



Fresh Ideas for Women's Ministry

Tools for evangelism, discipleship, and mentoring.

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Women's Ministry Gets a Facelift

Why women need a new approach.

by *Bonnie McMaken*

Women's ministry is clearly a hot topic on the **Gifted for Leadership blog**. Each time there is a post relating to this issue, it sparks a provocative conversation. The opinions span a wide spectrum: Some of us love it just the way it is, some of us avoid it at any cost, but most of us simply think it needs a facelift. We're tired of ministry that seems irrelevant and outdated.

Why is women's ministry a touchy issue for so many of us? If you're like me, you have stereotypes about traditional women's ministry. Sometimes these perceptions are founded in true experiences, but they can hinder us from pursuing community in these contexts. Instead of ministering to other women and allowing ourselves to grow, we isolate ourselves and our gifts.

Introduction





Fresh Ideas for Women's Ministry

Women's Ministry Gets a Facelift

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We have designed this resource to help you understand the spiritual needs of women and what churches are doing well. Unlike our other GFL packets that feature in-depth articles, the handouts in this resource give you short and succinct snapshots of the issues surrounding women's ministry. You may use these handouts at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, hand them out as brief primers for someone new to this particular ministry, or give individually to key leaders who work on outreach and events for women.

If you chose this resource, you are interested in reaching women and helping them discover their identity and gifts in Christ. We hope this tool will be useful and practical as you minister God's grace to others.

Peace of Christ,

Bonnie McMaken

*Contributing Editor, Gifted For Leadership
Christianity Today International*

Introduction





REACHING WOMEN

Welcoming Women to Church

Cultivate a church culture that is welcoming and loving—others will sense its presence.

by Linda Riley

Churches that plan to attract and keep visitors must consider how women's perceptions and priorities differ from men's. A couple's decision to join a church is often based on the wife's impressions, instincts, and intuitions. Here are some key areas that you may not be monitoring—but should.

Do They Care for Each Other?

While men may focus on the relevance of the message and the quality of programming, women often assess the emotional climate of a congregation. They notice body language:

- Are people greeting one another with hugs, handshakes, or barely a nod?
- Is there interaction during the service, or is everyone staring straight ahead?
- Are arms crossed across the chest or stretched across the back of the pew?
- What are people's facial expressions like? Bodies say what lips won't.





- Is the pastor making eye contact, smiling occasionally, referring to members in a positive way?
- Is the congregation responsive?
- Do people look engaged and ready to learn?
- Do congregants chat before the service? Do they linger after the service?

Do They Care About Us?

Mothers consciously evaluate the children's facilities, programming, staff, and level of care. For those with teenagers, youth ministry is often the determining factor in whether or not to join a church. These are tough times to be a teen. Parents are looking for support from youth leaders and for the potential of positive peer relationships for their teens.

While a visiting man may barely notice the pastor's wife, a woman often searches her out, taking keen interest in her personality and style. She looks for clues to the ways women interact in the church. She assesses "friendship potential" among women.

Many women are dissatisfied in their relationships with parents or siblings. They're looking for a church family that offers more than surface friendships, but that can provide a mentor in the faith.

Thought Provokers

- *Think about the women you know and list their highest values. Are they similar or different to those mentioned in this article? Where do you see these values represented in your church or ministry?*
- *Where does your church fall short in relating to women? How can you, as a leader, make your church or ministry a warm place for women?*





REACHING WOMEN

Different Women, Different Groups

Reaching diverse women may require you to bypass a one-size-fits-all ministry.

by Denise Farrar and Judie Amen

When we saw our women's ministry stagnating, we rethought it from the ground up. Here are the steps we took:

Step 1: Tapping the Resources

As in any ministry, the key to success is prayer. A handful of women prayed faithfully for eight years before this new women's ministry was born. God removed obstacles and changed hearts to pave the way.

Step 2: Getting the Picture

We began by surveying the congregation. We discovered that of those who attended our church, 58 percent were women, 56 percent of whom worked outside the home, and many of these were divorced, widowed, or single parents. Young mothers, we learned, felt isolated, and singles felt ignored.

