

Slight decrease seen in Sunday school classes: Vacation Bible School also on decline

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While Sunday school in Protestant churches remains popular, classes are less likely to be available to the youngest and oldest students, according to a recent analysis of Protestant pastors by the Barna Group.

Although the percentage of churches offering Sunday school has remained virtually constant in the last eight years, the availability of programs for children aged 2 to 5 declined from 94 percent of churches to 88 percent. Classes for high school students showed a similar drop, from 86 percent to 80 percent.

Vacation Bible School, which made religiously themed arts and crafts projects summer staples for generations of children, is also less common than before. According to the study, the percentage of Protestant churches offering summer camps has declined by 15 percent since 1997, with 69 percent of pastors saying their churches still offer Vacation Bible School.

Pastors most frequently cited a lack of teachers as the main reason they chose not to offer camps.

As for the content of Sunday school classes, most Protestant pastors—54 percent—said their churches use curricula provided by their denomination. The study also found that curricula created by individual churches are becoming more popular. Eighteen percent of pastors reported using “customized” curricula, up from 10 percent in 2002.

The 2004 poll was based on a nationwide random sample of 614 senior pastors of Protestant churches. *—Religion News Service*