



## RECRUITING, NURTURING, AND SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

**L**ooking for teachers and small-group leaders for education and formation ministries is not simply a matter of filling slots. You are calling people to ministry on behalf of the congregation. We all have gifts and talents given to us by God. As Christians, we are to use these gifts and talents in serving God. We extend that call to service to those whom we ask to be teachers and leaders in the congregation.

### AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER

What qualities do we seek in teachers and leaders? As you work to invite others into teaching, use this list to guide your thinking. Effective teachers and leaders are people who:

- Understand, like, and know the capabilities of the age group they are being asked to teach;
- enjoy learning and see the mutual learning of the classroom as exciting and rewarding;
- are willing to get to know those they teach—their likes, dislikes, joys, and concerns;
- study and reflect on the Bible;
- talk and live as faithful disciples;
- want to create a space for study, for practicing spiritual disciplines, and for growing together in faith with those they teach;
- enjoy the humorous side of things.

### TIPS FOR RECRUITING

You may have sole responsibility for identifying teachers and leaders in your congregation, or you may have a leadership team. If at all possible, it is preferable to have more than one person involved in this task. It is often

easier to identify those with gifts and talents for teaching when you work with a team. In small-membership congregations, having at least one person with whom you can work will help you as you think and pray about who will be needed as teachers and leaders. Observe the following guidelines:

- Approach the job of identifying potential teachers and leaders with prayer.
- Be open to those who might not immediately come to mind.
- Make a list of those you want to invite to teach and decide who should contact each person identified.
- Talk with each person you invite. If you send out a letter of invitation, follow up with a personal conversation.
- List the gifts and talents you see in each person you are asking. List how these gifts and talents can be used in what you are proposing for them.
- Be honest. Give a realistic idea of the time needed, the length of service, what support they can expect from the congregation, and to whom they should go for help.
- Take time to explain the ministry thoroughly, including information you think might help people know more about what you are asking them to do.
- Give your personal appraisal of the rewards and problems.
- Let people know what support they can expect from individuals and from the congregation.
- Be enthusiastic. Your attitude communicates the joys of teaching and leading.

- Give people time for thought and prayer. Don't expect people to accept without time for reflection and prayer.
- Be persistent. Honor absolute "No's," but listen for indications that someone might be interested. The timing may not be right, but another time may work. Or a person may need to observe someone else teaching before agreeing to teach. Some may be willing to substitute rather than teach each week.

When people know what is expected of them and promised to them, they can make a more informed choice that will enhance their sense of belonging and worth as teachers. Be sure, though, that these expectations and promises are both possible and supported by the church. If, for example, you expect teachers to attend training, then you must offer training and do it when the majority of teachers can attend. If you expect teachers to attend worship, your worship time and education time have to be separate. If you require continuing education that has tuition, you must have some way to be sure the costs can be met.

## **AIDING EFFECTIVENESS**

### ***Training Before Beginning***

Even before teachers begin, it is important to provide training to help them feel confident and informed. Receiving key information in advance assures teachers of feeling comfortable with the age group they will be teaching, feeling comfortable with the space they will be using, and feeling comfortable with the curriculum from which they will be teaching.

For some congregations, training begins even before identifying teachers. Many congregations provide book studies in which congregational members gather to read books together and discuss the material in the books. *Keeping in Touch: Christian Formation and Teaching*, by Carol F. Krau (Discipleship Resources, 1999), and *Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education in Your Congregation* (Discipleship Resources, 1993) are two books that can be used in this way.

