



The Death and Birth of an ABF – November/December 09



No, you did not read the title wrong: I meant to say death before birth. In the Fall 2008, I helped one of the ABFs I oversee “die” and out of the ashes raise up a brand new leadership team to “birth” a new ABF. Here’s the drama-filled, gripping story¹:

The Backstory

In the Spring 2004, we started a new ABF for young single twentysomethings (named 12:30@Eleven after Mark 12:30 (Love God with heart, soul, mind, strength) and they met at 11:00 am²).

The group was very strong and active from the beginning. But as happens with a community of young singles, many of them got married³. 12:30@Eleven morphed into a mixed group of married couples and young singles.

While this had been a dream of mine to have a “mixed” group like this, I began to notice around the Fall 2007 we weren’t attracting new people (whether married or single) at the same rate we had been when the group was made up of all singles. Because we have other ABFs that are more “marriage focused”, I was mostly concerned about the young singles that were not getting connected into community.

In February of 2008, I brought up the idea of birthing a new group with the existing leadership team. Much to my surprise, they chose to not pursue the idea at that time, but keep the discussion alive during their meetings. I began to pray about launching a completely new group without the involvement of the existing ABF. Then three of the leaders of 12:30@Eleven each separately approached me about stepping down, feeling God was telling them time with the existing group was done.

Suddenly, I found myself facing two issues: finding a leadership team for a new group AND finding an almost entirely new leadership team for the existing ABF. After talking through things with the leadership team, we decided to investigate whether it was time to close down 12:30@Eleven to allow something new to grow.

So in the early Fall 2008, we had many lunch conversations with both the married couples and singles in the existing ABF. Most everyone was a bit sad to think of 12:30@Eleven ending, but almost everyone agreed it seemed to be the right thing to do. So we put together a plan to bring the existing group to an end and birth a new ABF targeting unmarried twentysomethings.

A Pregnant Funeral (The Timeline)

We wanted some “space” between the end of 12:30@Eleven and the new ABF. I also knew I needed time to work with a leadership team, as well as a core group (more on that below), before officially launching the new group. Here’s the time line we came up with (and looking back, it seemed to be a very good timeline):

September - October 2008

- Talked openly with members of the ABF individually to gather feelings, ideas, and feedback

November 2008

- Closed the previous ABF with a Celebration Party.

December 2008

- Talked one-on-one with potential leaders for new group
- Recruited a “Mentor Couple” to work with the leadership team and mentor the group as a whole.
- Held two social events to keep existing relationship moving forward and create the opportunity for new people to connect.

January 2009 - Leadership

- Began meeting and praying with the leadership team. Met 4 weeks. Topics included:
 - Purpose of ABFs in general
 - Mission and Purpose of this particular future ABF
 - Leadership Roles within the ABF
 - Importance of Self-Leadership
- Also during this month, I sent emails to a group of about 20 single young adults⁴ I thought might be interested in the group and invited them to be part of a “core group⁵.”
- We tried to have a couple of opportunities for people to hang out together during this month as well.

February 2009 – Core Group

- Began meeting with a core group of 15 people (which counts the leadership team) for 4 weeks. Topics included:
 - Overall purpose of ABF
 - The mission statement of the ABF as determined by the leadership team
 - Naming the group

- Planning a kick-off event
 - Prayer, prayer, prayer
- The group chose the name “BE[cause]” which to them meant they wanted to BE about the cause of Christ⁶.
- Most in the core group also signed up to serve in the group, whether that be for Sundays or stuff that needs to happen during the week.
- To help the core group get to know one another even further, we had a Valentine’s event at the home of the mentor couple, as well as one other event.
- We also began general promotion of this new ABF:
 - Announcements started going in the church bulletin 4 weeks out from our March 1 launch.
 - Sent an email to every young adult we had in our database that was in their twenties, unmarried, and not part of any other ABF in the church inviting them to the kick-off event 2 nights before launch as well as the Sunday morning launch.
 - Sent a postcard to the same group with the same info as the email.
 - Started a Facebook group and sent invites to the group and events.
 - Lastly, I sent personal emails to any single young adult who came to church for the first time and filled out a Sunday communication card (which told us their name, age, and marital status), inviting them to come to the launch.

March 2009 – Birth!

- We launched on March 1. We had around 30 people in attendance.
- Not only did the group have a kick-off event 2 nights before launch, they also had an event planned for the very next Friday.
- One of the best things to happen during the month was the opportunity the group had to serve for a large youth outreach several churches are involved with. Our desire was that having a serving opportunity at the very beginning would help get “serving” into the DNA of this new community.

Congratulations! It’s an ABF!

As I write this closing paragraph over six months after launch, the group is consistently seeing 45-50 twentysomethings each Sunday. Over half of those gather afterwards to eat lunch with one other. As I type this, we have six members of this group (two of whom are on leadership) giving up two-weeks vacation to serve on a short-term mission trip in Kosovo. They have helped each other move apartments and homes. An early morning men’s group has started, and two women’s Bible studies have started as well. Several have begun serving in the church for the first time

ever. And most importantly, we are seeing people genuinely growing in their faith in Christ and a few being identified as future leaders.

All in all, I think it was a beautiful birth of an ABF, out of the death of a previous mid-size community.

Footnotes:

¹ This story is only gripping if you find the life cycle of mid-sized groups to be exciting. No parts of this story have been exaggerated to make it more exciting.

² My advice – never name a group after a Bible passage AND the time of day they meet at. It was very confusing to new people!

³ Mostly to each other!

⁴ Most of the twentysomethings we invited were from the previous ABF, a few were brand new to the church (I thought it would be a great way for them to connect), and a few were young adults who grew up at our church, went away for college, and were now back in town.

⁵ Having a “core group” was new for me. Previously I had always launched a new ABF with just a leadership team. My thinking, this time, was that we needed more than just 4 or 6 people carrying the burden of all the responsibilities necessary to launch a new ABF.

⁶ The name BE[cause] also has multiple more meanings

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