

## **Building a Women's Ministry** **Developing the Ministry**

By this point you have your team in place, you may have had a few gatherings in order to get to know each other better. Ministry ideas are being hashed around, things are feeling great. So, now, it's time to get to serious business and start planning for your upcoming year. I have noticed that different churches will define their year in different ways. Some, plan by January – December calendars. Others, go by a fiscal calendar. My church, because we have a huge student ministry, we plan by the school year. I would suggest that the women's ministry follow the same calendar as the church.

If you are over halfway through the year, you may want to use the rest of the year for planning and announce the ministry officially in the new year. It gives the team plenty of time to prepare. It's also better for the women because they won't get used to the idea of women's ministry events being on the calendar only to see them disappear for an extended break. As a women's ministry team, you may decide to plan out the year in advance, or break it down into seasons. You could have all the details outlined, or have a skeleton calendar and work on the details as each event approaches. Keep in mind, giving women advance notice can improve your event attendance.

I know of several Women's Ministry groups that plan a leadership retreat. They will head to a bed and breakfast, or if a conference is coming to their area they may add an extra day to their hotel stay. They use this time to plan out their entire year. There is a local ministry, who plans off season. In the summer they plan their fall and winter events, in the winter they will plan for spring and summer. Advance planning of some sort will only benefit your ministry as a whole.

Outside of your “Planning Meeting” you will meet regularly to execute those plans. You will decide the frequency of your team meetings based on the type of calendar you plan. A ministry that has an event every other month, won't need to meet weekly. A ministry that has a busy calendar with multiple activities per month is going to need to meet more frequently. Planning out the year not only informs the women of the upcoming events, it helps you determine the team meeting schedule too.

Another consideration for your meeting schedule, is whether or not you have volunteers from within the church helping. If you have a team leader who is the “Brunch Coordinator”, she may choose to build a team of volunteers to help her. These women wouldn't come to leadership meetings, but the Brunch Coordinator might want to have a meeting with her team as needed. Planning out your year, will help leaders to come up with a schedule for their committees.

I really advocate advance planning for the year, and those are just a few of the reasons I favor it. When you know what is ahead of you, can you be better prepared. It is really important to make sure your team meetings being led effectively. You are asking people to volunteer their time and energy to attend meetings, make sure they count.

A typical women's ministry meeting might look something like this:

Everyone arrives --- There is a little bit of socializing while everyone gets their coffee & gets seated --- The leader takes prayer requests --- Old business is discussed --- New business is addressed --- Meeting closes with prayer --- a bit more socializing.

Unless you are planning a major event, this really shouldn't take more than an hour to an hour and a half. I have sat in ministry meetings that have gone for three hours, and hardly anything was accomplished. The meeting was not effective.

For example, you can see this when you have:

- A leader who isn't assertive enough to get everyone seated and on task.
- 8 people meeting, and yet the prayer requests took 45 minutes.
- Side bar conversations that took away from the meeting.
- Lack of notes from the previous meeting and no one could remember who volunteered to do what.
- A member who was asked to get information for the team, comes unprepared and delays the meeting to try and find her notes or make the phone call to acquire the information.

Life happens, and any meeting can get derailed. However, if it is happening time and time again, there is a greater problem.

### **So, what are the ways we can ensure that we have effective women's ministries meetings?**

- 1) **Create an agenda, email (or hand) it to your team in advance.** *This can serve as a reminder, if someone needed to complete a task for this meeting, it can allow women with questions to get clarification before the meeting, it also helps everyone to be prepared for what will be discussed at the meeting. No one is ever caught off guard or surprised.*
- 2) **Start on time, every time.** *Because there is an agenda, the late person will know what they missed and can be filled in later. If you are meeting at a cafe, encourage those who are going to order food to arrive early. Long lines can cause delays, and when your food is ready there will be interruptions when it arrives or while you are eating. If you meet at your church or someone's home, allot for a short time to get coffee and conversation.*
- 3) **Distribute and follow the agenda.** *Agendas are great for keeping order, providing conversation flow, and ensure everyone has a piece of paper to write down notes, dates, and assignments on. If you are keeping an eye on your agenda, in reference to the time, it also helps you as the leader to keep moving forward at the right pace.*
- 4) **Establish the prayer policy.** *You may choose not to do any prayers requests, and open up the meeting with general prayer about the ministry, over the women serving, and anything pertinent that you as the leader were asked to share (for example, if a team member was in an accident on the way to the meeting, of course you'd pray about that!). If you do choose to allow prayer requests, you can ask that the women email or text you in advance. Then you can create a short document covering the points of the prayers, so that 1) as a group you can pray for them and 2) the women can take the prayer requests home with them for continued prayers. This will allow you to acknowledge the requests without spending too much time on in depth explanations. If you are going to allow the prayers requests to be spoken in the meeting, consider setting boundaries. It is absolutely within reason to limit the prayers requests to the women and their direct family members. You might also want to suggest that if anyone has any questions, concerns or suggestions for that person to share with them after the meeting is over.*
- 5) **Stop the debate.** *If a decision is taking too much time, because the team is clearly unable to agree, as the leader you need to stop the debate. Either table the discussion for the next meeting, when everyone has had time to think or do more research... or kill it. You, as the leader, do have that authority to state that since a decision can't be made, the team isn't moving forward with that project or idea.*
- 6) **End on time, every time.** *Things will happen, and you may find yourself nearing the end of your allotted meeting time, and only three quarters of the way through your agenda. You may be tempted to rush through those last few points, but I recommend that you to end the meeting. You can send a follow up email if the issue is time sensitive, otherwise it can wait until the next meeting. If you are meeting in someone's home... encourage the women to leave when the meeting is over, as to not take advantage of the hostesses hospitality. A quick comment to a group chatting: "You gals should go*

