

A Women's Ministry of Purpose **Quality Over Quantity**

A problem that might come up as you are trying to write your mission statement is that you don't actually know what the women of your church need. Perhaps you have been doing the old women's ministry model for so long, your team is out of touch with what the women need or even want. This can be resolved by asking the women directly. You can do this with a formal survey where they women can check off a list of wants/needs/desires for a women's ministry program, providing space at the end where they can write in suggestions that were not included. Or, talk to women directly. Bring it up during the conversation time of your women's small group or bible study. If you are going out to lunch with a few ladies from the church, this makes great table talk while you wait for your food to arrive, or purposefully seek out influential women in your church and ask their opinion.

When you have the results of these surveys, you can then categorize their responses by theme, noting which had the greatest response and thus seem to be the most important to the women as a whole. This feed back will not only be helpful in writing your mission statement, but planning your future events.

Be aware though, you can't please all of the people, all of the time. You might be tempted to utilize as many of their ideas as possible. However, that may not be practical or efficient. When we seek people's opinions and ideas, we can actually feel guilty if we don't use them. Especially if in the weeks after women start asking you if the ministry is going to implement their suggestion. A great response, should that happen, is: *"We were amazed at the variety and number of responses we got for the women in the church. We are going through all of that information now, and trying to determine the priority of the suggestions. Please, pray for us while we are processing all of these great responses. We want to make sure first and foremost that we are doing God's will with this ministry."*

If we attempt to employ every idea that the women suggest, you are in danger of too many activities. When this happens you risk a lack of commitment, because they can always go to the next event. It can be too confusing to a new church member or visitor, too many choices can be overwhelming. Some women will feel compelled to attend every women's event because they are part of the church body and want to support the ministry (this includes your team members). This will take time away from their family and their spouse. Too many activities may use up the resources that other ministries might need. Additionally, quality can be compromised if we are jumping from event to event too quickly. It is our job to keep the activities balanced, that quality is always more important than quantity of events. This isn't just important for the women we are serving, but the team as well. Too much, too fast, can result in ministry burn out. Those who serve do need time to replenish themselves.

Once you know the needs of the church and have developed the ministry Mission Statement, it's time to start planning your actions steps to support that mission statement. You do not want to get into detailed event planning yet, but instead basic action steps. Generally speaking, every event you are going to plan is going to fall into one of two categories.

1. Seeker Friendly, Fellowship Events
2. Discipleship Events and Programs

Seeker friendly events will be heavier on fellowship, like a women's brunch or ladies kayak trip. These events are designed to be welcoming to guests from outside the church, or to help women who are new to the church start building relationships. The goal of seeker friendly events should always be:

- pointing women toward Christ
- inviting women to come back for church services or bible studies

- connecting the women in the church to women in the community
- connecting women in the church to others who share the same interest.

Fellowship events build bridges, but should never be void of opportunities to share God with the women in attendance; however it is done in gentler way. A guest may have limited or no biblical experience at all, so deep theological conversation or addressing heavier controversial topics may be inappropriate. If we are pointing them to the gospel, we are planting seeds. We want them to eventually move from seeker friendly events, to Sunday services, and ultimately into the discipleship events and programs. We are planting seeds, moving them toward the places where they are going to get nurtured with the Word, and will grow.

Discipleship events or programs are the ones where we are funneling the women to deeper spiritual growth. They come in the form of regularly occurring bible studies, workshops, mentorship/discipleship programs, and some churches even promote classes that are similar to seminary classes.

Discipleship events will take into consideration that there will be women in various stages of their walk with Christ, different levels of scriptural knowledge. However, these events and programs are purposefully going to challenge the women to dig deeper into the scriptures & build stronger relationships with Christ. It will also deepen the bond between the women, allowing iron to sharpen iron, and solidifying their friendships in the sisterhood of believers.

