

Process for Starting New Units

Many churches may use the beginning of a new church year as they are enlisting leaders and evaluating the current organization as the time for focusing attention on starting new units. That timing certainly is appropriate. *However, starting new units is an ongoing action that can be done at any time. The key question is “when” can we start the new unit?*

Recognize the Importance of Starting New Units

Undergirding the process of starting new units is awareness throughout the church in the value of beginning new units. Plan intentional steps to make the church aware of the value of new units in reaching people for Christ and engaging people in Bible study and ministry. These steps can include emphasis from the pulpit, articles on the values of new units, recognition of successful new units, stories about people reached through new units, and emphasis on the growth caused by new units.

Study Your Sunday School Organization

A thorough study of your Sunday School organization will identify many opportunities for beginning new units. Opportunities will include many of the following plus many more:

- Classes or departments that exceed suggested enrollment ceilings
- Age ranges, and life transition stages (newly married, recently divorced, widowed, college students, etc.) that are not being reached effectively
- Areas with lots of prospects but little attendance
- Classes where the space is continually filled
- Special needs—mentally handicapped, physically handicapped
- Homebound, shift workers
- Other locations—home, apartment, office, recreational site, residential institution

Identify a Target Group

Although every believer and every church is to be on mission to reach anyone and everyone, according to the message of the Great Commission, realistically, each Bible study group needs to focus on a specific target group. The target group may develop around such influential factors as age range, gender, school grade, marital status, life status, or transitional point (such as newly married, recently retired, recently widowed, new parent, and so forth).

Discuss the Need with Sunday School Leaders

Hopefully Sunday School leaders were involved in identifying the need for the new unit. Once it has been identified, sit down with Sunday School leaders and discuss the need and the viability of beginning the new unit. Discuss the steps it will take to begin the new unit successfully.

Seek Sponsorship

A successful new Bible study group needs a support system. Leaders need encouragement that comes from knowing that others are praying for them. Such support comes naturally when leaders and the core for the new unit come from an existing class.

An existing class can help the new class to discover, contact, and enroll prospects. Members from an existing class can “adopt” members and prospects from the new class and provide prayer and ministry, particularly until the class grows and can stand on its own. Leaders from an existing class can work alongside one or more leaders from a new class, especially providing help in planning, teaching improvement, evangelistic outreach, and administration.

Enlist and Build the Leadership Team

New leaders are needed to birth new units; new units require leaders. The two are so closely related. Enlist at least two leaders and two prospective members as the core group for starting a new unit. The two leaders will generally include the class teacher and the class administrator. The core group may be larger for adult coeducational classes and single adult classes. The core group needs to meet together several times prior to the start date to plan actions for building the class and to plan for the first session.

Promote the Start Date and Location to the Target Group

Promote the specific date, time, and place the new Bible study group will meet. Such an intention assumes that ample preparation time has been given to the process so that information can be conveyed to the target group as well as to other existing groups that may be affected by the birthing of new units. Ask core group members to invite prospective members to attend a get-acquainted gathering a couple of weeks prior to the start of the new class or group.

Visit, Invite, and Enroll Members

Contact prospects for the class several weeks before the starting date. Enrollment provides an opportunity for an individual to identify with the class. Enrollment gives the Bible study group a tangible list of persons they can minister to and pray for regardless of the attendance pattern of the enrolled.

Conduct the First Session

The first sessions should be especially well planned and coordinated with all leaders. The sequence of these elements can be varied based on the target group.

- Party – Provide time for fellowship among leaders, members, and other attenders. Serve light snacks as appropriate for the age of the participants. Plan group-building and get-acquainted experiences. Use name tags to help everyone learn names.
- Praise – Ask some leaders and members to tell how they understand that God is working in their lives. Do not embarrass new participants (particularly unchurched persons), who may find it awkward to talk about spiritual things. As a part of the worship time, read a Psalm or other Scripture passage that will be part of the Bible study for the day and provide music or brief group singing.
- Prayer – All persons have concerns for which they need God’s intervention. Some new attenders may not be familiar with the idea of bringing concerns before God confident that

He hears, understands, and answers our prayers. As the leadership team learns about individuals in the group, it will become apparent who is comfortable praying aloud in a group. Prayer time can be a vital group-building experience as well as a meaningful time of worship. While this time is important, leaders will want to be sure that plenty of time is given for Bible study.

- Participation in Bible study – Approximately two thirds of the total session should be designed for Bible study.

Continue to Support the New Unit

The work of beginning a new unit is not over after the first session. It is extremely important that steps are planned to support the work of the new unit and help it develop strong roots and continue to build.

- Pray for the new unit.
- Sponsoring group continues to help build the class by supporting it in visitation, enrolling people, and ministry.
- Continue to mentor and support the leadership of the new unit.
- Plan with the leadership of the new unit for the next steps for the new unit and the support that is needed.
- Make the church aware of the progress of the new unit.