

I. HOW TO BEGIN

A. Pray

The first thing you should do is pray. Prayer not only changes things but also changes you. Maybe you have felt God nudging you to minister specifically to women. You may even have several ideas and can identify several areas of need. Before you do anything else, take all your concerns and hopes to the Lord. Let Him reshape you and your plans through prayer. He will help you think through what you need to do to get ready for the work ahead of you.

Here are a few questions to consider as you pray:

1. What are the most pressing needs?
2. Who else has an interest in this ministry?
3. Do others also sense an urgency for this ministry?

As you reflect on these questions and prepare for ministry, remember to keep God in the lead. Proverbs 3:6 says, “In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success” (TLB).

If possible, invite other people to pray with you. Before running up to the pastor or a staff person and blurting out a “We should have . . .” list, find one or two prayer partners and spend some time discussing this ministry and asking God for His direction. As you pray and talk with others, He may disclose additional needs or ministry opportunities.

Here are some verses and further questions to consider while praying:

1. “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” (Jer. 33:3).
 - a. What has God’s wisdom taught me (recently) that I did not previously know?
 - b. Do I have a teachable spirit? What is an example of this?
2. “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24).
 - a. Has the Lord shown me a way to “spur one another on” in women’s ministries?
 - b. What is an example of “love and good deeds” that someone has shown me?
 - c. What is another example of “love and good deeds” that I can show someone?

I pray that as you pray, God will enlarge your vision of women’s ministries and intensify your desire to rely on Him. We must trust God, rest in Him, and let Him take the lead.

B. Share with Pastor and Staff

After a week or more of prayer and if you continue to sense the Lord's guidance, talk to your pastor or a staff member about your concern for the women of your congregation. Remember, it's not just what you say but how you say it. If you approach the matter gently and show you have spent over a week in prayer asking for God's direction, you will probably have a more receptive listener.

Here are some steps to help you:

1. Make an appointment with the pastor or staff person and arrive early.
2. Share the needs you have sensed and that you have been praying about them.
3. Let the pastor/staff person share his or her thoughts concerning policies and procedures.
4. Ask the pastor/staff person what you should do next. He or she may want to pray about this or discuss it with someone else before proceeding.
5. You may need to wait awhile before doing anything else. The timing may not be right if you are in the middle of an all-church special emphasis—or if it's in the middle of December!
6. Before the meeting ends, try to get some idea of what the next action step will be.

Whatever the conclusion (wait or call again in a week), continue praying with your prayer partners. It's important to remain faithful to this part of your preparation and to keep in mind that ministry is not about us and our agenda but about God's purposes and His church.

C. Gather Support

After gaining staff approval, you need to gather others around you to catch the vision and get organized. You can do this in a variety of ways.

If your pastor or staff liaison is a woman, ask her to suggest women who may be interested in ministering to other women.

If your pastor is a married man, mention your concerns about women's ministries to his wife. Including her in the direction and planning of the ministry is vital. If she is part of your initial team, she will be more likely to support future events. If she is too busy to serve on a committee, let her know her input is always welcome. Use her strengths and show appreciation for her efforts. There's a lot expected of her by a lot of people, but she is not the mother hen of the church! Her role is to support her husband and to use her gifts to the glory of God. We have an obligation to care for her in a special way. (To learn more about what it means to be a pastor's wife, read Joyce Williams' *She Can't Even Play the Piano! Insights for Ministry Wives* [Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City].)

Good communication is imperative as you begin. Keep in regular contact with the staff liaison and your prayer partners about the progress you are making. Let others hear you voice the importance of ministering to women. The more you share ideas about ministry opportunities, the more others will catch a glimpse of what they can do.

D. Appoint a Task Force

You may want to appoint a task force or concern group of ladies who will meet with you to pray and discuss the needs and priorities you believe God is sharing with you. Talk to others with the same burden for women that you have.

This group should represent about 3 to 5 percent of your congregation. If your average church attendance is 200, you could ask between 6 and 10 ladies to be on your committee. You want different groups represented from various ages, marital statuses, church backgrounds, and so on. This will bring in several points of view to help you determine which needs are the most urgent.

Each group member should be a believer in good standing with your church. It would be helpful if each is a member (or regular attendee) of your local church. Membership usually indicates a greater level of commitment.

It is probably best to give the group certain expectations at the beginning. You could ask them to serve in this capacity for six months or even up to a year, if needed. That way, they know this commitment is not a life sentence. Assure them that you will value their input and truly listen to their concerns.

The task force needs to have specific goals. If you decide to assess the needs of the whole congregation, you may want to conduct a survey. Later I will explain how to do this and what to do with the information gathered.