For new and continuing teachers, offer an orientation to teaching before they begin. Include the following:

- information about the group with which each person will work, including a list of names and addresses with notes about who is currently active and who is inactive;
- information about how to keep attendance records, order supplies, collect offerings, and participate in assemblies and music;

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- information about the setting where each will be teaching—not all will be familiar with the church facility (Where is the room located? Are there rules for using the space, such as no tape on walls? Are there others who use the same space, like a weekday or daycare program? How is the room to be left following each use? What are the policies regarding food in the rooms? What supplies and equipment are already available? Where are these kept?);
- information about how to find substitutes—include a list with phone numbers, plus names of others who may provide back-up for teachers and leaders, such as small-group coordinators, the Sunday school superintendent, church staff, and age-level coordinators;
- information about how to obtain and use curriculum materials and what to do with the material at the end of each quarter after the material has been used;
- information about the availability of audiovisual equipment such as TVs and VCRs, CD players, computers, and cameras—include information on how to request material, how to use the equipment, and where to return the equipment.

### ***Beyond Orientation***

Once teachers begin teaching, they will discover areas where they want to gain more knowledge or to practice skills. Typical questions that may be the focus of training include:

- How should I best use the curriculum? Can I do everything that's listed? What's okay to change?
- I've never taught adults (or children, or youth) before. What skills, knowledge, and practices should I focus on to be the best teacher for this age group?
- I don't think my room is inviting for three-year-olds (or teens, or young adults, or mature adults). What can I do with my space?
- What are the best ways for teaching the Bible to the group I'm teaching?
- How do I involve my class in spiritual practices when we are together for such a short time?
- What do I need to do for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost?
- What are good mission or outreach projects for my group?
- How do I balance study with fellowship and/or activity?
- I've been teaching for twenty years. What are some new ideas that will excite me and my class?
- I have a hard time getting my group to talk. What are some ideas for involving my group in more discussion and participation?

### ***Engaging Teachers and Leaders in Learning***

Even though teachers and leaders have questions and want to improve their leadership with a group, they are not always eager to attend training. Why? It takes time—and for many, time seems to be what they do not have. And yet, many will make use of training times, participate one-on-one in a time of learning, or read on their own or with partners to become better teachers and leaders. Here are hints for involving teachers and leaders in learning.

- Provide all teachers and leaders with a month-by-month calendar of learning and study opportunities. Many people plan ahead, and if they know dates in advance, they will be more likely to add it to their schedule. Your annual conference or district may provide regular training. Call the district or conference office. Make sure you are on their mailing list to receive information about upcoming events.
- Ask teachers what they need. Don't assume that all new teachers need basic information. Some who have no teaching experience may be naturals at working with an age group, but need experiences that deepen their own spiritual life. Others who have taught for years may still feel the need for basic information on lesson planning.
- Schedule training at times your teachers and leaders can attend. Think, too, of online chats or e-mail newsletters with conversation about specific topics.
- Plan your annual budget to include money for training.
- Assign mentors to teachers and leaders. Mentors can be those who have taught in the past but are no longer teaching. They can offer support, listen to what's going on with the teachers, and pray with teachers or leaders.
- Some teachers and leaders may want more opportunities for community and learning with others. Invite them to investigate and join the Christian Educators Fellowship, an organization for professional and volunteer workers in Christian education and formation. ([www.cefumc.org](http://www.cefumc.org))

### **TEACHERS' SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

It is not enough for teachers and leaders to be about the business of teaching and leading others. They, too, are growing disciples. It is important to put into place a plan for teachers and leaders to continue their own faith formation. Think about the following in putting together a support plan for teachers and leaders:

- Encourage teachers and leaders to establish their own disciplined study patterns, including having a dedicated space at home or work. In some curriculum resources there is a

weekly study schedule for teachers. Suggest to others that they read daily the Scripture passages they will be using in their weekly sessions.

- Stress the importance of praying daily for those they teach or lead.

