done with juggernaut of programming. That was a valuable lesson. Need to keep that in the fall.

Different sized churches have different types of problems. Might be harder to be more personal in a larger church.

Still don't know if pandemic is over and there will be people who don't agree with us. May be a return in the winter for some.

A number of people had good things to say about delivering at home; whether or not the things were used, it was a valuable point of contact

People worried about vaccination or cleanliness of rooms - do a reverse rotation where kids use the same room each week and the teachers rotate.

Keep being personal, even when we go back.

Neil: I miss school - the structure of a lesson plan and teacher and kids having a great time together. Fellowship is not a substitute (although I love it) – need to be able to come back to our core mission which is to teach scripture and teach kids how to apply it to their life. Difficult to do virtually, when you can't be together. Valuing what we lost - that structure and that time together and getting people to buy back into that proposition, going to them directly and ask them to buy in and ask for help, not treat as customers but treat as leaders and people for whom program exists and not simply as people whom we hope will show up.

### **Additional feedback from breakout groups, typed in Chat comments:**

Catherine Curtis: One consideration that we have been talking about as we serve the families is we must do so sustainably so that staff and volunteers do not burn out. It is forcing us to make choices on what is the best use of our human resources.

Robin Stewart, Board Member: Lots of great ideas to carry forward:

Kayely Rich: Catherine - I like how you are thinking about human resource sustainability! What a tension to hold as we are all working hard to bring people back with all the added challenges we face right now.

Deborah Fisher: Margie - if you offer hybrid, are you concerned that folks won't attend in person? *(Note: this was a question in response to something Margie said during her report.)*

Robin Stewart: Family connections in a number of ways. Ministry "on demand" and always accessible online. Drive through ministry activities. Porch and yard gatherings. Teacher training in a hybrid situation may answer a huge need. Moving forward the mission component is key. In addition to church members, invite the community to join in the activity on Monday. Another idea for moving forward is to launch and invite youth across the community/city to join a youth group. The idea of food trucks for attracting families to come back in the fall.

Catherine Curtis: Kayely - yes, it sometimes feels counter to serving but is so important

Catherine Curtis: Providing intentional opportunities for children and their parents to renew relationships and friendships feels crucial

Eileen Wenckus: I agree Catherine

Carol Hulbert, Board Member: Yes to relationship building... Our group would like to keep the relationships that has been a part of pandemic Sunday school. (Just taking the time to ask how are you doing.)

Beth Tobin, Board Member: We keep saying we're planning for a moving target.

Ronalee Martinez: This meeting is great! Helps to see we are all facing similar challenges in our ministry to families.

Carol Hulbert: Agreed Ronalee

Catherine Curtis: Love the brainstorming and sharing of experiences

Deborah Fisher: I agree with what Catharine Curtis just posted - this is great!

Beth Tobin: Thank you all! It's been so great to see and hear your thoughts. Blessings on your planning and for all of your families.

### **Where do we go from here?:**

Amy Crane, Rotation.org board president: We have lots to talk about still. I think it has been valuable to put our heads together. We were isolated as Christian educators even

before shutdown with denominations and other organizations cutting back on conferences and it hasn't been getting easier to gather with our peers. We will be planning future Coffee Chats as well as continuing to host online discussions on our site.

Thank you for your presence today!

**Let us know what topics you would like to see in the future.** (shared via chat)

JoAnn Jones : Would love to chat more about reverse rotation! (*children stay in one room each week and workshop leaders rotate*)

Meghan Adrian : would like to chat about rotation with a small or younger age group

Ronalee Martinez : I would love to have more info on how to get teachers to use hybrid for their SS classes

**A few people hung around for continued conversation after the hour-long meeting ended. Here is a summary along with the chat comments and resources related to that continued conversation:**

Neil MacQueen: I would like to make a plug to please post ideas and questions in our forums or teachers' lounge because it will help someone – the power in numbers is strength of our site; we reach a lot of people. Meghan Adrian has been posting videos she has been creating for her church in Canada. It shows the power of internet and our site and power of "lampstanding" – If you have a question or an answer, what you share will turn out to be exactly what someone needed, eventually.