E. Write a Purpose Statement

Your task force could also write a purpose statement. A purpose statement should briefly explain why the ministry exists. For example, our local group listed the following goals as our statement:

“First Church Women’s Ministries endeavors
To provide opportunities for spiritual growth,
To encourage each other by using our spiritual gifts, and
To support each other through prayer and fellowship.”

Whether you make it simple or elaborate, the important thing is that you put something down on paper. Later when you plan an event, you can see whether it lines up with the criteria of your statement. If it doesn’t, you may want to rethink the purpose for your event.

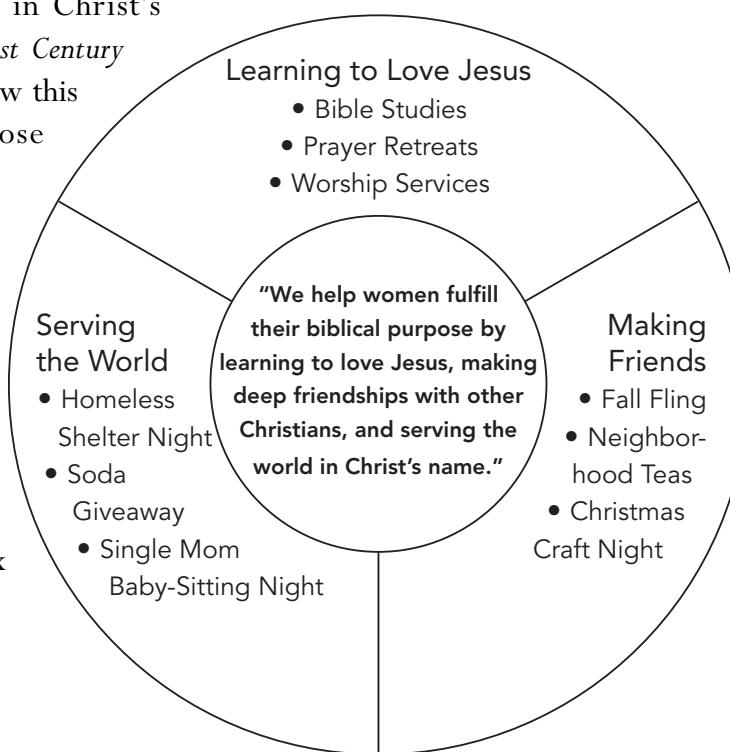
As you compose your purpose statement, be sure to compare it to the one Jesus gave—the Great Commission: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20). This is the mandate that should guide all ministries. It keeps them on the right track. Women’s ministries is no different. However you word your purpose statement, the primary goal is the same—to make disciples and teach them.

Here is another sample statement: “We help women fulfill their biblical purpose by learning to love Jesus, making deep friendships with other Christians, and serving the world in Christ’s name” (from *Women’s Ministry in the 21st Century* [Group Publishing, Inc.], 223). I like how this statement is visualized on the Purpose Wheel* (see diagram at right).

You can also use the Purpose Wheel to check how balanced your program is in the three areas depicted—Learning to Love Jesus, Serving the World, and Making Friends.

To help you further in designing your purpose statement, a helpful work sheet is included in the appendix section of this notebook (see Appendix D7).

Purpose Wheel



*Used with permission from *Women’s Ministry in the 21st Century*, published by Group Publishing, P.O. Box 481, Loveland, CO 80539 <www.group.com>.

F. Form a Council

If you have a smaller congregation and already know its main needs, you may want to form a women's ministries council or committee. Members to this council can either be appointed or elected. When completed, the council should reflect a cross section of your congregation, with representatives from a variety of groups. Strive to have an assortment of teens, senior adults, marrieds, singles (including the divorced and widowed), and persons from a variety of cultures, economic groups, and church backgrounds. Whatever the makeup of your council, make sure its members have a heart for ministry to women. This is most important.

After you have gathered your council members, take an inventory of their gifts, interests, and abilities. This group of ladies will be a wonderful resource in and of themselves. The key to keeping your council engaged is plugging them in where they are gifted and willing to serve. There are different ways to determine how your group can best work together. You can have the members take a personality profile test (like the Meyers-Briggs) to see if your council is well balanced with various personality types and work styles.

Another suggestion is to go through a spiritual gifts inventory with each individual on your council. Spiritual gifts can change over the years. We grow and develop new interests and abilities, new passions, and new empathies from our own personal life lessons. Even the person who did an inventory 10 years ago should reevaluate her involvement in her areas of service.

One spiritual gifts inventory to try is *The Complete Spiritual Gifts Kit*. Specific information for this is listed in Appendix A. This seminar helps people discover the ministry areas where their behavior style, spiritual gifts, and passion meet.

