



HOW WE DO A NEW BELIEVERS CLASS AND A NEW MEMBERS CLASS

Question: A website viewer/pastor asked, “We are reviewing our new believers and membership materials. Would you be so kind as to share the materials you use?”

Answer: Your question is discussed in greater detail in the article [How Effective Is Our Greenhouse](#) on the Purpose Driven Overview page on my website GodsGreenhouse.net. Briefly, we approach this issue from two different directions.

NEW BELIEVERS CLASS

A new believers' class is designed to disciple our new believers in basic Bible doctrine. That is its primary purpose. **Therefore, we keep it separate from the new member's class.** It is a mistake to do both classes in the same setting, because eventually one purpose will override the other purpose. In so doing, you will fail to accomplish one of your purposes!

The new believers' class is for people who meet one of two conditions. First, the person is a new believer in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Second, the person is a believer who has never progressed beyond the baby stage in Bible knowledge but is now serious about growth in the Christian life.

(We essentially make the people in the second category admit that they are still at the baby knowledge stage by emphasizing over and over again this class is for spiritual babies who are at the lowest level of Bible knowledge. We do not allow mature believers in the class unless they have a valid reason such as wanting to partner with a spouse who is a new believer.

It is important that the purpose of the class be maintained for the sake of the students. Unfortunately, some older Christians may wish to escape from their current class to try something new in this class. For example, one long time

member wanted to join our class, because she wanted to learn more about predestination! I carefully explained this class would not explore her subject, because that was outside the scope of the class.

Being Southern Baptist, we use standard Baptist material from our convention's publishing house at Lifeway.com for this class. I suggest finding a fill-in-the-blank type of book or one that provides some level of home Bible study. Buy the workbook Basics For Baptists at lifeway.com and you'll get a feel for what I do. I am sure you can find something similar for your own belief system.

One item of interest is that **we designed this class as a one year class**. This length allows the class to proceed at its own pace. This is important because too often the church leadership assumes that the members already know this material. *As a result, the church leaders minister more to the giraffes than to the sheep!* I was astonished that my first year class devoted three entire lessons (three Sunday morning forty minute lessons) to a discussion of the Trinity. I rarely give that subject more than five minutes in any one sermon, but they were really puzzled and struggling with this subject. ***In so doing, I learned how little I knew about how little they knew!*** That encouraged me to simplify my preaching even more!

I as pastor teach the class. This increases my work load, but it is manageable because there is little study time required for the pastor. After all, the pastor should already know this material! Believe it or not, the class gives the pastor a wonderful opportunity to review these doctrines in his own discipleship growth...and to reacquaint him with scriptures he has forgotten through the years.

This class also gives me opportunity to get to know the new believers and build a deeper relationship with them. The students are always open to ask questions on any subject at any time with the knowledge that I might override the question as being too deep for the students.

My first class was promoted quite heavily in the church bulletin and other means. We made it clear that we were looking for "baby" Christians. "We don't discuss predestination in this class! This is for people who don't know the difference between the Old and New Testaments!"

I like doing this class on Sunday morning during our Sunday School for several reasons.

1. People are already conditioned to attend Sunday School.

2. They attend at the same time that the other family members have a class of their own.
3. Sunday morning is the best time to reach everyone since the weekly schedule is more conducive to Sunday morning.
4. It provides a great excuse to create a new class. Every Sunday School should have a goal of beginning a new adult class every three years to help force the church out of its rut. We need to be reinvigorated!
5. I'm already on the grounds, too! It helps with my own schedule. Of course, I only preach once on Sunday morning (and then again on Sunday night). I would not attempt this schedule if I am preaching twice on Sunday morning.
6. Some worship-service-only attendees may be candidates for this class, thereby strengthening your Sunday School!

