



Midsized Group Names and/or Strategies - January 06

The history of midsized groups began with the Sunday school movement. With over 450,000 churches in America, multi-thousands of churches continue to offer adult Sunday school. Also, thousands of Southern Baptist Sunday schools continue to use "Departmental" midsized gatherings with breakout small group/classes or just straight midsized classes.

Knute Larson pioneered the Adult Bible Fellowship philosophy in the early 70's and today thousands of churches use ABF principles as part of their adult ministry strategy. A majority of the names represented below use ABF principles.

There are also other midsized group strategies flourishing – several involve intentional small group options for deeper intimacy and connection.

Here are names (and unique strategies for some) with a sampling of church examples:

14) Sunday School

Cedar Crest Bible Fellowship in Allentown, Pennsylvania
Alpharetta First United Methodist Church in Alpharetta, Georgia
First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee
Flint Central Church of the Nazarene in Flint, Michigan

13) Adult Bible Fellowships (ABFs)

Heritage Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia
Broken Arrow Assembly in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma
Crystal Cathedral (Pastor Robert Schuller) in Garden Grove, California
Brooklyn Park Evangelical Free Church in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota

12) Bible Fellowship

Prestonwood Church in Plano, Texas
First Baptist Church in Hellena, Alabama
Graceland Baptist Church in Albany, Indiana

At the start of the 21st century some churches are either describing their ABFs with community lingo or transitioning to "communities" or "community" within their name. The next four names on this list reflect this trend.

11) ABF Communities

The Chapel in Akron, Ohio

10) Adult Bible Communities (ABC's)

Thomas Road Baptist Church (Pastor Jerry Falwell) in Lynchburg, Virginia (15-70+)
Los Gatos Christian Church in Los Gatos, California
Trinity Bible Church in Richardson, Texas

9) Small Community

Northside Baptist Church in St. Petersburg, Florida
Northside believes their ABFs are small communities within the congregation.

8) Communities

Hope Church in Mason, Ohio (15-90)
Meadowbrook Church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

7) Community Groups

Pantego Bible Church in Fort Worth, Texas (30-50)

Christ Connections Community Church in Oswego, Illinois (up to 50)

Grace Community Church in Tempe, Arizona

Community Groups in these churches are part of the "Connecting Church" philosophy of ministry that is geographical based midsize groups and small groups. This philosophy was pioneered by Randy Frazee at Pantego Bible Church. (Randy is now overseeing the Neighborhood Groups at Willow Creek Community Church)

6) Home Groups

Xenos Christian Fellowship in Columbus, Ohio (15-60)

Xenos Christian Fellowship in Cincinnati, Ohio

NE Ohio Xenos Christian Fellowship in Cleveland, Ohio

Xenos' Home-based midsize groups are led by highly trained lay leaders who perform various pastoral functions within their group. These midsize groups also have intentional breakout gender based small groups. There is also a high value placed on one-on-one discipleship within the whole church culture. See Idea of Month for January 04.

5) Flocks

The Church of the Good Shepherd in Durham, North Carolina

Flocks at the Church of the Good Shepherd are midsize geographical based groups that meet at the church on Sunday mornings. They also have several small groups in homes for each flock.

4) Starting Point Groups

Village Baptist Church in Beaverton, Oregon (25-75)

Starting point groups at Village Baptist Church are midsize groups that meet at the church concurrent with worship services. The goal is for these midsize groups to feed into Life groups (small groups) in homes.

3) Adult Fellowship Groups (AFGs)

Grace Community Church (Pastor John MacArthur) in Sun Valley, California (100-450)

Each of the AFG's is lead by a pastor/pastors. These are either staff elders or lay elders. Each of these pastors develops a team of leaders. There are leaders that oversee different areas of ministry (music, outreach, etc.). The key leaders are those men who oversee the home fellowships associated with the fellowship group. The pastors usually meet with these men on a regular basis for mutual encouragement, leadership development, planning, and to discuss shepherding issues. As you can imagine the fellowship groups function like little churches within the bigger church. It is an effective means to have accountability and shepherding within such a large congregation.

2) Small Churches

First Evangelical Free Church of Manchester, Missouri (30-100)

Small Churches at First Free provide Biblical teaching and meaningful relationships in mid-sized groups. Some Small Churches are life-stage-specific, while others are multi-generational. In addition to meeting on Sunday mornings (9:00 am or 10:45 am), Small Churches also organize fellowship events, service projects, care and support for their members during times of need, and prayer. A distinctive of Small Churches is the formation and oversight of small groups. Small churches are a fantastic way to get connected at First Free with people that love the Lord and love each other! (ABF Principled)

1) Neighborhoods

Valley Community Baptist Church in Avon, Connecticut (15-80)

We have been seeking to break down this large group of Sunday worshippers into "knowable clusters". One solution is our VCBC "Neighborhoods" – smaller (midsize size) affinity groups organized by life-stage. There a "Neighborhood" just for you! (ABF Principled)

Websites:

14. cedarcrestbfc.org; afumc.org; fpcnashville.org; centralnazarene.org

13. heritagebc.net; baassembly.org; crystalcathedral.org; bpafc.org
12. prestonwood.org; fbhelenahome.org; gracelandbaptist.org
11. the-chapel.org
10. trbc.org; losgatoschristianchurch.org; trinitybiblechurch.com
9. northside-ministries.org
8. hope-church.org; meadowbrook-church.com
7. pantego.org; christccc.org; gccaz.org
6. xenos.org; xenos-cincy.org; xenoscleveland.org
5. cgsonline.org
4. vbconline.org
3. gracechurch.org (Also, Indygrace.org uses "Fellowship Groups")
2. efree.org
1. valleywebs.org

For another unique list see the Idea of the Month for August 04 which includes several prominent churches that use ABF principles.

Do you have another "name" and/or strategy to add to this list? Send it to slizzio@hope-church.org and we will add it right below with the date it was added.

Name, Church, website, date added

Mini-Congregations Calvary Free Church in Rochester, Minnesota/calvaryefc.org 1/4/06

RBFs - Relational Bible Fellowships The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, Alabama/brookhills.org

Life Groups Whitebury Baptist Church, Huntsville, Alabama/wbcares.org

- Steve Lizzio, Director of ABF Resources and Pastor of Adult Ministries at Hope Church in Mason, Ohio