

# How to Start a New Member Orientation Class

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An orientation class for new and prospective members is a must for a vibrant and growing church. Rick Warren says, “The manner in which people join your church will determine their effectiveness as members for years to come ... If little is required to join, very little can be expected from your members later on.”

## 10 Benefits

Consider the following ten **benefits** of a new member orientation class:

1. A new member’s class identifies the uniqueness of the church.
2. It shows that membership is valued highly, and not casual.
3. It provides the first step in discipleship.
4. It shows what is expected of every member. (The class does not add to what is needed for salvation; it clarifies what is already stated.)
5. It answers questions and concerns in a healthy way.
6. It provides the leadership with a way to interact with a lot of prospective and new members in a relaxed environment.
7. It provides an avenue where new members can get to know other new members and begin a relationship with them.
8. It gets people on the same page with vision, direction, structure, purpose, strategy, etc.
9. It prevents possible factions and problems.
10. While not a guarantee, a new member’s class will help new members be faithful and effective members for years to come.

## 7 Considerations

If you are ready to start a new member orientation class here are **seven practical considerations**:

### **1. How long should the class be?**

A strong membership class is not necessarily a long membership class. A class time of four hours is optimal. This gives the teacher enough time to present the

material; the participants to ask questions and develop some community; and the opportunity for other church members to share testimonies about church specifics.

## **2. What should you cover?**

The class should provide an overview of the New Testament understanding of a church in general and the uniqueness of your church in particular, including history, vision, strategy, organization, and doctrine. Detail information about the benefits, requirements, and expectations of a member should be included. Informing people how they can be involved is important. An overview of the various ministries the church offers is helpful.

## **3. Should the gospel be presented?**

Billy Graham has said that one of the largest mission fields in America is the local church. A church should not assume that a person knows Christ because they are transferring their membership from another church or even of the same denomination.

## **4. Should the class be required?**

In my opinion, the class should be required for membership. While long-term members will often object, new believers and younger members are most often eager to have such an orientation to the church. They have similar orientation classes at their work, their children's school, clubs, and housing developments. People unwilling to participate in a new member's class unfortunately communicate an apathy and disregard for commitment that may haunt the church later on.

## **5. Who should teach the class?**

The pastor should be the principle teacher. However, the class is a great time for other staff members to highlight their ministries and other church members to share their experiences about church. Other members can serve as hosts and hostesses. (Which, by the way, is an excellent way to reinforce the uniqueness of your church to key leaders.)

## **6. Where should the curriculum come from?**

It would be easy to use another church's new member's class curriculum verbatim. However, doing so wouldn't communicate the uniqueness of your church. Obviously one can tweak the material of other churches to make it fit your situation but the bulk of the material should be original to your church.

## **7. How to start a new member's class?**

If you are in an existing church that does not have a new member's class, I would

suggest that you first broach the idea with key leaders, deacons, elders, etc. to get their buy-in. This may require repeating the need for the class several times. Then, teach the class to the whole church, seeking their input and suggestions. Invite influential leaders and positional leaders to this class. (Internally, whether or not the class is required, the church can require that all teachers, leaders, take the class before they can serve in leadership roles.)

When the class is required, it will probably be best to grandfather everyone, not expecting current members to take the class for membership. But at a certain date make it clear that every new member will have to take the class before they will be considered for membership.