Based on our research, we no longer viewed women a solid block whose lifestyle and interests can be assumed. Women have changed; therefore our ministry to women needed to change as well.





An Unbelieving Spouse

Stand By Your Man

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Step 3: Targeting Your Group

Initially we targeted the easiest group: women at home. Our survey revealed that the young mom at home felt alone. She wanted to become involved in something meaningful; she was eager to learn. She also wanted her children to grow spiritually. We started out by offering two different daytime Bible studies.

Step 4: Caring for Children

We learned that when women attend Bible study, they want to be confident their children are cared for and learning something valuable. We even chose not to use volunteers, but to hire staff in order to build quality and consistency.

Step 5: Expanding to the Working Woman

As our morning women's group grew, we saw a tremendous opportunity to begin an evening study for working women and single parents. This group has very different needs from our daytime group. They are not looking for fellowship so much as close friends and solid content. So with them we focus on instruction, not fellowship.

Step 6: Expanding to the Workplace

Because of their busy schedules, not all working women are interested in an evening activity. For such women, a study integrated into their workday schedule is a much better fit. So we designed Bible study lessons that fit into a tight lunch-hour schedule. We meet at noon once a week in conference rooms located within ten minutes of most downtown locations. Discussion time is brief, but relationships are built and outreach takes place.

Thought Provokers

- *What is the composition of the women in your church? What group(s) may feel neglected?*
- *What creative strategies can you implement to provide community and discipleship for the groups of women in your church that may be under-represented?*





REACHING WOMEN

Why Women Resist Community

Overcoming comparison, competition, and mistrust to create good feelings.

by Nancy Barton

While women may be more sensitive and verbal than men, they still struggle to develop relationships that foster true community. Why do women, who seem so good at relationships, not feel at home in community? How can we overcome those feelings in the church?

“She’s better than I ...” A group of moms from our church were meeting for tea and conversation. As the afternoon waned, Cass began feeling more and more angry about her place in life. Raising two toddlers left her little free time. As she listened to Wendy talk about her newfound freedom now that her children were all in school, Cass grew frustrated. She couldn’t remember the last time she had time away from her children. Cass confessed to me later that she had little desire to meet with the women again.





Fresh Ideas for Women's Ministry

Why Women Resist Community

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Women are tempted to compare season of life, children, husbands, hairstyles, work, education, homes—you name it—and when we fall into this trap, we always come up short. We then tend to distance ourselves from those with whom we're comparing.

“I don't fit in because ...” As a single woman, I often walk into a group where I am the only one without a mate or children. Whether I enjoy community depends in part on whether I give in to the thought I am different; therefore I have nothing in common with these people, or whether I allow the Holy Spirit to fill me with his love so I can focus on others.

If we let discontentment rule, we will find something that sets us apart from any group.

“I don't know if I can trust you ...” Sue entered our small group with her guard high. Sue's painful relationship with her mother and with several female friends in the past had convinced her she could not trust other women. Her distant responses stifled the entire group. No one felt free to share beyond surface talk.

Most of us can recall a time our trust was broken. When we hold on to these hurts, we try to protect ourselves, and this fear creates distance.

“I can't help competing ...” Linda and Jan participated in the same small group for several years. The group prayed weekly for the Lord to give them children. Linda was 32, and Jan was 40. Recently Linda found out she was pregnant and couldn't wait to tell the group. But wanting to be sensitive, she told Jan first. Jan was genuinely happy for Linda, but over time she withdrew from the group. The group felt the tension immediately.

When we compete this way, we allow God's blessings of others to devastate us.

“I can't share who I really am ...” Julie works hard in numerous areas of women's ministries. She appears to be in charge, a committed Christian. In her small group, however, Julie is more reserved. She requests prayer for others but never for herself. Many know what Julie does, but few know her heart.

Features





Many like Julie have never dealt with soul issues. Many women wonder, *If I shared my real struggles, would others still accept me?*

Meeting These Challenges

Whether speaking in front of a group of peers, doing a new ministry, or giving a personal prayer request, women can cling to their need to remain comfortable. My natural response as a leader is to make them feel “okay and comfortable.” But that may only fuel their insecurities and shield them from true community.

