

Desired Attributes of Sunday Church School Directors

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Though it would certainly be difficult to find individuals possessing all the attributes mentioned below, all are desirable for those wishing to hold the position of director of a Sunday Church School (SCS). Directors are those who must make everything “go,” and the programs will be at their best only when the leadership is equal to the tasks.

Faithful Members of the Church

Sunday Church School Directors are role models for the teachers, the students and their parents. A Director who says one should attend and participate in the Divine Liturgy and the sacramental life of the Church should also be a Director who attends and participates in them. A Director should think of her/himself as a continual learner of the Faith, reading, studying and reflecting on the Orthodox Tradition and passing along new books and ideas to the teachers. A Director should be spiritually motivated, filled with fervor and excitement.

Dedication/Motivation

Directors must be dedicated to the program. Only when they love the program and what they are doing, donate their time liberally and look forward with inner pride (not to be confused with false pride) to the positive results of their efforts, will the SCS succeed. In addition, others too will be motivated enough to perform those responsibilities entrusted to them. Directors must also be able to display enthusiasm and a positive attitude, which has a tendency of being very contagious when exhibited in a correct manner.

Diplomacy

Directors must be diplomatic and professional. There are many ways to say the same thing. Only when leaders speak pleasantly to people in getting them to perform particular tasks or duties, will they maintain that dedication needed from their staff. Directors must also understand that they are dealing with volunteers. Though a staff member must never feel that he or she is doing the director a favor by being there, that staff member might be rather sensitive towards a particular tone of voice or action taken by the leader. A rule of thumb that all leaders should maintain is that they should put themselves “into the shoes” of staff members and think about how they might like to hear something coming in the form of a directive.

Adaptability

Directors should be willing to continuously learn and accept new ideas and methodologies. And one need not be a college graduate in order to demonstrate that he can learn quickly, make sound judgments, and not be afraid to try something new within the program. If directors continue to utilize outdated methodologies that have failed in the past, and cannot adjust to new developments or look at them with new eyes, then they are in for a difficult time.

Communication

Leaders must be able to communicate the meaning of decisions and policies to staff members in order to be successful. Therefore, reading, writing, and speaking well are essential ingredients for successful leadership performance.

Connected

Directors should be able to make and maintain good connections with teachers, students, and their parents. Directors also should be working in tandem with their parish priest, in regular contact with him about new programs and resources. Directors should be connected to the Metropolis Religious Education Director and the Archdiocese Department of Religious Education.

Miscellaneous

Directors should be cooperative, have social understanding and the ability to work well with others. They must be individuals who can “turn people on,” rather than “off;” act as co-workers for Christ rather than dictators; willing to listen to suggestions, constructive criticisms, problems and complaints. Only then will they find it easier to get people to work under and with them, and be able to motivate them. It is axiomatic in the business world that the key to success in an office is that managerial positions must be filled by those who understand and work well with others.

Duties of Directors

There are literally scores of tasks that Sunday Church School directors must tackle, matters that they have to settle, and sometimes numerous details that will also become their responsibility.

These are some of the more important areas that they must oversee:

1. Planning. Whether directors are blueprinting long, short or intermediate range plans, they must always first define their objectives and define their goals. Directors and their staffs must determine what they wish to achieve. For instance, if the registration and attendance for the previous year were at particular levels, competing against those levels may be desired, which would entail a review as to how this may be best accomplished.
2. Directors should be willing to work very closely not only with their Pastors, but with the Parish Councils, as well. It is incumbent upon directors to work with these other leaders of the parish to find ways to improve both faith and attendance of the parish and the SCS. True Christian leadership continuously assists in the spreading of the Gospel message, in helping others come closer to their Lord and Savior and sharing His love with all the members of the ekklesia – the Church. This should be seen as a primary objective for SCS leadership. The direct benefit to the SCS will be an increased enrollment and attendance throughout the year.
3. There must be open communication with the Parish Council and parishioners alike in order that all may understand and appreciate the work being performed within the SCS. As no program or function of the Church should be commenced without the blessings of the Priest, the director might plan with the Pastor a retreat and a blessing service for the entire staff before school begins. The blessing service could occur at the beginning of the Church school year and be held after the Divine Liturgy. All staff members would be asked to come forward for the ceremony. This not only gives recognition to the SCS and its personnel, but it also helps the congregation to understand the importance of the work performed and that the SCS is a primary function of the Church.
4. Directors must continuously attract new members to the service of Christ. It is always better to have too many than too few. Moreover, effective directors know that there is always a way for an individual to serve Jesus Christ, and a position can always be found somewhere.

Asking many people to do small tasks rather than asking a few people to take on huge responsibilities is a way of steadily integrating new people into a program and “test” them out.

5. Directors must plan well for staff meetings, which should only be held when needed, so as not to burden people too much. When meetings are held they should be kept interesting while making certain that what is intended is indeed accomplished. Stay focused!
6. Teacher training programs must be planned for. Teachers should be trained with proper methodologies constantly enforced. Directors have the responsibility to fill all positions with competent, dedicated people with the advice of the Pastor. Attending a training session offered by the Metropolis, or the Archdiocese or Orthodox Christian Education Commission can help teachers become more confident. Consider sponsoring one yourself and inviting area parishes to attend.
7. Directors must ensure that whatever plans, objectives, rules and regulations they set forth are understood and abided by the staff. Consider developing a small booklet that explains everything.
8. If there are co-administrators, directors must delineate clear channels of work by charging them with the chore of preparing assigned tasks for all department heads. Meetings with these leaders should be coordinated to ensure that all of the staff members are carrying out their basic duties.
9. Directors must demonstrate control over the SCS budget with a sound accounting system that fits their needs and those of the church.
10. The inventory (books and supplies) are to be kept well stocked.
11. It was stated within the *Attributes* section above that enthusiasm can often be contagious. Directors have the task of remaining enthusiastic as much as possible even under stress. This helps in spreading the love and camaraderie so necessary in a program such as this. This close, loving, working relationship is what our Christian faith is all about. This could mean the difference between success or failure, and nothing leads to failure more quickly than a cantankerous leader of volunteers. Directors should always find ways to show appreciation to their co-workers in Christ. They should never fail to thank and compliment them each and every time something extra is done.

12. Directors should always maintain contacts with the heads of many other organizations within their parish, as well as the directors of Sunday Church Schools of other communities in order to maintain further cooperation for the mutual benefit of all.
13. Ensuring that the Orthodox Faith is taught faithfully and accurately is the responsibility of both director and Pastor.
14. Finally, the directors, staff members and all concerned must understand that without the Holy Spirit's divine guidance and help, no progress will be fully realized. Therefore, the importance of prayer life, especially pertaining to the SCS, should be stressed to one-and-all. Prayer time should precede each meeting and at the start of each class lesson. Directors, in their own, as "titular" spiritual heads of a spiritual program should, therefore, always attempt to bring their co-workers ever so much closer to Jesus Christ.

Chris Andreas is a retired administrator from the private sector having work for IBM Corporation for a quarter century before moving onto the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in New York where he was also administrator for the Department of Stewardship Ministry. He both taught in and directed Sunday Church School, and has written several papers on the Holy Scriptures and various ministries of the Church.