

Cantonese Bible School

A Policy Framework for Unconventional Classes

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1 Preamble

This document outlines a policy framework for hosting unconventional classes within the Cantonese Bible School. These classes are deemed unconventional because they may deviate from the usual duration (3 months) of a Bible School class or occur outside of the usual Bible School time slots (after Saturday/Sunday worship). The reason for allowing such irregularities is to support the experimentation of novel teaching ministries. Nevertheless, novelty must be balanced by prudence, as real students are involved. This policy framework is an attempt to balance in a responsible way the simultaneous need for innovation and prudence.

The following are two use cases that illustrate how unconventional classes can be used for novel teaching ministries.

Use Cases 1: *Reading Class.* A group of brothers and sisters want to get together to read a book on the theology of incarnation. They desire to have one or more Bible School teachers to be their guides, helping to answer questions when they arise or lead discussions on a regular basis. Because of the nature of the book, it would be more appropriate to meet once a month, so that brothers and sisters can have more time to do the reading. Also, the length of the book is such that we expect the reading to carry on for 5 months. Note that this reading class cannot be fitted into a 3-month term, nor can the meetings be scheduled weekly in the usual Bible School time slots.

Use Case 2: *Spiritual Formation Class.* Suppose there is a plan to offer a spiritual formation class that coaches brothers and sisters in cultivating a regular practice of Bible meditation, and to do so in an intimate setting (e.g., involving only 8-12 students). Because habit formation requires an extended period (e.g., half a year), the duration of such a class will go beyond a 3-month term. In addition, the intimate nature of the class calls for setting up a meeting schedule that is more individualized (i.e., not occurring on Saturday and Sunday after worship).

These innovative teaching ministries call for deviation from our usual class offering practices. We do, however, want such deviations to be regulated by a policy framework. To that end, we articulate the conceptual model base on which we come up with our policy framework.

1.1 Conceptual Model

How shall experimental teaching ministries, such as those mentioned in the use cases above, be understood within the Cantonese Bible School? They are **classes**, though they may be executed differently than regular classes. More specifically, unconventional classes are not small groups

(though a small class size could cultivate intimate and supportive fellowship among its participants); they are not new ministries (though the class may be a testbed for a new ministry idea); they are not gatherings of a social clique (though the class may target a specific demographic group). Unconventional as they are, they are still classes administered by the Cantonese Bible School.

1.2 Design Principles

Based on the above understanding of unconventional classes as classes, the design of the policy framework is guided by the following four principles:

1. **Flexibility:** The chief purpose for having unconventional classes is that they offer a platform for testing novel pedagogical approaches. Policies governing the creation and administration of such courses must offer the needed flexibility for the success of these courses.
2. **Impermanence:** No Bible School class shall run indefinitely, not even unconventional classes. There is always a definite time horizon for its conclusion. If the proponent of an unconventional class wants to grow it into a permanent ministry, he or she shall find it a home in other ministry departments (e.g., Discipleship, Fellowship, Local Evangelism, etc).
3. **Supervision:** The teaching of an unconventional class is supervised. While all Bible School teachers are supervised in some sense, the unconventional nature of these novel classes warrants particular emphasis of this supervisory structure. At stake are the spiritual health of the participants of these unconventional classes. Supervision involves transparency of how the class is run and a willingness of the teachers to follow the pedagogical directives from their supervisors.
4. **Supplementarity:** Unconventional classes are not a replacement for regular Bible School classes.

Based on these principles, the following presents the policy framework governing the administration of unconventional classes. It is considered a framework because for different types of unconventional classes, the framework may need to be further refined to a form fitting for that type.

2 Policy Framework

- 2.1 A Bible School class is considered “unconventional” if it has one or more of the following characteristics:
 - It is offered outside of the usual Cantonese Bible School time slots.
 - Its duration is longer than one term (3 months).
 - Its audience is restricted to a demographic group rather than open to the entire congregation.

Even if a course is taught by an outside speaker, so long as it has one of the three characteristics above, it is considered “unconventional.”

- 2.2 An unconventional class shall not last longer than 6 months.
 - The beginning and end date of the class must be fixed prior to its offering.
 - Repeated offering of the same class in a back-to-back manner is strongly discouraged.

- 2.3 The teachers of an unconventional course are under the supervision of the Congregational Pastor, Congregational Elder, the Cantonese Bible School deacon, or their delegates (hereafter they are called the supervisors). Under this supervisory relationship, the following are the expected duties of the teachers (among other things):
 - reporting attendance to the deacon,
 - submission of verbal or written reports upon request of the supervisors,
 - implementing the directives of the supervisors in matters of course contents and pedagogy, and
 - facilitating class visits by the supervisors.

- 2.4 Teachers of unconventional classes must have an established track record of participating in regular Bible School classes.