

2016 History

Sandy Utah Willow Creek Stake Sunday School

The stake Sunday school presidency received an assignment from our stake presidency to model an effective Gospel Doctrine lesson in each ward of the stake during ward conferences in January and February. In coordination with each ward Sunday school presidency we received lesson assignments and prepared assignments for individual participation in each lesson. The primary goal was to develop lessons and encourage class member participation that would enhance the quality of gospel instruction in the stake. Central themes developed in each lesson incorporated the importance of lesson preparation by the teacher and class members alike. These ward conference lessons brought our stake Sunday school goals for 2016 into focus.

Acting on our experiences in modeling ward Gospel Doctrine lessons, we set out to increase the quality of gospel instruction in our stake – a notably difficult task in a stake filled with high caliber instructors with extensive gospel knowledge. Nonetheless, we felt directed in that goal, which became clear during the remainder of 2016 as Church leadership set out to accomplish a similar goal throughout the world. During the spring Doug Matsumori left Utah to serve a three-year assignment as church legal council in New Zealand. In his place Doug Mumford, a member of the newly created Single Adult Ward, was called as a counselor in the presidency, providing another strong teacher and leader in our presidency.

Following ward conferences, in March Brother Doug Matsumori (1st Counselor) proposed a Sunday School Jubilee intended as a stake Sunday school teacher training and development meeting. Such training events on a smaller scale organized in past years received disappointing attendance, but we decided to move forward with what we felt was an inspired direction and hold a larger event. Sunday School President Ron Esplin presented our concept to President Staples and we waited for a response from the stake presidency. Approval came from the stake presidency in April to proceed, with an additional direction to expand the “Sunday School Jubilee” to all teachers in the stake from all auxiliaries and priesthood quorums. Under the direction of John Johnson, counselor in the Sunday School presidency, stake auxiliary leaders met monthly to develop, finalize and implement plans for a Sandy Utah Willow Creek Stake Teacher Conference scheduled for October 27, 2016. Members of the stake presidency joined in some of these sessions and helped ensure that the event itself was a success.

As planning progressed for the Teacher Conference the Lord laid out materials before us in a miraculous way. Almost each publication of the Ensign and Church News, and weekly media additions to LDS.org, contained materials focusing on how to improve the quality of gospel instruction for youth and adult members. By mid-summer, Church Headquarters introduced the inspired manual, Teaching In the Savior’s Way, and inspired plans for monthly teacher councils in every ward and branch throughout the world. In August and September members of the stake Sunday school presidency, by assignment from the stake presidency, met

with each ward council in the stake to train wards on the new manual and teacher council program.

On October 27, 2016 approximately 225 stake members convened in Teacher Conference for the Sandy Utah Willow Creek Stake with members of every ward of the stake and of all the priesthood and auxiliaries organizations in attendance. Stake Sunday School President Ron Esplin addressed the opening session of the conference with a message centered on the importance of ordinances from church history and the Doctrine & Covenants in our lives. Stake President Kimo Esplin addressed the opening session with a heart-felt message of the saints need for nourishment in the gospel. Additional break-out sessions lead by skilled instructors from the stake focused on the needs of each priesthood and auxiliary teacher in the stake, including:

1. Ward Council Members lead by President Staples and Stake Sunday School President Ron Esplin focusing on ward council leadership responsibility for teaching in the wards;
2. Gospel Doctrine and Adult Sunday School teachers lead by Stake Sunday School 1st Counselor John Johnson focusing on adult gospel instruction;
3. Youth Sunday School, Young Men and Young Women teachers lead by Stake Young Men President Wayne Samuelson including vignettes by a youth teacher from each auxiliary modeling coordination between the 3 youth auxiliary responsibilities;
4. Primary teachers lead by the Stake Primary Presidency focusing on “Behold Your Little Ones”;
5. Relief Society and Melchizedek Priesthood Teachers lead by Stake Relief Society President Julie Slaugh and High Councilor Steve Eyre.

President Staples asked each break-out session to empower its participants with specific skills that they could take away from the conference to improve their personal teaching skill, including:

- i. Create a gospel principal implementation/application opportunity rather than just teaching topic or history.
- ii. Prepare sufficiently to know the material and be able to receive the spirit so you can teach and bear testimony as directed by the spirit.
- iii. Show your love for those you teach.

The stake Sunday school presidency believes 2016 was a successful year full of guidance from the Lord and opportunities to improve our teaching skills in the stake. We look forward to 2017 with an eye toward improving the gospel learner’s experience in our gospel classrooms and with grateful hearts for the blessings of being in the Lord’s service in 2016.