Overcoming fears: I asked Karen to speak at a Bible study group about her infertility and how she saw God working in her life. Karen questioned my judgment: “How can I share something so personal with so many women? How will I be received? What if I start crying?”

I asked Karen to pray about it and reminded her of all the women facing similar struggles who needed her encouraging words. I also reminded her that the Holy Spirit would give her the words to say. Karen pushed through her fears, and today, a year later, many women still comment about how her testimony affected them.

Finding identity in Christ: In addition to challenging women, I try to assist them in finding their true identity in Jesus Christ. Women often feel as if they need to have it all together.

Sandy, a success in the business world, told me she wanted to grow in Christ. “I’m a pretty good person,” she said in our first time together for discipleship. Hidden behind her words was a belief system that equated her identity with achievement. As we met regularly, I began to probe Sandy’s self-identity: What would you do if you lost your job tomorrow? How would you feel about yourself? Would Jesus be enough?

Sandy slowly began to let go of her false security. Today she is moving toward loving Jesus more out of devotion than duty. She is still outwardly successful, but that doesn’t hold the same power over her as before. She is recognizing how special she is to God. No longer needing to mask her weaknesses, she has truly found her identity in Christ. Women establish community as we set aside our pretenses, identities, and prestige, and extend God’s “needless” love to each other.





Thought Provokers

- *What particular fears drive you from true community into isolation? Where do you think these fears are founded?*
- *Most of these issues stem from a false perception of ourselves and others. How does finding our identity in Christ allow us to change that unhealthy thinking?*





REACHING WOMEN

Drawing Younger Women

Ways to build a ministry that will be attractive to all generations.

by Karen Mains

“How can we attract younger women to our women's ministry?” Getting answers to this question can be vital to the health of your church. Here are some factors to consider.

1. Feminism. The feminist movement has profoundly influenced the younger woman even when she does not agree with it. The working woman is developing an executive capacity. She brings home a paycheck, makes decisions as to how to budget family funds, and is learning to prioritize her time and involvements. She is often developing self-esteem on the job, and she is beginning to give input to significant areas within the church. A woman who stays at home has proudly discovered that she is a systems manager, an operations coordinator, and developing an executive mentality.





2. Drop intergenerational stereotypes. Before any fruitful discussion can happen, a basic attitudinal law must be passed: no generational finger pointing. The older women are not dull and behind the times. The younger women are not self-serving and uninterested in the church.

3. Face change head on. If the question of involving younger women is a serious question, then the first issue to be faced is the shift in the mental outlook of today's younger women. If I were attempting to attract these younger women, I would try to develop a ministry that really educated me on the issues of today. I also want some type of firsthand involvement that I am convinced is a significant use of my time.

4. Additional suggestions: Here are three suggestions I've found helpful in addressing the question of attracting younger women to a particular organization.

- Make an honest and careful diagnosis of your women's group. Is it vibrantly alive, or does it barely exist?
- Then see if you can, in a sentence or two, state the purpose for your existence. Is that purpose valid, and does it fit with the needs of the women within your church and the area in which you live? Does it offer women a significant place of growth and outreach both to their community and their world?
- Do the programs being offered fulfill that purpose? Are they quality programs that challenge and stretch the mind, emotions, and will—programs that aim at spiritual growth and maturity?

When you answer these questions, you will be on your way to attracting not only the younger women but all the women of your church to an exciting venture of faith.





Thought Provokers

- *What valuable lessons can younger women and older women learn from each other when they rid themselves of intergenerational stereotypes?*
- *What unique challenges do the women in your congregation face? How are those challenges being addressed?*





LEADING WOMEN

Lessons for Women's Ministry Leaders

When she took over women's Bible study, this leader learned some important lessons.

by Virginia Vagt

Leading Bible studies and church committees can bring strange pressures. I felt many of them when I first began leading a women's Bible study. I picked up the responsibility after the woman who founded our group moved out of state. As I took over her leadership post, I learned some important lessons about being a new leader.

