



9 STEPS TO STARTING A FELLOWSHIP GROUP



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Getting a local OCF fellowship started is not difficult. Here are 9 “P’s” to keep in mind as you prayerfully consider starting an OCF local fellowship group.

1. Perspective

We hope that your desire to get OCF going is motivated by your passion for God and compassion for military people. This is really the essence of the Great Commandment: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” asked the Pharisee. Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:36-40). In starting an OCF group, remember that you are not starting a program as much as you are ministering to people. Programs will likely develop, but only in response to your obedience to God’s leading (loving God), as you reach out to serve people (loving your neighbor).

2. Philosophy of Ministry

We trust that you will find God already at work at your location. He works on several fronts as He finds people committed and available to Him. “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

There are many valid avenues of ministry. OCF has a unique ministry philosophy derived from our Vision (the military community positively impacted through Christlike leaders), Mission (engaging military leaders in biblical fellowship and growth to equip them for Christlike service at the intersection of faith, family, and profession.), and Spiritual Pillars (located on our About page). You should seek to understand and accept these as you take on a leadership role in OCF.

One of our pillars (core values) is that we are lay-led, or to say it another way, we are a “lay-indigenous” ministry. By that we mean that the responsibility for ministry to the military lies with all believers (lay, from laity) in (indigenous to) the military, not just those ordained to positions of leadership within the Church (the chaplains and pastors). Therefore, OCF seeks to share the vision with believers in the military, and then motivate and equip them to carry out the mission. The OCF ministry is not staff dependent, but staff supported. For that reason, our staff is small, and the local fellowship will enjoy a large degree of autonomy.

We realize that there are many more Christians in the military than those affiliated with OCF. But, if your heart responds to this type of ministry and you are willing to assume the responsibility that goes along with it, we invite you to start or help expand the OCF ministry at your location.

3. Probe

It will be important early on for you to assess the spiritual situation at your location. A visit to the chaplain’s office and meetings with appropriate chaplains is the most important part of this process. They will be able to tell you the ministries they are directly involved with and those they are overseeing. The senior chaplain is responsible to the commander for the spiritual and religious well-being of those in the command. The chaplain, therefore, is responsible for the Command Religious Program, under which an organizational ministry like OCF operates. Be genuinely interested in the Command Religious Program. There will likely be areas of overlap and support for both the chapel and OCF.

Before visiting the chaplain’s office, contact the OCF home office so that someone can provide information, from an OCF perspective, on what and who is there in your area.

Your contact with other believers at your installation will also provide input as to what God is doing.

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4. Pray and Obey

Pray often for God's leading and direction, not only as you begin but regularly as you proceed. As mentioned earlier, the local OCF fellowship operates with a large degree of autonomy. While the national OCF can establish principles and guidelines for ministry, we cannot directly answer the question, "What should I be doing here?" in any detail. We expect, therefore, that our leader will conduct a "Pray, Discover, and Obey" (PDO) to get God's perspective on what needs to be done. A PDO is both a principle and a process. The principle is easy to understand—it is the realization that we are unable to do anything meaningful for the Kingdom of God unless we are tuned in to what God wants to accomplish and are willing to obey Him in the things He reveals to us.

Theoretically, a PDO should be conducted before any program is instituted. However, there may be times when you may want to get something going for a short time, perhaps a prayer meeting or Bible study group, in order to first identify others who are interested in participating in a PDO. More information about PDOs can be found on the OCF website by pointing your browser to <http://www.ocfusa.org/2009/11/pray-discover-obey>.

5. Promote

Promoting the local OCF fellowship will be crucial both as you begin and as you continue to grow. Your visit with the chaplains should give you an idea of their intent and offer to promote OCF. However, they are not going to carry the burden for this. They may offer to place your name in the chapel bulletin or allow you to have an OCF literature display at various places on the installation. They may even allow you to place an announcement in whatever "welcome packet" they have for newly assigned personnel or allow you or someone else to mention OCF at a briefing. You can certainly inquire as to some of these possibilities. Be sure to take a look at the Leader Resources for items available to advertise OCF meetings. Use these items appropriately, and consider places such as the chapel, BOQ, housing office, barber shop, or other high-traffic areas.