***Some teachers are reluctant to teach for fear they are not "spiritual enough." Encourage teachers to take responsibility for their own spiritual growth and offer opportunities within your faith community as well.***

- Provide each teacher and leader a notebook to use as a journal. Encourage them to record their thoughts and feelings about the Scripture, concerns for their class, and daily events in their journals.
- Plan for teachers and leaders to have prayer partners. Pair teachers who are not teaching together and who do not teach the same age group. Encourage teachers and leaders to check weekly with their prayer partners to talk about concerns and joys.
- Through the church library, or a lending system, provide books, videotapes or DVDs, and articles for leaders and teachers.
- Start teachers' study and support groups. These groups might meet monthly or more frequently as needed for study, sharing, and fellowship.
- Encourage teachers and leaders to participate in long-term study such as *DISCIPLE*, *Christian Believer*, or *Companions in Christ*.

## **DON'T FORGET THE THANKS!**

All of us like to be thanked, including our small-group leaders and teachers. Here are some ideas for thanking them:

- Dedicate teachers and leaders in a worship service each September. Use the *Christian Education Week* resources provided by the General Board of Discipleship each year ([www.gbod.org/education](http://www.gbod.org/education)).
- Hold appreciation meals for teachers and leaders. This celebration can be part of the regularly scheduled church meals with teachers and leaders as special guests or be planned by the education and formation team and set at a special time.
- Remember teachers and leaders during the year with notes of appreciation, candy or fruit, a cup of coffee, or a pat on the back.
- List the names of teachers and leaders in church bulletins and/or newsletters.
- Display pictures of teachers and leaders on bulletin boards.
- Recruit substitute teachers and plan "Sundays Off" to give teachers time to participate in a class themselves.
- Recruit class representatives to coordinate writing thank-you notes to teachers and leaders throughout the year.
- Pray unceasingly for those who teach and lead.
- Ask the pastor to include specific teachers by name during pastoral prayer in worship.



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For more information about the needs and requirements in specific ministry areas, see the leadership series *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation*, which includes

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|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| * Christian Education | * Children's Ministries | * Youth Ministries     |
| * Adult Ministries    | * Family Ministries     | * Small Group Ministry |

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## **SAMPLE LETTER OF INVITATION FOR PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

In our recent committee meeting we were praying and thinking about the needs of \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of class/small group*).

In this group we have \_\_\_\_ (*number of people*) who have been meeting together for \_\_\_\_\_ (*length of time*). This group needs a teacher who can easily talk about faith, will listen to the joys and concerns of the class, understands the age group, and is willing to be a learner together with those in the class.

We ask that you prayerfully consider teaching this group beginning \_\_\_\_\_ and ending \_\_\_\_\_. We see you bringing the class the following gifts:

*(List gifts here)*

Enclosed is a copy of our *Covenant for Teaching* that can help you understand what you can expect as a teacher in our congregation. We feel the class will be enriched and blessed by your presence as a teacher. We also feel the class will bless you through its study and fellowship.

I will be calling you within the week to talk with you personally about this. Thank you for considering this opportunity for ministry.

In Christian service,

*(Your name)*

On behalf of the Education and Nurture Committee

# COVENANT FOR TEACHING

Between \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Congregation)  
and  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Teacher)

***As a teacher or leader in Christian education and formation in our congregation you can expect the congregation to provide:***

1. Support for you in your leadership
2. Curriculum materials for your use
3. Appropriate training experiences for you based on your needs and the needs of the congregation or group with which you work
4. Supplies and audiovisual materials that are helpful for the teaching experience
5. A clean, well-lit, and appropriately furnished room
6. Support and help from pastors, staff, and lay leaders in Christian education
7. Opportunities for you to grow in faith as you serve others.

***As a congregation we expect teachers and leaders to:***

1. Prepare for each session you teach
2. Arrive at least 15 minutes before the beginning of the session you will be teaching
3. Attend congregational worship and participate as you are able in the total program of the church
4. Be willing to show and share your faith through your teaching
5. Be willing to spend time getting to know the members of your group and incorporate that knowledge into your teaching
6. Use curriculum materials approved by the congregation and denomination
7. Participate in training events pertinent to your needs
8. Practice the means of grace
9. Sign and live by the *Covenant for Teaching* statement