Meghan Adrian: When I started doing those videos, I found others doing this sort of thing on YouTube and I started asking if I could use them - - they said "of course!" People put things out there to share. For those who haven't seen them, my videos include a short animation using PowerPoint – pictures are from Lamp Bible Pictures. I wasn't sure about using them, so I contacted the artist to see if I could use them legally in my videos. She said, "Yes!" And now she is creating content just for me – she was thrilled to help. Always ask, the worst they can say is "no."

Carol Hulbert (via Chat): One of Meghan's videos: <https://www.rotation.org/topic/the-lord-s-prayer-object-lesson-short-animated-video-and-printable-activity>

Neil: digital content will still be needed after the pandemic. Not only for Hybrid Sunday school but also at home. Five years from now the available materials will be even better. Thank you for sharing what you created, Meghan. Don't be afraid to try something new, find the time to do it. I don't believe people are Zoom fatigued (or certainly not screen fatigued). Kids walk around with their tablets and their phones, using them constantly, watching what they want to watch. Schools haven't done us any favors with teachers (like in Peanuts) "Wah wah wah wha" all day. Kids will watch a screen if it has good content on it; in fact, they want more.

Margie Price (via Chat): One of the nice things I found about Zoom (oddly enough) was that parents listened in on the Sunday school lessons, something they had never done before. :-)

Beth Tobin (via Chat): Margie - So true!!

Robin: challenge for us is trying to figure out how to get good and consistent quality.

Meghan: There is other good stuff out there. All free. Take a look at Crossroad Kids.

LINK: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmMySSzKknjgAVVCOPXu\\_qg/featured](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmMySSzKknjgAVVCOPXu_qg/featured) and don't miss our list of free videos from Saddleback Kids' Ministry: <https://www.rotation.org/topic/88-animted-bible-story-shorts-from-saddleback-kids>

Neil: Our lesson Writing Team is tapping into this. We are recommending fewer things to buy for lessons because there is so much good free content out there.

Meghan: We are currently running hybrid, but not sustainable for long haul. Is anyone else doing hybrid – not just Sunday school but worship also?

Catherine Curtis: Our congregation is planning to continue hybrid worship. But we have had conversations recently that hybrid church school can't go forward – well, not with the resources we have now -- not enough people involved. I got information from a school teacher about how we could do it. We had outdoor church school for the spring. There was one little boy alone at home who couldn't come in person and he was really missing Zoom church school (he's an only child with a single mother who is a nurse). And we have another family who couldn't do zoom (they have a child with specific learning needs), so outdoors was perfect for them. So we had two families with very different needs. We tried to meet both families' needs with hybrid Sunday school, with a fifth grade boy as a Zoom buddy for the boy at home; he had a laptop and was showing

the other boy what was going on and helping him share his thoughts. It didn't work as hoped. I would love to see what others have learned in doing those types of things.

Margie Price – we have a fully hybrid Sunday worship service (in-person plus live streaming) and Wednesday night worship (Zoom and in-person). We have been doing fully Zoom Sunday school since last March. All I could think of for hybrid is to have kids interact with an iPad set up in the classroom and have the kids interact in-person and online. I would like to keep the Zoom aspect of Sunday school because for some kids, for some families, it really does work better. But I don't know how well hybrid works; I haven't tried it yet. Looking for suggestions on how to make it happen. I have several iPads at my disposal. How do you make the interactions work?

Carol: Our church has been using a combination of in-person and Zoom for adult gatherings, using a system called Owl. It's not cheap.– a device sits in the middle of the room and rotates to the person who is speaking. Pretty cool and works pretty well.

Carol Hulbert (via Chat): <https://owllabs.com/>

Neil: there is a business that does the same thing for worship services – their camera zooms in and pans. Is that what we really mean by hybrid virtual Sunday school? Do we need a camera in the classroom or do we mean connecting with that kid in some other way. How long do they want to watch a classroom through a camera? If they can't come to church, do they need somebody to come to their house and teach them the lesson, or do they need a Zoom buddy to walk them through the lesson? That's labor intensive.

Catherine Curtis: in my particular situation, this little boy was just starved for interactions with peers. Just pointing a camera at action and watching others was not what he needed; he needed interaction. He was having playdates with friends over Zoom; they tried offline gaming on Zoom. We had only 35 minutes for the lesson, but he wanted to run around his room and show us things – he is an only child and very isolated.

