As I walked down the hall of the educational wing at my local congregation, I could not help but be impressed with the well-equipped classrooms, the energetic teachers, and the excited students.

It seemed only a few years ago that I was enrolled in a new and rather controversial course at a Christian college on how to teach Bible classes for children. The idea that children needed special classes and an activity-oriented curriculum was viewed as unnecessary by many church leaders and the emphasis was more adult oriented. Today, leaders recognize that Christian education begins in the cradle and that if the church is to save its own children, an effective Bible school program is vital.

The ministry of the church, however, does not end with serving its own. It must reach out to a lost world and, for this to happen, missions must be an integral part of church teaching. Children who are taught that God loves them and cares for them must be encouraged to share that message with others. The knowledge that Jesus died for them should also carry with it the responsibility to accept His great commission.

Mission education cannot be an “add on” to the Bible school curriculum or a once-a-year occurrence. It needs to be ongoing and integrated into the curriculum. The message that God does not wish anyone to perish, and that the church is His tool for accomplishing that purpose, should be as central an objective to the Bible school program as helping young people choose to become Christians. One without the other will not accomplish God’s plan.

The purpose of incorporating missions into the curriculum should be two fold. First, young people need to have the opportunity to know missions first hand. They need to be taught that the world needs the Gospel. They need to know missionaries, to learn about other cultures and peoples, and to experience both in reality and vicariously the challenges and successes that missions brings. They need to be challenged to examine missions as a full-time career choice.

A second purpose is to educate the church of tomorrow to be a sending, supporting, and nurturing congregation for missions and missionaries. Through the Bible school, tomorrow’s church leaders can learn about the difficulties missionaries face and to see the need, for example, of specialized training, language learning, and cultural identification.

For this to happen, teachers need to be trained in both mission concepts and in teaching methodology that results in changed behavior. Existing Bible school materials need to be modified to emphasize God’s mission to the world and new materials need to be written.

Missions Resource Network has made missions education a vital part of its goal to help churches plant churches worldwide. If your congregation needs help in this area, MRN is available to provide both training and resources.

Dr. Joyce Hardin, retired dean of the College of Education at Lubbock Christian University, and MRN’s Coordinator for Missions Education, conducts congregational and area-wide workshops to train Bible school teachers to teach world missions. For scheduling, call (512) 894-4886.