

New Sunday School Units

A growing Sunday School is constantly creating new classes and departments. After a class has been together for more than two years, they tend to look increasingly inward and to care for their members only. In fact, studies have shown that after a class has been together for 18 months, they generally plateau and new people find it hard to become a part of the class. New classes provide opportunities for new entry points for new people. Studies have shown that a new class will reach 23 new people in the first 12 months. The following are additional reasons we need new units:

- Based on signs of a healthy church, new units help us reach people and witness to more lost adults.
- Creating new units is the process of enlarging the Bible teaching-reaching ministry to assure that each person's needs are met effectively and to make sure everyone has a place.
- New units provide opportunities for more adults to discover and use their gifts and talents in Christian service.
- New units also help bridge gaps in the present organizational structure.
- When classes go beyond a reasonable number of persons enrolled, workers are stretched too thin in ministering to class members.
- When a class becomes too large for ministry to be done effectively the result is that people tend to drop out or become inactive.
- When a class becomes too large for ministry to be done effectively, the motivation to discover, enroll, and reach new members declines because leaders cannot adequately meet the needs of members they already have.

Ways to Create New Classes

New classes can be created in several ways. Here are a few:

1. **The paper class:** a list of prospects is given to a teacher who is told to build a class.
2. **Regrading / Reorganizing:** An age profile chart is done, listing each person's name, birth date, and attendance records. Classes and departments are reorganized and new units added according to age.
3. **The divided class:** the roll of a class is simply divided into two equal units – some of all types of members in each unit.
4. **The dropout class:** this class is formed by giving a teacher a list of Sunday School inactives.
5. **The seed class:** select people are enlisted to begin a new class. This class probably has the greatest potential for growth and success.

The best way of creating a new class is the seed class. "Seeding" a class with a good teacher and some core members gives the greatest probability for success. Look at the following scenarios to see why this is so.

Scenario One – The Paper Class

If you create a paper class, the teacher seeks to enlist people who are prospects for the class. Some of these, possibly all of them, have not visited the church. If they are invited, some of them will attend. Commitment levels are slight to non-existent. Growth in this type of class is extremely slow. The leader/teacher must be tenacious and not easily discouraged. Some who come initially might be uncomfortable with a few persons in attendance. A high dropout rate is to be expected. The class can be built, but time and tenacity are required.

Scenario Two – The Regrading/Reorganization

Many churches find, after years of adults refusing to promote into the proper age graded Sunday School classes, that very few are actually in the correct class. Regrading is a process of organizing adults into the proper age group. Then, all new classes are formed according to the age groups listed. For a while the adults will stay in the new classes, but eventually may wander back into another class. Additionally, this may not create any new units at all. This will only work when the majority of key Sunday School leaders agree to this method of “starting over.”

Scenario Three – The Divided Class

If a class is split – each class receiving equal representations of each member type – an extremely disruptive situation develops. Friends are separated. Some members, who attend only occasionally because of relationships with other class members or the teacher, find themselves assigned to separate classes. Some of the quarter-timers and spasmodics return to find a new teacher in a new room. These disruptions can be enough to cause some of these persons to drop out.

Scenario Four – The Dropout Class

If the new class is composed of dropouts, the group will grow with great difficulty – if at all. Some dropouts can be brought back into the life of the church. Some will bring negative attitudes that can infect the spirit of the class making growth difficult. Patience, determination, and a caring spirit must characterize the teacher assigned to this type of new class.

Scenario Five – The Seed Class

This scenario has the greatest probability for success. A teacher is enlisted and then selected persons from a class’s core group (or possibly from several classes) are enlisted to create the core group of a new class. These persons should be committed to Christ, to Bible study, and to reaching others for Bible study, Christ, and church membership. Because these members are enlisted for the task, they understand their purpose as growth agents. Their consistent attendance creates a receptive group to welcome prospective members.

Please note: When enlisting members for the new class, be careful to leave a strong core group in the original class. The original class needs strength to maintain itself. It should not be sacrificed to a new group. Usually, several months are required for the older class to restore itself to the point it was prior to the beginning of the new class.

Steps to Starting New Units

1. Select a target group. Decide on who you are trying to reach and what kind of class you want to start.

2. Set a date to begin. Know the annual attendance patterns and select the optimum time to begin new classes. You do not want to start a new class when the attendance in Sunday School is generally down.
3. Build your leadership team. A good leadership team consists of a teacher, outreach leader, care leader. Don't forget to train this leadership team.
4. Find a place for them to meet. If you are low on space, be creative. Sanctuaries and fellowship halls can hold multiple classes. Rooms such as the kitchen, church office and others can be used for Sunday School classes.
5. Obtain needed curriculum. Make sure you have pupil books so you will have enough as the class grows.
6. Discover and assign prospects. You must give the new class a pool of prospects to begin contacting.
7. Build relationships with prospects. Remember, the number one reason people come to Sunday School is fellowship. Help them build a fellowship atmosphere both in and out the classroom.
8. Celebrate the new beginning. Have a commissioning service. Identify the new class members as missionaries and don't forget to recognize the original class for sending out these missionaries. This will help in creating a climate for new classes and will be a model for the other classes of what we consider to be a successful class.

Other factors to consider when creating new units.

- Move with the movers – don't wait to win over those who are reluctant. Those with the vision must be the ones to fulfill the vision. If left to others without the vision, confusion at best, failure at worst, will result. This means one of two things. First, the ones with the vision must do the work of creating the new class or department and second, the ones with the vision must help others catch the vision. Even then, a great deal of encouragement, coaching, and guidance is necessary.
- Communication is critical. Use every means available to inform those involved in creating the new class – both the class or classes from which the new class is created and those involved in creating it.
- In the initial stages, however, involve only those persons necessary in creating a new class. Wait until the change is certain in the planning or in reality to inform the larger body of a department or the church as a whole. Less disturbance will result if you wait until the action is settled in the minds of those involved in the change.
- Find the teacher, then form the class. Each teacher will attract a certain following initially.
- Channel prospects to the new classes. Without histories, new classes are a better environment for new persons.
- Assign inactive members from other classes to the new class. The formation of the new class might provide just the opportunity needed to re-activate these members.
- Create as many favorable circumstances for success as possible.

- Pay close attention to the new classes – care for them as you would a new child. Offer encouragement to the teacher and class leaders.
- Tell the story to others. Stories shape opinions and attitudes quicker than anything else. Facts and figures won't do the job for most people. Putting a face with those facts and figures make people believe and care.
- Close the back door. It's not enough to reach new people, if they just file through. Keep those you reach.

Begin now by planning for the new unit.

1. We need to start a _____ Sunday School Class.
2. We will begin the class on this date _____.
3. The leadership team will consist of:
 - Teacher: _____
 - Outreach Leader: _____
 - Care Leader: _____
 - Other Members: _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
4. They will meet _____.
5. We need to order _____ copies of _____ (curriculum).
6. We will begin by giving them a prospect list of _____ (number) of prospects.
7. We will help the class build relationship in the following ways:

8. We will celebrate the new beginning by:
