



styles
change
people
change

IS YOUR MINISTRY KEEPING UP?



HELPFUL HANDBOOK FOR
KEEPING YOUR WOMEN'S
MINISTRY UP WITH THE TIMES

WOMEN'S MINISTRY ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE HERE'S WHY THAT'S A GOOD THING

Imagine wearing a corset and a petticoat under a heavy, long dress in the heat of summer.

Or sporting a bonnet and apron to run your errands.

Even better, imagine wearing gobs of electric blue eye shadow with mercilessly teased hair and a neon mini-skirt.

Yeah right, you're thinking. Like that would happen.

When it comes to fashion trends, few of us pine for the styles of the past. Rather than gaze longingly at our retired bell bottoms, we embrace change (sometimes with "what were we thinking?" hindsight). "Out with the old and in with the new," we say.

But when it comes to ministry, changing with the times is harder than updating our wardrobe. Changing the way we've always done things feels riskier, and comes with a host of unknowns. *What if a new idea doesn't work? What if our ministries shrink instead of grow?*

We get it. Change is scary. But here's the thing: just like fashion trends are ever-evolving, women's ministry is evolving, too, and you have two choices for how to respond:

1. You can figuratively hang on to those bell bottoms and wear them every day...but that won't change the fact that women have moved on to skinny jeans.
2. Or you can update your ministry to the times.

You're reading this handbook, which tells us that you've already taken a step to "ditch the bell bottoms." Pat yourself on the back for being willing to try new things, and keep reading.

Ready or not, women's ministry is changing.

Here's why that's a good thing:

- Ministries are smaller, which at first seems like a bad thing. But smaller means they're more nimble and can therefore **reach women in places that haven't been reached before** (like the workplace or hobby groups, for instance).
- Lower attendance at traditional ministry events is provoking ministries to get more innovative, giving rise to **creative new ways of doing ministry**. From inspiring outreach events to fun workout clubs, these new ideas are reaching women who'd normally not participate.
- Ministries are becoming more informal, meaning that churches have diverse pockets of women meeting for all different reasons and occasions. Though less centralized, this grassroots approach to ministry has the potential to be very impactful because of its ability to **foster and deepen relationships**.

COMMON REASONS YOUR MINISTRY MIGHT BE **STUCK IN THE PAST** (AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM)

Whether it's fashion or ministry, trends are tricky. Sometimes we do a good job of staying current, while other times we fall behind without even realizing it. Here are three reasons why your ministry might be falling behind:

1. Because you want to save time. For many ministry leaders, doing the same programs and events year after year is one simple way to streamline planning and thus save time. We know that at least half of women's ministry leaders are volunteers, meaning they juggle leadership with jobs, families, and other responsibilities. Saving time by keeping things familiar can be a powerful motivator.

2. Because you want to make training volunteers easy. Getting volunteers excited to serve, training them, and keeping them involved is HARD. And that task is harder when you're training them for new things. Sometimes it's just easier to not rock the boat.

3. Because you want to save money. Getting budget approval and organizing fundraising campaigns are met with less resistance when the program or event is tried and true. Proposing new things sometimes feels like more effort than it's worth.

Though these three reasons are all understandable, they may be hurting your ministry in the long term. Perhaps you're already experiencing some symptoms of a ministry that's in decline, like lackluster attendance, low participation rates among younger women, and trouble keeping volunteers. The following pages include things you might be doing that are holding your ministry back, and suggestions for how to get unstuck.

PRO-TIPS WITH WOMEN'S MINISTRY

LEADER, LAURIE



Earlier this year we had a chance to interview Laurie, a women's ministry leader from Maine, to find out her insider tips for how to keep ministry vibrant and growing. She had so many good insights to share that we're including them throughout this handbook.

But first, here's a little about Laurie:

I am a lifelong learner and lover of Jesus. The Word of God has been my companion and comfort since childhood, when I came to know Jesus as my savior. I grew up in church and God gifted me with a passion for the Word – study and teaching – at a young age. I was teaching first grade Sunday school when I was in 8th grade.

Currently my husband of 37 years is the senior pastor of the church we have belonged to for 30 years. We spent 14 of those years as foreign missionaries in Ecuador, South America, and were called back to the pastorate 13 years ago. Our four children are all grown and married, and we have four grandchildren – my great, great joy!

I have led the elder's wives ministry, was worship leader for four years, and took over women's Bible study from the previous pastor's wife. Our group grew to require two morning sessions and an evening session. I now mentor our women's ministry team – we have a fantastic women's minister who is also our retreat writer/leader, and five other women leading women's groups and studies, and a couple of women in training. I am currently doing individual Bible study and training with a future pastor's wife. I also mentor the leaders at a local rescue mission where I work part-time.

