



Anatomy of a New Mid-Sized Group Start Up's – May/June 09



Case Study: The Mix ABF

One of the frequent questions we are asked regarding ABFs is "how do you start one?" This past January, the Evangelical Free Church in Sheboygan Wisconsin started a new one. This article tells the story of the start up and identifies some major steps along the way that can apply to almost any organization.

Assessing the Need

In 2007, the church in Sheboygan moved from a "sandwich" schedule (two services with an education hour "sandwiched" in-between) to three consecutive Sunday morning services. At that time, the church of approximately 1,000 in attendance had 8 ABFs -- 6 were life-stage oriented and 2 were for men only (using the Men's Fraternity curriculum). Many new families were coming to the new 2nd Service. A new ABF in the 3rd period was badly needed. An additional need that was identified was to have an ABF where various life-stages could be mixed together.

Key Leader

For almost a year prayer and study were given to identifying a key leader for this new ABF. During this time the Pastor of Adult Ministries met with a number of couples to assess their desire to be part of the new ABF, their qualifications to be part of the leadership team, and to try and identify the key leader. Toward the end of that year, a man named Bob, who was a proven leader, came forward and asked if there was an area of church need that could use his leadership gifts. He seemed the perfect fit. With the key leader identified, it was time to move from dream to action.

Leadership Team First

One of the core pieces of the ABF philosophy is that each ABF is led by a team of peers -- NOT a teacher. The first action step was to develop this team and have the team decide the steps toward start up. This does not mean that they were left to their own devices. The church has a specific ABF Leadership Team Training Curriculum that constituted the bulk of the first meeting. The Pastor of Adult Ministries ran the training, and actually led the first meeting, putting into place the key leader and helping select other key roles. Then the Pastor of Adult Ministries turned leadership formally over to the new key leader and continued to meet with the Leadership Team in a consulting role.

Each ABF has a key leader and a secretary. Beyond that they organize themselves according to their unique needs. In this case, the leadership team consisted of 4 couples. They created roles for new person follow up, social organization, publicity, small groups, etc.

Almost all ABFs that follow the ABF philosophy establish the leadership team of peers as a core concept. The Sheboygan church takes this a step further in that the ABF does NOT have any teachers at all. There is a pool of adult teachers. The ABF Leadership Team decides (with guidance in the form of a 2 year teaching plan) on what kind of teaching series to offer, then goes to the teaching pool to find a teacher to come in for 4-8 weeks to teach that particular series.

The Mix ABF Leadership Team met for three months before the first ABF meeting was held on a Sunday morning.

Socials Second

During November and December the ABF held 3 socials. Two were off campus and the third was in what was to be their new classroom at church. Announcements were made during the 2nd service from which they would eventually draw most of their community. They had decided on the name "Mix" and designed name tags, which the leadership team wore to church every Sunday during this ramp up time. The socials majored on ice-breakers, laughter, food, and fun fellowship. The only content was a brief speech about what the new ABF would offer once it started in January.

Recruiting Third

During November and December the leadership team placed announcements in the Sunday printed program, the monthly newsletter, the PowerPoint announcements in 2nd service and found two times where one of their number could be called to the platform either to be interviewed or to make a brief announcement of their own. In addition to their bright yellow Mix name tags, they passed our bright yellow flyers to many of the 2nd service attendees.

The Launch

The Mix was launched on the 2nd Sunday of January. About 35 people showed up the first week. Their ages were mixed. Most were from the new 2nd service, but some actually switched worship services because of the excitement around the new ABF launch. At the time of this writing they have finished their first teaching series, enjoyed a transitional pot-luck, and have launched their second teaching series. Each Sunday has about 15 min. of open fellowship around food, about 15 min. of prayer, ice-breakers, and other community activity, and then about 40 min. of interactive teaching. They host an off campus social each month.

Follow Up

The Mix leadership team began immediately to follow up on both recent new attendees as well as prospects. Most of this was done via phone or hallway conversation at church. Prospects were engaged in appropriate relational conversation, politely invited to the Mix and then left alone if they decided not to attend.

Lessons Learned

If there is a transferable lesson from looking at the Mix start up, it is to start with the Leadership Team and then do start up socials and recruiting for about three months prior to the formal launch. The launch goes much smoother when there is an entire leadership team already owning the process.

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