JoAnn Jones: On certain nights, we would just do that on Zoom – we would gather and parallel play and show toys and talk to each other. We would gently interject a thinking question along the way, have discussion about it. We did it for grade levels. It wasn't a lesson that was developed, it was more relational with the conversation snuck in there. I think that is going to happen frequently into the future.

Catherine: we have a director of youth ministries. He wouldn't have anyone show up for that sort of eveningson Zoom

Amy: Every community is different.

Beth Tobin (via Chat): JoAnn, are you willing to share your conversation topics?

Catherine Curtis (via Chat) : Has anyone opened their nursery?

Beth Tobin (via Chat): I made a nursery cart

Meghan Adrian (via Chat): We opened a nursery/children's space where parents are expected to stay. We are using a hybrid method, so parents can catch up on the sermon online

Beth Tobin: We're planning for a moving target. I am a planner (enneagram 3) so it is hard. Our staff is trying things and changing and tweaking; nothing has to be set for the year.

Neil: do you think we are still in an era of experimentation? People want to return to the familiar, but I don't think that is what is going to happen.

Beth: we have such a wonderful opportunity to take what is best of the past and add new. Change is constant. We have an opportunity to try something new. And people have a lot of grace so if something doesn't work out, it's okay. People know we are trying.

Neil: Catherine and Beth – you are in big churches. Rotation Model started in a big church with lots of staff. We made a decision to share with others what worked and what did not work. I would put it on big churches with lots of staff to leave a trail of breadcrumbs for us. Smaller churches with no or part-time staff would benefit through your experience and experimentation.

Margaret Norris: I have been working with a ministry architect for a while. Our consultant suggested we create a team for the fall. Have six people who are willing to work until the middle of November and do something and tweak it and do something and tweak it every week. I found that helpful because I did not know what positions to recruit for. And so it's pretty much a transition team to figure out the way forward.

Various responses: That's a good mindset. How is your transition team meeting, in-person or email?

Margaret: still forming it. This week I started doing Godly Play in a large classroom for families. So the families can do it together but still be socially distant from others. I checked in with the parents after the first one to see what worked and what didn't work. And it is a summer experiment, so once the fall comes I have more of an idea of what to do. I have had lots of meetings on Zoom; the adults seem to like meeting on Zoom so

they don't have to drive – the population of our church doesn't tend to live close to our church.

Neil: in our group we were talking about the same thing – opportunities for families to come in and engage with their kids. Essentially training parents to engage with their kids. Doing this so they can learn from each other and from us. With the idea of them going out and doing this when they aren't meeting with us.

Margaret: Rachel Turner (author of *Parenting Children for a life of Faith*) had a great presentation at the InterGenerate Conference about how she was having experiences with children and then sending them back to their families; and she realized that Deuteronomy 6:7 tells parents to teach their children, so we need to give parents the tools for spiritual formation. I haven't told the parents the reason we are doing Godly Play as a unit together is to be able to start these conversations.

Back to the importance of family ministry.

Margie Price: We changed our vacation Bible school model this year for two reasons. One, instead of in morning with just kids we had it in the evening, family style. This allowed for social distance and we needed fewer hands-on volunteers because the parents were there in small groups with their kids. Another part was to get families involved to get the experience with the kids. It was a big success.

Carol Hulbert (via Chat): Change is okay.

Beth Tobin (via Chat): We did family pods for VBS this summer.

Catherine Curtis (via Chat): We did the exact same thing for our VBS this year - mixed response.

Beth Tobin (via Chat): We are planning to do family/multigenerational SS this fall.

Meghan Adrian (via Chat): We're also trying a similar thing

Margie Price (via Chat): Mind you there are still parents that were hoping to drop their kids off for babysitting. but most really enjoyed it. lol

Beth Tobin (via Chat): We have had so many children being so anxious about being back at church that we are thinking to stay together as a family will help reduce anxiety at least to start with.

Meghan Adrian (via Chat): Most of our parents really wanted to join us for Sunday school. We had push back from some grandparents though

Beth Tobin (via Chat): When they get to church they don't want to leave, but getting them there is anxiety producing for them.

Beth Tobin (via Chat): So how do we empower parents and support their confidence in faith development.

Amy Crane (via Chat): I think finding ways to share with parents what is happening in Sunday school is an important start to empower parents (what Bible story we heard, what we learned). I share when parents pick up kids plus sometimes share pics in a private Facebook group.

Robin Stewart (via Chat): Love these ideas of connecting with parents!