New students can begin the class at *any time* during the twelve months, begin wherever we are, then continue with us through the end of the book (*the initiating class of first year students can then leave with the idea of staying together and beginning their own class*) and continue on at page 1 as the new cycle begins. When that student reaches the point where he entered the class, the student is now ready to move on. Hence, some students will begin when the class is studying salvation while others may begin in the study of prophecy. All will leave the class upon completing the full cycle.

Last, I always began the class with a trivia question for the class to discuss with one another. The question might be so simple as “Who is your favorite movie hero?” or “What is your favorite animal?” This discussion helps the students to know one another better. They discuss this question for a few minutes then share their answers with the class. Other folk may identify with their answer, too! This can lead to the development of a new friend. (Remember: assimilation is always one of our goals.)

NEW MEMBERS CLASS

THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS IS A ONE-SHOT DEAL FOR US. We acquaint people with the church's expectations prior to their joining or immediately upon joining. Some churches make this class mandatory for church membership. I personally concur with that line of thinking, but it is not a standard for our church. However, such a standard would have eliminated some of our problems, because it would have immediately identified the degree of mismatched expectations.

For example, I pastored one church where the church's *written* policy allowed woman to speak on any subject. However, the previous pastor had admitted some members who did not believe a woman should ever be allowed to speak on any subject! One of them did not even believe a woman should be allowed to sing a solo! This created a level of mismatched expectations that was a constant thorn for the church. It simply did not need to be. So we worked this material into our New Member's Class and made sure that future members were aware of our policy on day one! It would be wise to do the same if your church has certain distinctive features it wishes to keep!

What material should one use for a new members class? I use CLASS 101 from Rick Warren. The cost is low. The material is not perfect, but it does several things that I like.

1. It introduces the students/church leadership to the concept of purposeful assimilation/development of members using Warren's baseball diamond as well as the five assimilation circles representing community, crowd, congregation, committed, and core. That is a workable process. My church leaders have to see this over and over in order for it to truly sink in. (Be patient with them, because it took five years for me!)
2. It includes a transcript that can easily be edited to make sure you complete the course in the allotted time period.
3. Since it includes a transcript, the director can enlist the aid of other teachers and share the blessing. This increases the level of buy-in.
4. The material is fill-in-the-blank which helps keep the student awake!
5. The class allows you to set a level of expectation for each member.

There is another class available that I think you should explore which is available at uniquelyyou.com. Television pastor Charles Stanley has used this material in the past. Uniquelyyou combines Warren's class with some psychology ideas to help each student identify his personality, etc. and how he fits in best. I would strongly recommend ordering 101 from Warren and adapting it for your own church.

It's a 4 - 8 pm Sunday class for us. Why not Sunday morning? Some churches try this material over a several week period via a Sunday School class. However, student attendance fluctuates too widely in that setting to accomplish the class's purpose. So we followed Warren's recommendations and do it on Sunday evening. This creates a problem, though, since the class occurs at the same time as the Sunday evening worship service. Some of my members objected to this,

because it decreased the auditorium crowd. I'll never understand such selfish reasoning, but Moses dealt with this for forty years in the wilderness, and we will have to deal with it, too. Be prepared to grin and bear it.

Yes, we did explore doing the class on Saturday night. However, Saturday's are already booked by most people. We determined that a Saturday class would have failed in our own setting.

We adapted 101 for our own doctrine, practices, etc. As noted above, most churches have a few peculiarities. It is wise to cover those peculiarities in this class.

We feed everyone at 6 pm with sandwiches. The half hour break works well.

How often should the class be repeated? As often as the need requires! Three students are enough to do the class.

Let me leave you with these comments from one State Director. May his words encourage you to reenergize your program!

*I recently returned from a conference led by Tom Bandy. He has written several books including Kicking Habits and Coaching Change. If you have not read these, I would recommend them to you as well as his website easumbandy.com. His main point is that the church must develop or re-develop the core process for making disciples. We have made many church members but not many disciples.
*Interesting stuff.**

*Thanks
Lloyd Hamblin (WVBC)*