Lesson 1: Sincerity can rival charisma—but it takes time

At first I was surprised how well things were going. Attendance didn't fluctuate much, discussions were lively, and it seemed to me that with every passing week I welcomed the group with more humor and less starch. When I was told I was too businesslike, I was unsure how to change. I learned from that lesson that, even in ministry, style matters.

Features





Lesson 2: Leading alone isn't for everyone

Our former leader had been more of a one-person show with helpers. I couldn't pull that off, so two friends and I began to meet regularly to discuss how to increase the friendship factor and how to handle compulsive talkers. We also prayed for the group.

As a new Bible study leader, I was afraid to hurt anyone's feelings and confront people who were monopolizing conversation. As a team, we took on controlling group dynamics and encouraging conversation.

Lesson 3: Criticism can be constructive

Our leadership team decided that instead of overhearing negative comments, we wanted to bring them into the open. If people felt irritated, disappointed, or bored, we wanted to know so we could respond. Every few weeks we asked, "How do you think the study is going?" Although some people didn't feel comfortable voicing their complaints to the group, our openness encouraged the kind of feedback we wanted, and it allowed me to stop worrying what people were thinking of my leadership.

Lesson 4: Other leaders are great resources

It helped me to learn that I could go to my leaders for counsel. After two members of the group bitterly argued about the doctrine of election versus free will, I wondered if I should have cut off the discussion. Later I talked to one of our pastors about how to address conflict. His advice on diffusing tension was a great help.

Lesson 5: Members matter as much as friends

When group attendance began to change and my friends in the group attended less frequently, my fears of rejection were stirred. But in this difficult situation my ego seemed to toughen up. Leadership has rewards; I saw this begin when a newly widowed woman, who yearned to join our group, slowly became a part of it. Seeing her and other new people coming bolstered my leadership self-image. After a while it no longer seemed so crucial that my friends always be there.





Thought Provokers

- *How do you respond to criticism about your leadership? Why might it be helpful to invite feedback from those you lead?*
- *Do you actively seek out the wisdom of other leaders? If so, what leadership lessons have you gleaned from those relationships? If not, what is holding you back?*





LEADING WOMEN

What's Working in Women's Ministries

These ideas and strategies are finding success in all kinds of churches.

by Naomi Gaede-Penner

What can church leaders do with the challenges and changes in women's ministry? Some churches continue with traditional sewing circles and bake sales, while others experiment, offering ministries such as video-style Bible studies in the marketplace. Some churches try a general-interest approach, inviting all women to quarterly Saturday brunches. Others attempt to promote programs and activities for specific women in a variety of situations.

A number of strategies transcending differences in church size, available resources, or types of women are working.

Ministry for Mothers

Women's ministry leaders are nearly unanimous: mothers' groups work. Some ministries target mothers of teens, employing a variety of formats in doing so. "Ours is mostly a support group," says one leader. "We don't have speakers, since our purpose is primarily relational. So far, we find it to be effective."





- Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) intends “to provide a Christ-centered, caring ministry for mothers of preschoolers that develops friendships, creativity, and personal relationships with Jesus Christ.” In a typical bimonthly morning meeting, women socialize over coffee, complete a craft, hear a speaker, and meet in discussion groups. In addition, MOPS ministers to the children, not merely babysitting the preschoolers, but offering a Bible lesson as well.
- Moms in Touch, a nationwide organization connected with Campus Crusade for Christ, offers another model of ministry to mothers. Their emphasis is spiritual: the weekly format includes 10 minutes of prayer requests for children, followed by 45 minutes of prayer.

Offer Meat-and-Potatoes Spirituality

Bible studies build relationships and provide opportunity for caring. But women also want content and application.

- Multitrack approach: One church offers concurrently a Bible lesson for moms and their preschool children. The women can do something for themselves without feeling guilty about leaving their children. Another church gathers women together Thursday mornings for worship and devotion, and then offers a choice of four elective Bible studies.
- Topical studies can also be effective. One church tried to reach working women by offering, during a weeknight, a four-week seminar on “The Christian Woman and Her Finances.” Since more than half the women attending worked outside the home, they considered the program a success.

Integrate

An integrated group is one that expands its membership and participation beyond the definition of women only.