Whether it is a seeker friendly, fellowship, event or a discipleship program, it must have a purpose that fulfills the mission statement of the ministry and therefore the church. If you have a church that has plenty of fellowship opportunities for the body of believers, your church leadership may want your primary focus to be discipleship programs and events. When this is the case you can always encourage the women of the church to host fellowship events of their own. With social media, this is easier than ever. If your women's ministry has a facebook page or other social media account, a quick message indicating your plans to go out for dinner, to the movies or even a morning run can result in impromptu fellowship opportunities.

When we focus on quality over quantity, we can see numerous benefits for the women, the ministry and the church. When you can put the effort into quality and the events are spread out, women will anticipate the events. They are more apt to sign up right away, which helps for planning purposes. Fewer events make it easier for the women to keep track of the upcoming events, and the information desk at the church will have an easier time answering questions. There is a deeper level of commitment to attending the events, because the women know there isn't going to be another opportunity in just a few weeks. The events begin to take a level of priority they may not have had otherwise. Quality over quantity usually results in better utilization of the resources and budget, which benefit the ministry and the church. Finally, quality events usually don't end as the evening draws to a close. They inspire conversations that may continue for weeks to come or even lead to a new small group/bible study group forming.

To ensure we can accomplish quality within our events and programs, at the very least our leadership team should take some time to study apologetics. Briefly, apologetics is understanding what you believe, and why you believe it. It's the ability to understand what our beliefs are and how to communicate them to others. You might be surprised to find out that this is a pretty common problem in the church today. We know that we believe, but to try to explain that to someone outside the church can be intimidating. There is solid reasoning to have faith in God, belief in Jesus' crucifixion and

resurrection, and that there will be a day Christ returns to gather his church & judge the world. It has to be deeper than *“I was raised to believe this”* or *“I have always believed there was something bigger than me out there, this just made sense”*.

How can we seriously share the gospel with someone, if we lack the ability to explain it to them?

We live in communities where everyone isn't automatically assumed to go to church on Sunday, or has at least a rudimentary understanding of the scriptures and gospel message. So, we can't assume that when we encounter a person out in public, or even a guest at a women's ministry function, that they have any idea of what we are talking about. We have to be ready to defend our faith.

The very first time someone asked me to explain to them how I came to Christianity, was in the bathroom at a women's conference. She was a guest, a seeker, and we had struck up conversation in a workshop. Talk about being in an unexpected place to defend my faith! I had an answer, but I admit it probably wasn't nearly as good then as it was now. I can only pray that it was enough.

Part of defending our faith, also means we are going to need to explore those tough passages and hard questions. We will be challenged and our ability to answer those challenges will greatly impact our credibility. And, it must start with your Women's Ministry Team.

Mary Jo Sharp has a book entitled *“Defending the Faith: Apologetics in Women's Ministry”*, that has an entire chapter devoted to the application of Apologetics in the Women's Ministry programs. In the chapter she identifies four goals for women's ministry in regards to introducing apologetics back into ministering to women.

1. Goal 1: Establish the Need – We must understand why this is necessary not just for leaders but all sisters in Christ. We can introduce it slowly into the body, even starting with a discipleship class first, but it needs to be a priority.
2. Goal 2: Create the Environment – We must establish that in the women's ministry it is safe to ask questions, that we don't expect everyone to know everything, and that we are happy to help answer those questions for you or along with you. Women want to know that it is ok to have doubts, questions and uncertainty without fear of ridicule.
3. Goal 3: Find or Create a Study – There is no expectation that we should forge forward in apologetics on our own. If you have a people within the body that are gifted in this area, please utilize them as a resource. If not, there are resources you can buy to create or teach directly from.
4. Goal 4: Answer Possible Objections – You may encounter people who feel that apologetics is not necessary to be taught in the church. Often this comes from past experiences that are negative. In fact, there will be some who view apologetics as arguing for the faith. You can't change people's past experiences, but you can reveal to them your heart.

Having women's ministry programs that are rooted in the word, Christ centered, and seed planting; which can defend our faith; create a ministry that is fulfilling purpose of the Great Commission. We are reaching out into our communities and even further, sharing our love of God and introducing Him to those we encounter in our daily lives.