

“Sunday School” to “Community Groups” – Why the name change?

“Sunday School” was originally developed as an educational opportunity for children who worked in factories. It was quite literally their school. On their day off from factory work, children would attend Sunday School prior to the church’s worship service to learn reading, writing, and mathematics. Our modern notion of Sunday School has evolved since then, but the old name still communicates that the primary goal is education by way of instruction. This begs the question, “What is the primary goal of Sunday School?”

In the book of Acts the church is presented as a community. This community is described as spending time together, supporting each other, worshipping together, and being especially devoted to Scripture, fellowship, and prayer (Acts 2:42-47).

A big difference between the first century church and the church today is proximity. Members of churches today live miles and miles apart, and in neighborhoods that might not have any other church members living in them. We sometimes drive to 20-30 minutes to arrive at the building where we worship together. The first century church wasn’t so spread out. They were already much more of a faith *community* just by virtue of their locale. For example, living close together would’ve meant walking to and from gathered worship together. It also would have meant spending a lot of time together, eating meals together, helping each other, and knowing the successes and struggles of each other’s lives. Their proximity would’ve made “doing life together” as a community of faith much more natural and intuitive.

Why is this observation important? For Woodlawn to have this type of Christian community, we must first recognize the need for an organized structure or framework. In other words, it is less likely today for genuine Christian community to happen organically.

Having recognized this, we believe that Woodlawn’s Sunday School hour and other Sunday School related initiatives are precisely the framework we need to cultivate faithful Christian community. By changing the name from “Sunday School” to “Community Groups,” we will communicate more accurately the expectation and goal of these groups to those currently involved as well as future participants.

However, this emphasis on Christian community is about much more than a name change. It also requires an ongoing devotion to the things described in this passage from Acts 2 – Scripture, fellowship, and prayer. While Bible teaching and discussion will remain an essential part of Woodlawn’s Community Groups, we desire for there to be an equal emphasis on fellowship, support, and prayer. Groups will be encouraged to host regular times of gathered fellowship outside of the Sunday morning hour, to help meet needs that arise from within the group, and to maintain a strong and intentional prayer life.

Our hope is that this name change to “Community Groups” will communicate more clearly the purpose and aim of these Sunday morning groups at Woodlawn.