- Koinonia groups are groups of 12 to 17 people who mix Bible study and fellowship. They include men, women, singles,





retired persons, homemakers, and women working outside the home.

- Age- and life-stage groups are where adult Sunday school classes are organized according to stages of marriage or family. An additional class can be formed for people who do not obviously fall into an age or life stage, such as women whose husbands don't attend church.

Help Women Evangelize Women

Whether church women are at home or in the marketplace, many are extending their hands to unchurched women. It is not uncommon to find that in ministries to mothers of preschoolers, one-third of the women who attend are unchurched.

- Women's sports can be evangelistic. "It's not threatening to invite my non-Christian friend to join our women's softball team," says one woman. "Besides, softball is fun, although it's not the usual way I think about evangelism."
- Annual Christmas dinners help women reach other women. The dinner is held off the church site. A beautifully decorated room creates a festive spirit for a carefully planned program that includes music, an evangelistic speaker, and a presentation on local missions.
- Ministry in the Marketplace. Every week, in four downtown offices, women gather with brown-bag lunches to view a 30-minute video that addresses, from a biblical perspective, such needs as self-esteem, friendship, and stress. Leaders conduct a discussion following the viewing.

Thought Provokers

- *How are the women in your church challenged to reach women outside the church? How can you, as a leader, incorporate evangelism as a value in your women's ministry?*
- *Why is it important that you offer fresh programs for women?*





LEADING WOMEN

Out of the Box Events

Fresh ways women's ministry leaders are reaching out to women today.

by Amy Nappa

Many women enjoy traditional gatherings, but many others seek events that are more challenging or relevant to the life they lead. Here are some fresh and fun ideas:

1. Outdoor Adventures

Imagine fresh, icy air blowing around your face as you race faster and faster along the ground. Now imagine you hear your girlfriends laughing, even shrieking with delight. And on top of it all, you realize you're doing something totally amazing: dogsledding! That's what a church in Minnesota planned for one of their events this year. They took women out of their comfort zone and challenged them into risk taking. Mixed into their adventure were periods of Bible study, worship, and devotional activities.





Fresh Ideas for Women's Ministry

Out of the Box Events

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2. Chocolate Retreat

A retreat kit called “Chocolate Boutique: Where Women Taste and See That the Lord Is Good” (Group Publishing) illustrates Bible lessons with something most women can't get enough of: chocolate. Guidebooks come with the kit, so that some churches actually save money using this retreat plan.

3. Mom's Night Out

Single mothers have a hard time finding moments for themselves. This truth, and a desire to bless and encourage moms, prompted one church to hold a monthly Mom's Night Out. During this event, childcare is provided while women are treated to a gourmet dinner, attend classes or private prayer time, and stock up on donated household goods. The result: the church gets to combat the loneliness and disrespect that single mothers feel, and the congregation gets to pour out its love for these women.

4. Movie Night

Whether you watch the film at church, crowd into a nearby cinema, or rent a DVD and gather in a home, movies are a great event. Choose one that allows for great chats afterward.

5. Paintball or Laser Tag

For the wilder at heart, try this active outing. Many locations give discounts for groups—and you might get some teenagers to join you.

6. Game Night

Twister anyone? Dust off the board games, ask everyone to bring snacks, and have an evening of laughter, challenges, and more laughter.

7. Volunteerism

Let ladies bond as they walk, run, or bike in fundraisers. Give blood as a group. Garden together, then donate your produce to a shelter. Friendships grow when you serve together.

Features





Thought Provokers

- *What are some events that would challenge the women in your church in unexpected ways?*
- *What does a church's willingness to host unconventional events say about its philosophy of ministry?*





LEADING WOMEN

Living Life as a Mentor

Add this significant one-to-one dimension to your ministry.

by JoHannah Reardon

As a young mother, I joined a neighborhood Bible study where I met Gloria, who was from an abusive background. Her father had regularly beaten her, which left her with a terrible sense of worthlessness and lack of confidence about raising her own children.

Gloria began to call me every day to ask all sorts of parenting advice. Because of her past, she second guessed everything and wanted affirmation that what she was doing was right. Because I'd had a fairly healthy upbringing, I felt confident about those daily decisions and was able to offer her reassurance.