Thanks for introducing yourself, Laurie!

STUCK IN THE PAST #1: ONE LEADER/SPEAKER IS CARRYING ALL THE WEIGHT

This common pitfall can be spotted:

- **on your teams**, when one person is organizing and doing everything
- **in your Bible studies**, when one person is choosing the studies and leading the group(s)
- **at your retreats**, when the whole event revolves around a speaker

When ministries are anchored on one or two personalities, it discourages new ideas, fresh perspective, and younger women getting engaged. On the other hand, when you intentionally share the leadership load and equip new leaders, it energizes ministry. **You can do this:**

- **on your teams**, by setting leadership term limits, establishing clear titles/job descriptions, and proactively identifying and recruiting younger leaders. For more ideas, read <http://womensministryleader.com/5-tips-for-getting-more-women-on-your-ministry-team/>
- **in your Bible studies**, by choosing studies that anyone can lead
- **at your retreats**, by choosing a retreat kit instead of a speaker. Retreats that have multiple women facilitating, and lots of conversation prompts built-in, make sharing leadership fun and easy. For more information about retreat kits, visit <http://group.com/retreats>

PRO-TIPS WITH LAURIE: ON WHY SHE STILL HOSTS RETREATS



We asked Laurie why she still likes to host retreats for her ministry. Here's what she said:

Women today work hard and just getting away isn't enough. Women want a pretty atmosphere that is also affordable and comfortable, with delicious, thoughtful food, and opportunities for being in nature and shopping.

For many women, this is the only time all year that they have a weekend to themselves, so the idea of a beautiful setting in a pampering atmosphere is really attractive. We aim to keep prices low, and the inn where we stay offers a very reasonable rate.

Every year our attendance GROWS! God keeps bringing women and equipping us to minister to them.

STUCK IN THE PAST #2: YOU ONLY OFFER BIBLE STUDIES AND TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY EVENTS

Did you know that women's ministry as we've come to know it got its start in the 1950's? Christmas teas and morning Bible study groups were the bread and butter for women during that era. It's not hard to spot how much women's lives have changed since then, yet Bible studies and teas are often still the go-to programs for churches.

The problem is that women aren't housewives with flexible schedules anymore. An increasingly larger number of them work—often full-time—while also raising families. Their low participation in these standard programs has less to do with their level of commitment or their priorities, and more to do with the very real challenge of balancing career and family (something the 1950's housewife never had to do).

To expect today's time-crunched women to fit into a 1950's program mold is unrealistic. Instead, consider some of these innovative ministry alternatives:

Moms' groups: Perhaps because moms are increasingly in the workforce, they're hungrier than ever for connections with other women who are also raising children. Moms' groups are a good solution, particularly if the program is flexible enough to meet anytime and anywhere (including people's homes). For more information about starting a moms' group, visit <http://group.com/moms>

Innovative ministry ideas (continued):

Professional networking groups: Women love to network with other women, particularly when their relationships deepen their faith while also supporting the growth of their careers/businesses. Hosting a networking group can be a great outreach to women both in your church and community.

Workout/fitness groups: One of the most successful new ministry programs for reaching women of all ages are fitness classes. Women will even attend at early morning hours (something they'd never do for a formal Bible study) to fit in prayer, worship, and exercise before their day starts.

Retreat and mini-event kits: Traditional holiday teas get a makeover with mini-event kits that are a cinch to organize and easy for women to attend. The same goes for retreat kits, which are intentionally flexible so that you can plan one-day or weekend-long events depending on the needs of your group.

For more information about mini-event kits, visit <http://www.group.com/category/ministry-resources/womens-ministry/event-kits-and-downloads.do>

For more information about retreat kits, visit <http://group.com/retreats>

STUCK IN THE PAST #3: YOU PRIORITIZE PROGRAMS OVER **RELATIONSHIPS**

It's easy to write off this common pitfall by thinking that you value relationships above all else. We believe you DO value relationships, but the truth is more complicated. As a ministry leader, you value relationships, but you also want to show your church and leaders that you're a good steward by creating quality ministry programs. You're balancing other people's expectations with the needs of your women, and sometimes programs can feel like the path of least resistance.

We've already talked about how much women's lives have changed in the past several decades, and how programs are now competing with the very real demands of work and home. Based on this, here's what women need more than programs:

Rest and free time to connect with Jesus. Programs by default are programmed, which usually means there's not a lot of time for relaxation and free time for prayers and devotions. Busy women are like dry sponges—they crave less structure, less activity, and more connection with the source of living water (aka Jesus). One easy way to foster rest and free time is with [a retreat kit](#) that builds in quiet time, worship, prayer stations/walks, and journaling reflections.

