

GUIDELINES AND HELPFUL HINTS
for
STARTING OR RE-VITALIZING
YOUR DISCIPLES MEN (Christian Men's Fellowship) GROUP

GETTING STARTED SUGGESTIONS

1. You will need help

It is very important to have a small CORE GROUP of two to five committed men to make the idea of a Disciples Men's group a reality. There will be too much for one person to handle alone. Titles or positions are NOT as important as responsibilities to be covered. For instance, your group can elect officers such as president, vice-president, etc. or form a steering committee with chairmen for programming, telephone/publicity and food. The most important thing is to get all duties and responsibilities assigned to someone.

2. You will need the support of ministerial staff

It is important to the successful formation and survival of your group that the minister(s) be supportive of your efforts. By developing programs to meet the needs of your congregation's men, you are helping the minister(s). Sometimes, ministers have viewed the formation of a new group as a threat or another responsibility. Meet with the minister and encourage him/her to see your group as one meeting needs of men and ask them plainly for support. Working together, you can establish common expectations. Remember, the Disciples Men/CMF group is led by lay leaders, not by the minister(s). Do not be a drain on your minister's energy by expecting him/her to lead studies, pray every time you meet or especially, to plan your programs. Understandably, this will cause many ministers to lower their support and participation.

3. Program to the needs of men of your congregation

Considering viewpoints from men of differing ages, jobs and church or life stages will provide insights into congregation needs. Also, needs of men in a small rural church could be quite different from a larger city church. Additionally, a survey or a group discussion might be useful in determining the needs of men in your own congregation. Worthy programs should address men's spiritual journey of faith, men's ministry, or issues of male identity, purpose and meaning. Valid programs would include (but not be limited to) the following:

- Fellowship Group (meet, eat and chat)
- Men's Support Groups
- Work Project Groups
- Study Groups (Bible study, *Fellowship of Carpenters*, etc.)

Not surprisingly, you might find the need for several of the above groups. At least until a primary group is firmly established, it is best to form one group and program that group for a variety of needs. For example, form one Disciples Men's group with various

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activities (one month do a study, and next month do a work project, etc.). Also, it will be most important to poll the men to select the best time and day for the meeting to allow for maximum participation by your men. Saturday mornings, Monday or Tuesday evenings have proven to be most popular for other men's groups

4. Setting goals and objectives

Early in your group's life, the following will need to be accomplished:

- (1) Develop objectives and goals you want. (Ask, "What do we want to achieve?")
- (2) Set objectives that will have a measurable outcome
- (3) Develop strategies and tactics to meet your objectives

Consider the following example questions to assist your group in identifying desired outcome for your objectives:

- How can the men of _____ church meet the specific needs of our men?
- How can the men of _____ church serve God by working together?
- How can the men of _____ church further the Kingdom of God?

5. Providing quality programs

Make certain that programs:

- Meet the needs and interests of your men
- Start and end on the publicized time
- Include prayer and worship time
- Will be judged worthwhile

Dull, lengthy, uninteresting programs can kill or really stifle your group. Variety is a key element in reaching men of different ages and interest. Younger men aren't usually very "turned on" by a talk about funeral arrangements and cemetery plots.

6. Personal contact

A telephone or publicity chairman (or officer) is essential to the success of the group. This person needs to have an outgoing personality and enjoy contacting people by phone and in person. It will be best if he knows most of the men in the congregation. This man needs to be committed to the CMF/Disciples Men group. He will recruit others to assist with calling all men of the congregation. It has been shown that no matter how well publicized a meeting is, some people will forget. Therefore, a reminder call will be required.

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7. Link with other men's groups in your area and region

By attending area and regional events, such as retreats and rallies, men in your congregation might receive inspiration and desire to become more active in men's work.

Additionally, you gain access to a network of fellow Christian men who can share what has or has not "worked" in their group. The experience of other groups, though valuable, should not be taken as absolute. Attendance at retreats and rallies tends to energize a person for his activities once he gets back to his home and his congregation.

8. Use of food during meetings

Christians since the first century have used the occasion of eating as a time for sharing and fellowship. Most men's groups find sharing a meal is a good way to build community and enhance "male bonding." The food serving style need not be elaborate but the food should appeal to men AND serving portions should be fulfilling.

9. The second through the fifth years are the hardest

Continuing the momentum and protecting the vitality of the group becomes more important, though more difficult in succeeding years (when the newness and excitement wears off). Strong leadership and quality programming will help sustain the group through this tough period. A continual self-evaluation process will be very important here. Periodically, ask yourselves, "Did we do what we said we would do and were the results what we expected?"

Finally, if the time to start a men's group is not right at one particular point, it may be later. The formation of a men's group is a difficult task. If a survey shows that the time is not right for your congregation (not enough interest, too few willing to help, no identified or expressed need, etc.), then accept that for the present. The "right" time could appear somewhere in the future. Interested men should continue to attend available area, regional and SESSIONS events in preparation for the future group.