In spite of me being the one who was offering advice, I still gained a great deal from the relationship. Gloria had developed a remarkable sense of humor to combat the horror in her life,





and she kept me giggling all the time. Often when I was uptight or frustrated with my child, she said something silly about the situation that completely restored my perspective.

This relationship happened naturally. I didn't befriend her in order to become a mentor to her. I simply felt drawn to her. Through this experience, I've learned a few things about mentoring:

Look for Someone You Like

Don't look for someone to mentor that you feel needs to change. There are no guarantees, and I didn't change Gloria, I simply gave her some direction. Our relationship would never have worked if we hadn't liked each other. The enormous amount of time we spent together would have been impossible if we hadn't liked each other enough to hang in there. Gloria had never had anyone stick with her over the long haul, and my sheer tenacity won her over.

Look for Someone You Are One Step Ahead Of

The terrifying thought of mentoring someone is the feeling that you must have everything together or have all the answers. But if you do feel you have everything together and have all the answers, you will probably be a terrible mentor. Every woman wants someone to take her by the hand and lead her one step at a time. This may mean that you know the Scriptures better, come from a healthier background, or are simply older and have already walked through the doors the woman you are mentoring is now facing. You should have the feeling that you have something to offer but can learn from her as well.

Look for Someone Who Wants to Grow in Christ

When looking for someone to mentor, look for someone who sincerely wants to change. I mentioned earlier that you shouldn't mentor someone in order to change her, and that is true. But you should want to see God change her as much as you want to see God change your own life. The premise of Henry Blackaby and Claude King in their book *Experiencing God* (LifeWay Press, 1998) is to look for what God is doing and join him. That is especially true in mentoring. After all, it is God who transforms lives. And we are transformed just as much when he uses us in the life of another.





Thought Provokers

- *Think about a woman you've mentored. In what ways did she grow during your time together? How did that relationship minister to you?*
- *How can churches benefit from connecting women in different life stages for the purpose of mentoring?*





Additional Resources

More places for more information.



LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Today's Christian Woman.com. This website offers uplifting articles and practical advice for Christian women.

ChristianBibleStudies.com. This site offers Bible study curriculum. Including these studies specifically designed for women:

- “Where Do I Get Self Worth”
- “Longing to Hear God's Voice”
- “Harnessing Stress”
- “Finding Confidence”
- “The Joy of Being Content”
- “Healthy Body, Healthy Spirit”

Designing Effective Women's Ministries, by Jill Briscoe, et al. Based on the model of Elmbrook Church in Waukesha, Wisconsin, this book contains practical ideas for planning and leading women's ministries. (Zondervan, 1995; ISBN 031043191)





Fresh Ideas for Women's Ministry

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Finding a Mentor, Being a Mentor: Sharing Our Lives as Women of God, by Donna Otto. A guide to developing and nurturing spiritual relationships. (Harvest House Publishers, 2001; ISBN 0736906428).

Leading Women to the Heart of God, by Lysa TerKeurst, ed. A guide to building, leading, growing, and maintaining a women's ministry. (Moody Publishers, 2002; ISBN 0802449204)

Shepherding a Woman's Heart, by Beverly Hislop. States that women need leaders who are shepherds of their souls, and describes what forms it should take. (Moody Publishers 2003; ISBN 0802433545)

Woman-to-Woman: Preparing Yourself to Mentor, by Edna Ellison, Tricia Scribner. A practical and Bible-based guide to mentoring relationships. (New Hope Publishers, 2005; ISBN 1563099497)

Women's Ministry in the 21st Century, by Group Publishing. A collection of ideas and insights for use in women's ministry settings. (Group, 2004; ISBN 0764427008)

RESOURCES





Do You Feel **Alone** as a Woman Leader?

IF you're a capable, called, and gifted Christian woman in leadership, join the conversation at **GiftedForLeadership.com**. This blog, along with downloadable resources, will help you safely converse with other women about the issues you face. You'll walk away feeling encouraged, supported, challenged, and definitely not alone!



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Conversation
Today!**

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