Care and prayer. Spontaneous and informal acts of kindness (like a meal delivered in a time of need, or a care package sent to a college freshman away from home for the first time) are often more impacting than a formal Bible study or event. Arguably a ministry with an army of women that are ready to reach out and meet a need at a moment's notice is more valuable than one with lots of moderately attended events but few servants.

PRO-TIPS WITH LAURIE: WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES & BENEFITS OF HOSTING A RETREAT?



Retreats are one of the most valuable events a ministry can host during the year. Here's what Laurie shares about the challenges and benefits of her retreats:

The biggest challenge is being relevant to all age groups. We are blessed to have all decades represented. We encourage nursing mothers to come and have designated Retreat Grandmas available to give these mamas a break during the weekend.

We believe God's truth is relevant to all ages, so we try to make our retreats universally appealing while still being sensitive to how we do small groups. Some insist on being in a group with family or friends, others want the adventure of getting to know people.

The most rewarding thing is seeing the Holy Spirit work on hearts and lives, and watching our ladies let Him work through them. Every year God brings deliverance, cements relationships, softens hearts, and changes lives. Ladies learning that God is accessible, loves them, and wants relationship with them is the best!

STUCK IN THE PAST #4: YOU CHOOSE TEACHING & STUDY **OVER CONVERSATION**

Women's ministry leaders are drawn to leadership for a lot of reasons, but for many of us one of the top reasons is our love for teaching and sharing insights from the Bible. There's nothing quite like watching another woman experience freedom and breakthrough because she's gained new spiritual understanding based on a lesson or teaching in the group.

The tricky thing about learning, though, is that conversations and experiences are more effective at driving an insight home than just listening to a teacher. One of our best models of this truth is Jesus himself. Here are a few tips we can learn from him:

1. Don't always provide the answers. Jesus was a master at leaving a question hanging in the air unanswered. He was comfortable with confusion, and frequently let people wrestle with what he said.

2. Let women talk (and even argue/debate). Jesus encouraged conversation and debate among others, and strategically let them hash things out among themselves, often asking questions to keep the conversation going. You can do the same by building in a lot of time for women to talk during your studies, events, and retreats, even if it means that you don't finish a lesson. A good tool for this is [a retreat kit that balances teaching with icebreakers and small-group discussion throughout the whole day/weekend.](#)

STUCK IN THE PAST #5: YOU ONLY PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS & GROUPS AT CHURCH

Of all the things that have changed in culture since the 1950's, changes to technology are among the most dramatic. From smartphones to social media, women have so many new ways to talk to each other and get news. In fact, recent studies say that people get the majority of their news—including updates about events—from Facebook. Based on this, you can see how there would be disconnection if the only way they could learn about your new groups, studies, retreats, and holiday events is at church.

If you're still using Sunday announcements and bulletin inserts as your way of promoting ministry events, it's time to consider adding one or more of the following:

1. Try social media. As mentioned, Facebook in particular is a go-to source for event updates and announcements. Don't know how to use Facebook for promotion? Find a young person to help. Because of their expertise, social media promotion is a key area to get younger women involved in ministry.

2. Use email. Likely your church keeps email addresses of people from the church and sends out a regular newsletter. If you're not already promoting your ministry events through email, now is a great time to start asking questions about how to get into the mix.

3. Identify "social butterfly" influencers. Are there women in your church or community who seem to know a lot of people and always have the latest updates on what's going on? Make a quick list of them (even if it's just a short one), and ask them to help spread the word about your ministry events. Giving them a stack of fliers, cards, or postcards can help them remember the details.

4. Partner with community organizations or other churches. Reach beyond your circle of connections by partnering with other groups on events to expand your circle and share the load of promotion.

Planning a retreat specifically? Each Group retreat kit has a list of promotional ideas, graphics, reproducible fliers, videos, and more to make promotion easy.

CLOSING PRAYER

Special thanks to you, reader, for joining with us in the mission to reach women of all ages with the love of Jesus.

We'd love to close in prayer with you:

Father, we pray together for our ministry teams and leaders. Give us humble hearts and opportunities to serve. We pray for your words to flow through us as we talk, teach, and lead prayer. Give us the courage to step outside of our plans and programs if you have another path for us to take, as well as the discipline to stay on course amidst distraction and interruption. We pray that we will treat everyone as you would, with love and warmth equally. Give us patience, endurance, and fortitude as we lead our ministries. Keep us all healthy, rested, and full of peace. Amen.

Start planning your best women's retreat yet with an all-inclusive kit



www.group.com/retreats