The structure of the council may take awhile to gel. At first you may not know what positions or officers you want. Here are some suggestions:

1. Director—coordinates overall ministry and reports to the adult ministries director or the pastor.

(The following report to the women's ministries director)

2. Secretary—takes meeting notes and corresponds with guests as needed.
3. Treasurer—collects all moneys and deposits them according to the church treasurer's guidelines. Keeps a record of current budget and balances.
4. Hospitality—oversees event greeters, food/drink needs, and special speaker needs, and welcomes new visitors to the church.
5. Registration—oversees all aspects of registration for each event.
6. Bible study—selects the study (with approval of director and/or staff), coordinates teachers and child-care workers.
7. Prayer group—organizes neighborhood groups of four to five to meet regularly.
8. Publicity—makes flyers and announcements for church media (weekly bulletin, monthly newsletter, PowerPoint slideshows, and other venues).
9. Retreat—gathers others to help plan all details of a retreat.
10. Shower coordinator—organizes all aspects of baby and wedding showers.
11. Meals*—gathers volunteers to cook meals for funeral dinners, for those recently in

the hospital, or for those with long-term illnesses.

12. Encourager*—visits those in the hospital for surgery and keeps in contact with the family to care for any other special needs.

There are other positions you could add to this list, but don't get too hung up on them. Some members may function in a couple of these positions throughout the year. Sometimes their gifts and abilities overlap into other positions, and so the lines of distinction between positions are not always clear. That's OK. Use people where they are willing to work and make the best of what you've got.

When someone agrees to serve on the council, it is best to get a commitment from that person for one year (or more). Encourage your council to learn all they can about being better connected with other ladies. This includes building friendships, being intentional about seeking out mentors/mentees, and welcoming new ladies to your fellowship. There are abundant resources available to help you develop ministry strategies for in-reach (those already in your church) and outreach (those outside your church). In the meantime, just *practice* loving others around you. Show others you care by doing little acts of kindness and love.

Sometimes, even with the best intentions, life overwhelms us with special circumstances. When ladies ask to be excused from their commitment to the council, I do not pressure them or make them feel guilty. I thank them for their service and let them know we will be praying for them.

You may want to start an apprenticeship program in your council. Each member can have a helper-in-training. For example, if Ruby is the treasurer, she could ask Amy to work with her. By the end of the year, Amy could become the treasurer. This method will benefit you with a backup for each position, in case something happens.

Keeping a variety of ladies involved in your council will lighten the load and lessen the chances of burnout. Plus, the more ladies involved, the more ideas and perspectives you will have. Continue to offer training options through workshops, conferences, and seminars as often as possible.

*Meals and Encourager positions submitted by Lois Ring, Central Church of the Nazarene, Lenexa, Kansas.

G. Develop Your Leadership

As the women's ministries leader, you have a responsibility to improve your leadership abilities. Start where you are. Emulate the example of our Lord Jesus, who is the Servant Leader of all time. Go to seminars and conferences that teach leadership skills. Read books and stories about other leaders and what they did to further themselves. There are many good resources on improving your leadership. Check Appendixes A, B, and C for further reading on this huge topic.

You probably have an idea of your strengths and weaknesses. You should surround yourself with people who encourage you, who are strong where you are weak, and who get you to stretch your faith and think outside the box. You also need someone who will challenge you to do better, but chances are, you already have such a person! Here are some other helpful suggestions for leaders:

1. *Be on the journey.* Daily renew your relationship with God and your commitment to grow stronger. If you neglect this area, you can stop reading now. Your efforts at ministering to other women will be very shallow and won't go far. You *must* be immersed in God's Word and continually seeking His guidance. Remember His thoughts are much higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9).
2. *Be available.* If God is calling you to minister to other women, you will probably have to give up something to do this. This is not a bad thing! It will bring you freedom to exercise your faith and rely on Him.
3. *Be flexible.* Even if you are a great planner and have an outstanding council, the unexpected will happen. Make the best of what you have and go from there. Don't be discouraged, but be full of grace during these times.
4. *Be supportive of your family.* Keep your priorities in check, and balance your ministry time with your family time. This can be a struggle, but ask for God's direction. Nothing breaks my heart more than seeing people put their ministry above their family. Ministry callings will change throughout your lifetime, but your family will not. Take time for these vital relationships.

H. Care for Volunteers

Gathering volunteers to serve on a council takes perception, patience, and persistence! Keeping those volunteers is another task. Here are a few practices I've learned over the years.

