

1-1-1999

The Anchor Class: A Case Study

Eleanor A. Daniel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Daniel, Eleanor A. (1999) "The Anchor Class: A Case Study," *Leaven*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 9.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol7/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu.

The Anchor Class: A Case Study

BY ELEANOR A. DANIEL

What do a doctor, a bank teller, a retired teacher, a retired nurse, an engineer, a seminary student, and a real estate agent have in common? What do they, in turn, have in common with a Christian college chemistry professor, a professional actor, a university admissions director, the co-owners of a small business, and a physical therapist? Add to that many more occupational roles spread over four or five decades of adulthood—and you have to ask, “Who are these people?”

These people are the Anchor class, a collection of men and women who range in age from their thirties to their seventies who meet together every Sunday morning at First Christian Church in Johnson City, Tennessee. The class was begun in September 1996, making it the newest adult class at First Christian. The formation and development of the class will be the source of our case study.

It became evident to the Adult Education Task Force in early 1995

that a new Bible class for adults was needed in order to involve greater numbers of adults in Bible study each Sunday. Existing adult classes, with one exception, had demonstrated an old maxim of adult education: there are almost no prospects from within the congregation for existing classes. It can be difficult for classes that have existed for some time to integrate into membership those who are new to the congregation. It was also clear to the task force that new adult leaders needed to be equipped.

The first step in creating a new class was to form an elective Bible survey class that would meet during the second Sunday school hour from September 1995 through May 1996. (In those days we had back-to-back worship services, with some adult classes meeting during each.) A focused effort was made to identify those who did not attend Sunday school and to invite them to attend, though others who wished to take this elective class were welcomed as

well. Several people chose to leave their regular classes for the year to pursue this Bible survey—something that they had wanted to study. About half of the forty people enrolled fit into this category. But the other half were folk who hadn't been attending Sunday school, at least not regularly. Some were new to the congregation and hadn't yet found a class with which to identify.

In the spring of 1996, a six-week course was presented as an elective on Sunday evenings to those interested in leading adult groups. A dozen people responded. Of the dozen, five are now involved in active leadership in an adult class. Others use their skills occasionally in the adult education program. That same spring, before the survey class was finished, one of the couples came to me (I was teacher of the class) and said, “You have gotten us involved in Sunday school. Now what is next?” That question, and the observation of the Adult Education Task Force, led us to the conclusion

that a new ongoing class needed to be formed. That was how the Anchor class was born.

A couple who had been in the survey and leadership classes covenanted with me to form the leadership team for the new class. I would be the teacher. She would provide organizational support; he, already involved as a teacher in the children's division, would lend relational support.

We chose the name Anchor to designate what we intended to be and do. We aimed to be a class where people would gather for Bible study that would equip them to be effective witnesses in their homes, church, and jobs. We wanted the class to be neither a singles class nor a couples class—it was to be a class that would appeal to those of any marital status. Furthermore, it was to be a class that would welcome adults of any age. In short, we decided to defy some of the sociological designations that usually define groups. Anchor seemed to avoid age and marital designations and implied a place to find a solid foundation for faith and life.

Now to find class members. Eight or ten from the Bible survey class committed themselves to this new venture right away. We used letters sent to a focused list and pointed announcements in church publications to recruit others who might be interested in the class. Announcements and letters were designed to provide a clear picture of the nature of the class, the teacher, the first study material, the name of the class, those who had already committed themselves to the venture, and the starting date. We included a response card in the letters and a

telephone number in the announcements. All of these efforts were, of course, undergirded by prayer.

The three class leaders made careful preparation of the room—seating arrangement (around tables that allowed each person to maintain eye contact with most others in the classroom), pictures and posters to create an inviting environment, and a center where coffee and tea would be available (close to the door and traffic flow to make entry into the room easy). We committed ourselves to be present at least twenty minutes before class time each week to greet each person, to get acquainted with newcomers, and to touch base with each other on anything that needed to be discussed.

At the time the class was being formed, the congregation had just moved into expanded facilities on the same site and returned to a Sunday morning format that included 8:30 A.M. worship followed by 9:45 Sunday school, and worship again at 10:45. It was clear from the beginning that those coming from the 8:30 A.M. service would not be in the classroom before 9:40, but probably closer to 9:45. We decided intentionally, then, to have an extended time of fellowship until 9:50, followed by a brief time of announcements and prayer and then the teaching session. We believe that group life is as important as coverage of Bible content, as critical as Bible study.

Launch Day was exciting. We were expecting twenty-eight; thirty-eight came. As we had anticipated, not all of those thirty-eight stayed beyond the first month, and we quickly settled in with an average attendance of twenty-two, with about

thirty-five people participating fairly regularly.

The lives of the people in this class are very busy. We have chosen, then, to have only a few well-planned, carefully crafted socials. Each fall we have had a family luncheon following the second service—always well attended and a good time of fellowship. Each Christmas we have had an enjoyable Christmas dinner at someone's home. We have had a picnic—and we have other events in mind.

From the beginning, class members have been involved in providing care for those with needs. At times, the support has been through gifts of money. For example, at Christmas in 1997, more than \$500 was given to a woman struggling with cancer and the costly treatments it required. A couple of weeks later, an international student couple at the local seminary was given \$250 and Christmas gifts for their child. At other times, the support has been through appropriate expressions of concern and sympathy.

The class has also been actively involved in financial and personal support of projects beyond the local church. In 1998, for example, the class committed \$2000 for mission support—\$1000 to a mission in Italy, another \$1000 to a mission serving Eastern Europeans and Russians. One time it was an offering for a Romanian brother to have a hip replacement. Another time it was money for a Korean student at the local seminary. One person in the class frequently calls and asks, "Could the international students use some food?" Assured that they can, she appears shortly at my office with

large amounts of food to distribute to them. Class members are involved—as board members for at least four different missions, volunteer coordinator at the medical center, chairperson of the area Girl Scout Council, chairperson for the annual congregational women's retreat, and a variety of other ministries both inside and outside the congregation. In short, Anchor class members are servants!

Study topics have included the book of Colossians; the cardinal doctrines expressed in the Apostles' Creed; prayer; how to study the Bible; the doctrine of grace; suffering in the book of Job; and the person of Jesus, based on Philip Yancey's book *The Jesus I Never Knew*. No topic has been pursued in scholarly depth; rather, each has been considered in light of the needs of adults as they live out their faith in the world.

Two years after Launch Day, the Anchor class roll stands at fifty-four, with an average attendance in the thirties. Fifteen couples are involved in the class, while eleven single women and two single men attend. Two married men attend without their wives; eleven women, without their husbands. Of the present members, twenty-five attended within the first month of our existence. Of that twenty-five, fourteen were not attending Sunday school on a regular basis, most not at all. Another twenty were not yet a part of the congregation in 1996. Only a few have made the move from another class. The class has simply demonstrated the power of new classes to attract newcomers and the fact that new classes do not seriously intrude upon the membership of existing classes. Rather, new classes tend to

appeal to new people, those not already involved in the life of a class.

Where does the Anchor class go now? We trust that we can continue to attract newcomers. We are committed to sound Bible study within the context of relationship. We intend to reach out to those who have needs. We plan to continue our mission emphasis. We will surely change in significant ways; otherwise, we would not be growing in Christ. But we will seek to continue to be an Anchor for active, seeking adults who wish to share life and study with others in an atmosphere of faith.

ELEANOR A. DANIEL is dean at Emmanuel School of Religion in Johnson City, Tennessee, and teacher of the Anchor class at First Christian Church in Johnson City.