The topic of education came up in a class that I was attending. The teacher asked for the class members to define the word “education” as we understood it. Some of the responses, which are primary definitions found in a standard dictionary, are given as follows: Education is “the act or process of importing knowledge”; “systemic instruction”; “teaching”; “schooling”; “a program of instruction”; etc.

Finally, the teacher gave his definition, which I have never forgotten. He said that education is simply “applied knowledge”. The full impact and reality of that statement would become much more clear to me as time went by.

Perhaps it would be good to briefly look at the implications of this definition of education. If an individual goes to Medical School and learns all the basic theories, diagnosis and treatment of ill folk, but after receiving his degree, even with honors, never actually treats a single patient, is he truly a doctor? If a person goes to a Trade School and learns all the basics of craft work and cabinet building, but after graduation, never saws a board, never builds anything, can we truly define him as a craftsman?

If the knowledge we gain through an educational process is never lived out in practical applications, are we educated at all? If the individuals that we teach week after week in our educational programs never find practical expression of the information imparted to them, are they any better off than they would have been without the information? Or, can we be classified as “Christian Educators”?

This raises another very serious question about educational practices in many local churches. Why are individuals elected to fill teaching positions in many church schools with little or no knowledge about what they will need to teach or the basic principles involving how they will teach? It has been rightly stated that “we cannot teach what we do not know any more that we can come back from somewhere we have never been”.

Dr. Howard Hendrix, a well known Christian educator and professor at the Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, stated in his book The Seven Laws of the Teacher, that “we expect a person who teaches our children that 2x2=4 to have a College Degree, but to teach our children in Sunday School, anything will do”.

Serious doubt can be raised in our own spiritual lives if we do not live out the truths we learn from the Bible. Being “a Christian” seems to involve much more than being a believer in Jesus Christ and being saved. This concept causes us to pause and consider our personal relationship to Jesus before giving a positive answer that we are genuine “Christians”. Once saved, we can answer that we are believers, but are we constantly and consistently living out our faith. Early
believers were called “Christians” because they were imitators of Jesus. Are we truly Christians or, just believers?

The need to have trained leadership, especially in Sunday School, has been a topic of discussion and, many times heated debate in church congregations. The search for solutions to this dilemma in many churches has been abandoned as hopeless with no viable answer. We are left with all the excuses (reasons) ringing in our ears as to how it is impossible to have qualified teachers serving in educational leadership positions in the church. Like this: “If we have any requirements for teachers, we will not have any teachers”: Or, “we just cannot train enough teachers to meet our needs”: Or, better yet, “Sunday School teachers and other educational leaders do not need to be educated, just agree to take the position because experience is the best way to learn how to teach”.

We have probably heard them all at one time or another. But, are these excuses really valid? Most of us will probably conclude that they are not, but the solution will not come easily or quickly. It will take the willingness to admit that the problem actually exists and the dedication, determination and commitment, to initiate workable strategies to solve the problem.

The following is a hypothetical example at this point:

Suppose that a church congregation decided that this problem would be addressed. They developed a plan. The following statement would be adopted by the church body and included in the Church By-Laws:

“Within three years, from this date, the Nominating Committee will not recommend, nor will the church approve, of any individual to serve as a Sunday School Teacher or, in any educational leadership position, without proper validation that they are prepared for the position. If they are not prepared and still feel that they would like to serve in the selected position, they must agree to attend an educational orientation class, taught by a qualified teacher for their potential position. If they will not agree, then they will not be presented to the church or elected to fill the position. No exceptions.”

To meet this objective it would require that the Church Nominating Committee be carefully selected and composed of highly qualified members. Their Job Description would be developed, approved by the church body and included in the Church By-Laws. This is critical if the primary objective is to be successful.