

AAA SOLUTIONS TO SHARING CLASSROOM SPACE

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Many administrators are experiencing the challenges of allocating classroom space for growing educational programs. Unfortunately, the joy of expanding ministries can sometimes be dampened by conflicts between those who are asked to share the same classroom space at different times of the week. In such cases administrators have seen otherwise calm, loving saints act more like temperamental toddlers who don't want to share their toys. An unwashed table top or a row of desks and chairs out of place may result in tears, resignations, or running gun battles. However, careful planning and diligence on the part of the administrator may significantly reduce the frequency of these problems and the hard feelings that often accompany them. Let's examine some specific steps and procedures that can be implemented by a wise leader.

Articulate a common vision. An effective administrator will unite and inspire his coworkers to work together for a common cause. Every ministry should have as its primary goals winning the lost to Christ and discipling them as they grow. Each individual and ministry needs to know how others relate to this overarching mission and respect fellow members as collaborators in Christ. Such an understanding is possible if the leader communicates the interrelatedness of the various ministries clearly and concisely.

How can this Herculean task be accomplished by anyone less than Sampson or Solomon? One way to build esprit d' corp is to sponsor celebrations where the various ministries who must

struggle to use the same classrooms come together to cheer for each other as they share what God is doing in the lives of the families to whom they minister. In this festive atmosphere, the leader can review previously arranged procedures, answer general questions, and encourage a spirit of cooperation. This administrator's experiences have led me to the conclusion that people who praise and pray together will stay together.

Allocate resources. Even the most mature and flexible teachers work better when they have materials and space they can call their own. Here are some options for administrators to consider, especially when the classrooms are being used by weekday programs such as a Christian school or preschool, Wednesday night church meetings, and Sunday morning Bible study.

- X Provide a locking closet, cabinet, or high shelf for each group that uses the room.
- X Provide trained staff who convert the furniture when the need arises and take care of any custodial needs.
- X Provide separate storage areas where educational supplies are stocked for each ministry. If separate areas are not available, make sure ample supplies are maintained.
- X Provide a "focal wall" in each classroom for each teacher to be able to post visual aids for units of study.
- X Provide bookshelves or toy bins on wheels that can be easily turned around to face the walls when not in use. If these are not available, cover the shelves with easel paper.

One large church designed its new educational space with its Christian school and Sunday School classes in mind. At the end of each school week, a custodial staff stack all the children's tables and chairs neatly next to the teacher's desk and then pull folding curtain across that end of the room. About 80 percent of the classroom space remains to be used throughout the weekend. From a nearby storage area, stackable tables and chairs are moved into the room on Friday afternoon and returned on Sunday evening.

Accept the realities of joint use. Some teachers might think that an "ideal" situation is one in which each room has only one user and is frozen in time each week when the teacher closes the door until the next class session. Is this really good stewardship of a facility that belongs to the Lord?

Those who are involved in the sharing of classroom space must make necessary adjustments in relationship to the age group(s) that also use the space. For instance, in most cases neither teacher will be able to leave behind large displays or student projects. Students' work will have to be completed during the allotted time or taken home with them for completion, unless suitable storage is available. Leaving them on display is an invitation for disaster.

As previously mentioned, every user of the room must have the option to display announcements, schedules, or class related materials. The primary user such as a school teacher must be courteous and reserve some space.

Finally, all those involved need to have a spirit of love and forgiveness, knowing that there will be times that things will not be perfect or done according to routine. This former administrator recalls the time an enthusiastic Sunday School came in on Saturday morning and wrote an entire outline on the chalk board. That afternoon the Christian School teacher who used

the room during the week came in and erased the layman's work. Needless to say, sparks were flying on Sunday morning!

This article has presented three leadership concepts for church administrators to follow in order that they can effectively inspire those around them to work together in a spirit of appreciation and cooperation. God wants to use us to strengthen harmony and coordination in His body so He will be glorified as His children serve Him.