The most effective way to publicize your OCF function will be personally—by word of mouth or even face to face. Look for opportunities to do this and encourage others to do the same. Use the lunch time, over a meal or a workout, to share your vision with other work associates or perhaps invite others over for dessert to share what you see God doing and invite them to join in. Always be on the lookout for new ways to let people know what is going on.

Be sure to inform the OCF office, too. We have people ask us about specific OCF activities as they go TDY/TAD or PCS. We will be glad to inform people of your activities. Our OCF Directory is designed to give a snapshot of what is happening at your installation, so keep us updated. Call 800-424-1984 and ask for Member Services or email joyce.baerg@ocfusa.org.

6. Proceed

When you have some indication as to the direction God wants you to proceed, do it! Don't expect to always be able to implement a multifaceted plan immediately. Take the first step and then trust God to reveal progressive steps when it is time to do so. Many local fellowships fail to get started because no one steps forward to say something as simple as, "My place, Tuesday evening at 1930." It is almost impossible to interest people in something you haven't yet started!

7. Participation

As you proceed, seek to get participation from many people. While there is a specific philosophy of ministry for OCF, within that sphere, be as inclusive as you can. In particular, realize that OCF cuts across denominational lines to include believers from many denominations. Don't look for uniformity, but rather unity in the Spirit. Be open to diversity, especially in form. By including as many people as you can in the local OCF fellowship you will achieve greater ownership of the ministry. This will be a great boost to you in the areas of delegation and commitment.

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Explain the OCF vision and mission to individuals and the direction you have received to that point, then ask them what they sense God wants them to bring to the fellowship. Be as inclusive here as possible.

Two specific examples:

- Some local fellowships include enlisted members. Our ministry is not a ministry to officers, but rather of (primarily) officers to the entire military community. Whether your fellowship would be effective with enlisted participation is something for you to decide based on your service culture and the local climate. OCF policy does not preclude enlisted members participating in OCF local fellowships.
- Christians from “liturgical” denominations (Lutheran, Episcopal, Roman Catholic) are certainly welcome as part of our fellowship. While all denominations have particular doctrines that some may find disagreeable, the OCF position is to seek unity on the central issues of salvation and freedom to discuss in Christian fellowship the doctrines of the various denominations. Those who are willing to listen and understand (not necessarily accept!) should find a wonderful experience of fellowship and love.

8. Partnership

Consider yourself in partnership with at least two other groups. The first group is the chaplains. We do not have the same role as chaplains, but we should complement each other when things are working correctly and produce a “win-win” situation. OCF does not exist to be at the beck and call of the chaplains, but there will be areas of mutual interest. Work together on these as closely as possible. Even when differences of theology exist, let it be said that OCF was willing to work under the Command Religious Program.

Experience has shown that there is little to fear by way of compromise when the proper attitude is displayed. The second group with which to partner are the various other ministries to the military. This does not mean that you should do everything together. The different ministries perform the same function as do different denominations—they offer legitimate choices to people which are often neither right nor wrong, but simply represent different styles. You may find it useful to come together at special times during the year.

It is appropriate to “fly the flag” for OCF. However, it is important to know when to do so and how. The appropriateness arises because people look for OCF as part of the continuity of fellowship and feeding they desire while they are in the military. But, the OCF label does not need to be on everything OCF people do. There will be an appropriate balance between OCF visibility and invisibility that will be different for each installation at any point in time. Seek to find this and ask God for wisdom.

Remember, the OCF flag flies third on the flagpole, under the flag of Jesus Christ and under the flag of the body of Jesus Christ. Sometimes all the flags should fly; at other times, just the top two.

9. Perseverance

Some ministries will start with a bang! For whatever reason, the groundwork had been laid. At other times you will be laying the groundwork as you go and it might appear to be slow going. Be open to consider if there are things that are hindering God’s powerful movement in your midst. There might be sin in the camp. But in God’s infinite wisdom, there may be timing issues that are too heavy for you to bear by having them revealed to you. In those instances, continue to press on and simply be faithful. Be assured that God will be faithful on His end.

Please feel free to call the OCF office (800-424-1984) to discuss issues or situations where you would like some additional input. We will be happy to assist and support you as you step out and launch this ministry. Finally, we trust that you will find joy in serving Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.