

Considerations When Beginning a Women's Led Women's Bible Study

1. *Define the focus of the group and who will be served by this group, i.e. young moms, new Christians, mature Christians, women leaders who will be leading other groups, cross generational, etc.*
2. *Define the **needs** of the women that this Bible class will be meeting.*
3. *Articulate clearly why **a woman led women's** Bible class is necessary to meet the above needs.*
4. *How will the group keep from becoming a social group, therapy session, "gripe group," or breeding ground for gossip?*
5. *How will logistics be decided i.e. meeting place, frequency, time, snacks, with children or without?*
6. *Define WHO will lead the group and how that will be decided? What are the qualifications necessary to be a leader, i.e. "full of wisdom and the spirit" or something else?*
7. *What are the arrangements for pastoral guidance? (See the following section entitled, "Keeping a Women's Bible Study on Track.")*
8. *What materials will be used as the basis for the study and who will decide what is valuable for the particular group wishing to begin a study?*
9. *After all of the above areas have been articulated and put into writing take it to your pastor and/or church council to ask their permission and guidance. If this will involve women from more than one congregation, be sure that all of the congregations involved are aware of the above information and identify which pastor/congregation will be the recognized advisor/responsible body.*
10. *If the initial response from the pastor/responsible congregation is negative, ask for the reasoning and also ask for alternative suggestions to meet the needs of the women which have been identified above.*
11. *If there is support for this class, start with a small group of 4 or 5 as a sort of "pilot" group. This will give you a chance to work out the kinks as well as to deal with unforeseen circumstances, i.e. perhaps the lessons are too long to cover, perhaps there is more discussion than what you thought there would be, perhaps whether or not children are encouraged to come will either prove to be an obstacle to women joining or will be an overwhelming success and you'd have to deal with the "blessings" first on a small scale.*

12. *After the “pilot” decide who the wider group is to include and be sure to make the class focus, study method, material resources, attitude toward children, etc., widely known so those who are interested and fit your above description will know they are welcome. YOU DON’T WANT TO EARN OR INADVERTENTLY DEVELOP A REPUTATION AS AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB. Women seem to be especially sensitive to feeling “left out” or unwelcome. Be careful here.*
13. *Plan a course of study for a year. Know where you’re headed and how you’ll be meeting the needs you identified earlier. After that time get feedback from the group as to whether or not this is meeting their Bible study needs and adjust/expand as necessary.*

Considerations for Keeping a Women’s Bible Study on Track

The history of the Christian church and of the WELS includes too many examples of lay led and/or women’s Bible study groups which have wandered from the focus of Bible study or have come up with inaccurate theology which can be very confusing, especially to those young in the faith. The result then can be that what should be a great blessing rather becomes divisive and damaging within a congregation. This is the very reason some are opposed to special women’s groups. The following are suggestions for safeguards to prevent “a good thing going bad.”

1. *Before beginning a women’s Bible study group, get the approval of the pastor and/or church council under whose authority you’ll be operating. When in a congregation setting, as opposed to a multiple congregation endeavor, it’s important that this be a function of the congregation and under the church council. It’s not helpful for the longevity of the class if it’s entirely tied to a single personality.*
2. *There must be regular leader study sessions with the pastor or someone he designates.*
3. *Discuss the make-up of the group with the pastor, i.e. members only, WELS members only, outreach to outsiders and who will follow-up on potential prospects, etc.*
4. *Any question the leader is unsure of must be referred to the pastor or someone he delegates.*
5. *All study materials need to be reviewed in advance and approved by the pastor.*
6. *All classes must be planned and led. This is no place for “laissaz faire” (lazy free) leadership styles.*

7. *Begin each study session, both leader and class, with prayer for the Spirit's guidance and the LORD's blessing. To study God's Word together with other Christian women is a tremendous blessing and responsibility. The words of Werner Franzmann's hymn, "In Trembling Hands, Lord God, We Hold," CW 199, is a very good prayer, especially for leaders.*