



INVITING NEW MEMBERS

BY

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So people have moved on and your remaining group has evaluated its mission. After much honest discussion, you've agreed on a new direction or confirmed the existing one. Hopefully you've been praying as you've gone through this process. But what's next? If you've decided to add members, how do you go about inviting others to join you?

Identify Potential Members

The most obvious place to find new members is at your church, especially if your small group is a ministry of your church. Often the pastor or other leaders will know people who are looking for a group, and they may be able to share some encouragement or cautions.

Another place to find new members is among the friends or acquaintances of the remaining members. This can be good news or bad news. The good news is that a friend of someone in the group could likely be a good fit. The bad news is that if the new person doesn't work out, it could cause hard feelings or awkwardness among your present members. Also, depending on the group dynamics, others may be uncomfortable with having good friends together in the group. Because of their own insecurities, some people will automatically feel left out or isolated by what they perceive as a clique. Be sure to talk openly about such potential problems and have the group agree in advance how to handle them if they crop up.

Or, members may know someone from work, their neighborhood, the softball team, or elsewhere. These people may not be good friends or even Christians, but depending on the group's mission, they may make great additions. Be creative and see what God does.

Begin with Prayer

Once the group has come up with several names and perhaps even prioritized them, it's time to pray! The only way to be sure you get the group God wants is to pray for His guidance. I've done it both ways and believe me, praying is the only way. I've been amazed at the unlikely people God has put together in my groups, but they have worked far better than those I stubbornly or naively put together on my own.

Approach Potential Members

Once there's a consensus on whom to invite, the leader or another group member can approach each recruit and discuss the group. Because they were part of clearly defining the group and its mission, it should be easy to communicate the group's hopes, plans, expectations, and limitations.

Communicate Expectations

It's important to be clear in communicating the mission, expectations, and values of the group to the potential new member. I've been accused of scaring people off, but if, for example, the group has agreed there will be no children at meetings, it's only fair that the newcomers understand that means *no* children. If the agreement is that members will do homework and come prepared to discuss the lesson, that means we expect that members will do homework and come prepared to discuss the lesson. What do we gain if we soft pedal around issues that we've agreed are important?

Get Acquainted

Your group might want to invite potential members to a get-acquainted meeting where they can meet the group, ask questions, and observe group dynamics before making a commitment. That will give both the remaining and the potential members a chance to see if they're comfortable with the fit. Make sure that when you issue the invitation to this meeting, you're clear about the purpose and don't imply that the person is being invited to join the group at this point.

Invite those you want to join

After you've met potential members, release the decision to the Lord and see what He'll do with it. Take some time to pray again and seek his wisdom. Then call those you want to join and tell them how delighted you are to get to invite them. Hopefully, they'll feel the same way.

Transitions in groups are difficult, but they can also offer the opportunity to breathe new life into the group and to stretch our comfort levels a bit. The Chinese symbol for "crisis" is a combination of the symbols for "danger" and "opportunity." Transition often looks like that.