Meghan Adrian (via Chat): That's so good to remember!!

Neil: our group talked about parents in the Sunday school. Years ago we talked about a family workshop, a family mentor workshop. It was designed to get parents talking with their kids about the lesson. Maybe we need to look at that idea again. I like when you can take a great idea and structurally make it part of the program were it gets done all of the time. Like when we started Rotation Model where we said we wanted to do drama more and not always do a craft. Maybe making this part of the structure, having parents part of the Sunday school and modeling the lesson to one another is worth considering.

LINK: <https://www.rotation.org/topic/the-faith-mentor-workshop-concept>

LINK: intergenerational and broadly graded Sunday school:

<https://www.rotation.org/topic/adapting-rotation-lessons-for-younger-children>

JoAnn: I love that idea. I think our families do not believe that they are critical in the faith development of their children. They don't believe how important they are. They haven't taken on the fact that they were chosen and equipped by God to do this thing called parenting and take on this critical job. I am afraid when we go back they will tell us that we are the ones who know what we are doing and that we should church their children. I don't want to lose the fact that families are now saying that they can talk to their kids about Jesus and about where they see needs in the community and then they can do something. I think it is an education piece before we go jumping back in and we need to say every fifth Sunday we need to have parents involved in this, but they also need to know they have responsibilities the other four weeks of the month.

Meghan: before we started back in-person Sunday school, I had a meeting with parents of your youngest kids and asked them what they are interested in because we are

basically starting from the ground up. I was surprised at the expectations of the millennial-aged parents. Most of them did not expect to just drop their children off in Sunday school -- they wanted to be in there, too. They wanted Christian fellowship with Christian parents. They asked for a library style circle time with a book that is read and a simple game and the flannelgraph and a little time they could go after circle time and have coffee and chat together. So I have grandparents come at the end and supervise kids while parents have a bit of time for coffee together. The kids are aged newborn to twelve-years-old. We are not a big church. After the service the grandparents come down and we have more intergenerational gathering. Still changing every week. The new group of parents felt very free to ask for what they needed. Wide age range. Last week we did the story of Daniel – I used the book *Jesus and the Lion's Den*. I simplified the story for the reading. The parents are there with the children so I don't need to have that many volunteers (the littlest ones are being held by mom and dad). We had the story, played a short game, had a snack, prayed together. There was a craft for the older ones in a separate area, and a sheet with a QR Code for the parents with a link to a video from the Bible project called "The Way of the Exile" so while they had coffee they could access questions.

Carol Hulbert (via Chat): I love the Bible Project's videos. <https://bibleproject.com/>

Neil: in churches that I worked where things went well in children's ministry, it was the young adults that were a large part of that, and as their children got older, the older kids' programs went well too. So it comes back to a good Young Adult ministry. Seems like the magic sauce.

Robin: this maybe shows that there is a blessing that comes out of a decrease in size and numbers. More intimate times and targeted programs to grow bigger.

Neil: Shoutout to Writing Team members (upcoming in the fall as well as past team members) on my screen right now: Meghan, Catherine, Carol, Luanne, Robin, Cathy, Beth, Sharon, Amy.

LINK: <https://www.rotation.org/topic/about-the-writing-team-lessons-and-our-improvement-project>

Neil: I am concerned about staff being overloaded with things. I am seeing blogs pointing to doing things that don't work or don't make a difference. How do we know something is working and what is just work? Maybe family ministry is something we should focus on more? Is that the target? If rotation.org is not focusing on family

ministry more, maybe we aren't being as helpful as we could? How is that reflected in our site?

Robin Stewart (via Chat): Great question: Is it working or is it making work?

Cathy Walz: There has been some talk about intergenerational and family classes?

Margaret and Meghan, can you share a sample lesson at our site so others can see what that looks like?

Margaret: what I have been using is Godly Play as the basis, which is a different curriculum. And we are not calling it intergenerational because people kind of recoil at that. Plus it's not a lot of people working with the child, the family is there learning together. I'm not sure how I'm going to continue, but after listening to Parenting for Faith, I think it is what I need to do. My families disappeared from Zoom. I have a recording of me doing each week's Godly Play story and I think I will start letting the parents know it is available on our website if they cannot be there for the in-person lesson.

Amy: Many thanks to all for sharing your time and creativity! We hope to see you again soon!!