*get coffee somewhere!” is non-threatening, gentle nudging. I've been known to do subtle things like handing someone their note book or purse, cleaning up the space, and helping to usher the women toward the door.*

- 7) **Have a Note Taker.** *Someone on your team is a good note taker, I'll guarantee it. You will know them, because they were the one who showed up at the gathering meeting with a note pad in hand. When ever you meet, they are writing the whole time. They answer questions when no one else can remember, because they wrote everything down... not just what pertains to their own duties. Enlist this person to take notes (also called meeting minutes) during every meeting. They can then forward the notes to the entire team within a day or so after the meeting. This ensures that everyone knows what is happening, who is responsible for what duties, and for the person who was late... this is how they will catch up. If they have questions, they can speak with you directly.*

One of the very first events you will plan for a new ministry is usually what is called a “Kick Off Event”, it is basically a way to introduce to your church the new ministry. In most cases, the Kick Off Event is a brunch or dinner, hosted by the ministry team. You may choose to do something a little less labor intensive, such as Coffee and Dessert, or Tea and Sandwiches. While this sounds like a fun and easy event, which it is, don't forget that it is going to serve several purposes.

1. You are introducing the ministry to the women of the church.
2. You are introducing the ministry team members to the women.
3. You will be distributing your upcoming calendar of events.
4. You may be soliciting volunteers for subcommittees or for specific unfilled team positions.
5. You might also pass out surveys to the women to complete, indicating their interests, offer suggestions, or pose questions they might have about the information given.
6. You may want to announce the upcoming women's small groups and studies, or solicit leaders if you are still developing that program.
7. If you are planning to attend a conference that year, this is a great opportunity to share that information with the women in advance.

I'd also like to make the recommendation, should you hold a Kick Off Event, disperse the Women's Ministry team members throughout the room. Try to have 1 team member per table to answer questions, or to get to know the women they are sitting with. When a team is always sitting together, it can give the appearance that they only socialize with each other. A tight knit team is wonderful, a tight knit fellowship of women is amazing. I would also encourage the leaders to switch up who they are sitting with, from event to event. Get to know more women, if possible.

Kick Off Events can also be utilized when you are making major changes to the ministry to share this news with the women of the church. Is there a new team? Introduce them. Is there a new vision? Share it. Need more volunteers for a growing ministry? Ask for them.

If your church takes the summer off of large ministry events, a Fall “Kick Off Event” can be a great way to officially start the new year. The organization for a Kick Off Event, is similar to a brunch, refer back to topic 7 for details and suggestions.

It's important to have a great start to building the ministry and holding effective planning meetings. A Kick Off Event is a fantastic way to build anticipation for the ministry, gather volunteers, and start the ministry off on a good foot. However, we can't neglect to ensure we are ending on a good foot too. We do this through Evaluation and Course Correction. The exact method you will do this may vary from ministry to ministry, but the point is the same.

We must look back on our activities and ask ourselves, did we accomplish our goal?

- Was there good attendance? If not, then why? (*bad date, poor topic, no interest, etc*)
- Was the event executed properly? (*did the event fail due to poor planning, misinformation, etc*)
- Did we get results? (*did women sign up for small groups, did we see more church attendance?*)
- Ultimately, did the event fulfill our mission statement? If not, why?
- Did we stay in budget? If not, why?

These are just some of the questions you might want to consider, but I do recommend having some sort of questionnaire that your team uses to evaluate the events you hold. This also includes small groups and bible studies. Did you offer ten studies, but only 4 of them had people sign up? Try to figure out why. Can this be fixed? What can we do differently?

You can choose to evaluate the events as a team, as each event passes. Or, you may decide to wait until the end of the year/season and review them all at once. There are ministries who actually survey the women of the church at the end of the year, for feedback. I've even seen a few who survey at the end of the event itself! The exact process of your evaluation needs to be something decided upon by the team members, but don't neglect to include it. Your ministry will not be effective if you are not looking at what went right and what went wrong. Otherwise you will waste time offering events no one is interested in, you will waste money on materials no one wants, and you will repeat mistakes you didn't learn from.

Knowing this information is only half the battle, the rest of the battle is problem solving the errors and building on your successes. These evaluations will be imperative for your next "Planning Meeting" when you discuss the upcoming year's agenda.

You might learn quickly that Friday night events are just not going to work with the women in your church. Or, that the women are not interested in bible studies by certain authors or on certain subjects. You might find that a certain speaker didn't sit well with the women of the church, and probably shouldn't be invited back. On the flip side, you might find another speaker was given high praises and you might consider bring her back more frequently. Evaluations might also reveal the areas the ministry is in deficit. You will learn that women in your church want a mentorship program, or have a deep interest in community service. The women may make suggestions of things you had never even considered. Their opinions are just as important in the shaping of the ministry as those on the leadership team, if not more so, because these are the women we are serving.

It's not about us. It's about getting HIM to the them.

Now that you have your ministry up and running, it's important to continue learning and growing leaders in order to sustain it into the future. We do this by developing our leadership team, understanding how to handle crisis when it comes, and respecting the careful balance between our personal lives and ministry service. In our next 3 sessions, we are going to explore these important topics to sustain our ministry work.