

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Most adults join an adult class to make friendships with other adults with similar interests. Designate people who will arrive at least fifteen minutes before class begins to greet class members. Ensure that each person is greeted with a warm, firm handshake and a friendly smile. Provide your members with name tags each week and enlist someone to fill out name tags for newcomers.

Providing coffee and doughnuts can help the class “warm up” before the lesson is taught. Plan at least fifteen to twenty minutes for informal conversation and relationship building at the beginning of a class period.

A class newsletter is a good tool for communication and relationship building on a weekly or monthly basis. It can help keep people informed about prayer requests, upcoming socials, birthdays, and anniversaries. The newsletter may include recipes, devotional thoughts, want ads from the local business community, and features from local doctors, lawyers, financial counselors, and other writers who wish to encourage others in their areas of expertise. With the influx of affordable home computer software, the newsletter can be as simple or elaborate as the class members would desire. The newsletter can be given out at the end of the class session or mailed to members.

Decide as a class at what point you want to contact missing class members. Enlist volunteers to contact people or families that have been absent. Follow up with phone calls, cards, or notes.

Print special cards with sayings like, “We’re praying for you,” “We missed you,” “Congratulations,” or “Thank you.” Pass cards during class time for everyone to sign. Address and mail.

Recruit a host or hostess for each class whose main responsibility is to watch for new people and help them feel welcome in the class. A resourceful host or hostess will introduce new people to class members who live in the same area or who have similar interests. They can also formally introduce the newcomers at the beginning of class time or during announcement time.

Encourage your class to take advantage of larger church events, such as worship, picnics, and socials. Look for class members and sit together. As the teacher, use these times to affirm and appreciate those who respond to questions during the class time.

Many times adult classes become “fishing ponds” for other ministries of the church. For instance, children’s, youth, or worship departments can all benefit from volunteers from your adult class. Highlight the church’s needs for volunteers on a class bulletin board or during the announcement period of the class.

Encourage class members to start new small groups from the membership of the class. Small groups can meet during the week, weekly or every other week, for Bible study and prayer. This will help to build deeper relationships and will also enrich your class discussions. Rotate groups periodically to help everyone get acquainted.

Meet class members during the week for breakfast or lunch near their workplaces. As part of the lunch appointment, have a class member show you around his workplace and also introduce yourself to his work associates. Be sure to schedule these visits beforehand.

Adopt the church's young adults who have gone away to college. Send them care packages with assorted personal items and goodies to remind them of their home congregation or class. Include these students on the church mailing list or a class newsletter list to keep them current with the news from home.

Begin softball, volleyball, and other recreational activities for class members and friends. Use this time to get to know each other as well as to grow in numbers.

HOW TO PLAN A SUCCESSFUL RETREAT

Choose a location that will accomplish the goals of your retreat program.

Church camps, state parks, hotels, resorts, or lodges can be great sites for a retreat. Two key factors in considering a site are cost and distance. One to two hours away is a good rule of thumb. This is far enough away to keep people from running back and forth to take care of minor details, yet not too far to financially keep people from attending or limiting the time for your retreat schedule.

Determine the expenses of the retreat.

Small churches may not have the resources or the numbers to justify the expense for their own retreats. Many colleges have campus ministries that sponsor retreats every semester. Why not take a group of young adults and join them? You could also plan area-wide retreats by combining resources with other congregations.

Look for those who have the gift of giving to share in sponsoring people who cannot attend because of financial restraints.

Look for interdenominational organizations that provide programs and seminars in large cities. Promise Keepers, marriage enrichment retreats, Emmaus walks, and church growth seminars are some examples. Take your class. Plan to spend extra time before and after the event to gather your group together, debrief the experience, and set personal goals for the future.

Travel, food, special speakers, entertainment, baby-sitting, publicity, lodging, and miscellaneous program costs are all items that should be considered when planning a retreat.

A retreat for young couples with young children can be enhanced if older adults in the church would adopt the children for the weekend. This is especially helpful for those who do not have an immediate family in the area to help with child care. Another way to help with baby-sitting is to take along several high school students. They can use extra Vacation Bible School materials to conduct a separate retreat for the children.