1. Spend time getting to know an individual. Each of us is unique in many ways. Ask about her salvation story, family, and church background.
2. Capitalize on her strengths. Sure, we all have our quirky idiosyncrasies, but try to focus on the positives.
3. Remember her birthday. Send her a card to make her feel special.
4. After a major event, send a handwritten thank you to express your appreciation. Be specific. Instead of saying, "Thank you for decorating for the brunch," say, "Thank you for the beautiful centerpieces you made for the brunch tables. I like the way you incorporated the theme into the details of the table setting."
5. Pay attention to the small details that people do for an event and express appreciation for them. Doing this lets them know their efforts were meaningful.
6. Introduce your council whenever possible. It's good to let others see who is involved and that it takes many hands to plan an event.
7. List your council members in the women's ministries brochure or newsletter. Highlight a different member each month. This lets others know who is designated to receive their suggestions or feedback about events.

I. Start a New Ministry

Before beginning a new ministry, talk to various ladies to get a sense of what is needed. Try to talk to those who are new to the church, as well as those who have been there for years. Listen carefully to the diversity of their concerns, which can range from issues having to do with age gaps and societal labeling (economic or cultural) to just plain busyness. Next, piece together and summarize what the ladies are saying about their needs. You may even want to list these needs in the order of their importance. Although you may not be able to address them all, try to deal with the most pressing needs first.

After the pastor's approval, one leader was ready with many exciting and new possibilities. Yet when she realized how busy the ladies were, she had to scale back on the activities. So she started small and organized events that did not require much planning for her participants. They did not cost much, and they served the purpose of fellowship and sharing. After the ladies got to know each other better, they felt a greater sense of connection. She recognized the two secrets of beginning:

1. *Start simply.* Keep the activity focused and purposeful. Include some fun! Don't make the first event too complicated. Keep it simple.
2. *Simply start.* Just do it! You've done all the dreaming. Now go, girl!

J. Expand an Existing Ministry

When you want to expand a current ministry, again get a prayer partner. Ask God to help you identify needs that are not being met. You may already see a need or two on the rise in your community or congregation. As you discover what the needs are, pray for the Lord to bring you workers with a passion to serve Him and to reach out to others. The Lord will provide!

Focus on one particular area of growth and stay with it. For example, if you decide to reach out to young mothers, find out who they are and how you can help them. It may take some time to research the details, but the payoff can be eternal rewards for the relationships that are fostered. Allow yourself space to experiment with various approaches. If you fail, learn from it and go on to a different method.

The Ministry Ideas section of this book (p. 129) has a variety of ministry options to choose from, including Bible studies, book studies, support groups, and service opportunities. See this section for specific ideas.

Lori desired to give to the needy, whom she could see were all around her. She wanted to do something but wasn't sure what to do. She talked with others about this. Because she was willing to share her passion, she soon found out about a need she could help meet. She discovered that there were many women returning to the workforce who were in need of professional clothing. With the coordination of staff and many volunteers, she started a clothes closet for women so they could confidently head back to the workplace with nice work attire. Later this ministry expanded into including men's and children's clothing.

One church had an ongoing Bible study group that was sensing a call to get involved in their community. They discovered that their local area had one of the highest abortion rates in their state, and they started praying about it. After a year of prayer and research, they decided to open their own crisis pregnancy clinic. Currently, it is a thriving clinic on the cutting edge, and it just received a federal grant for over \$1 million for abstinence education. Their desire for community involvement has opened many incredible opportunities to save babies, win lost souls, and educate young people. See how ministries can multiply! Their efforts have touched hundreds of lives in their community.

A lady who found out her friend had breast cancer decided to make the health-care journey with her. She accompanied her friend to her surgery and treatment appointments for the next several months. After she walked through that dark valley with her friend, she had a new empathy for ladies in that situation and felt led to begin a support group for cancer survivors. After hearing what a prayer shawl ministry was all about, she gathered friends to make scarves ("shawls") and to care and pray for those going through cancer treatments. They give each cancer patient a scarf to let her know she is covered with their prayers. What a beautiful expression of love during a most distressing time!

When it comes to tough issues or crises, there are several help organizations available on national, regional, and local levels. Whether you are facing an issue of domestic abuse, teen pregnancy, pornography, or homosexuality, there are many resources available to help. Please refer to Appendixes A, B, and C for specific listings.

One year, I attended a workshop about abused women. I was astonished to learn that one out of every four women in the United States was abused in some way—physically, emotionally, or mentally. When I went back to my council to share how we could do something about this, I was met with silence. I thought for sure they would see the need. I had a hard time understanding why others couldn't see the importance of this ministry possibility. Later, I found out that one of my council members who had sat in that very meeting was being abused. Then I realized how complex abuse cases are and how important it is for victims to get professional help. It usually takes much effort over a long period of time for there to be any resolution in these situations. In the meantime, we must continue to pray for these women and show them love and support.

As you reflect on the steps for beginning a women's ministries program or for building on to an existing one, be faithful and sensitive to the Lord's guidance. Women can effect change in their communities one dream at a time! Ask the Lord for constant direction as He inspires your ladies to reach out to others.