

Introduction to Women's Ministries

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*Imagine you and I are seated on my back porch,
with coffee cups in hand. You are a newly selected
leader of the women's ministry in your church,
and you have just been given this
Handbook for Women's Ministries.*

I think I know some of the questions you will ask.

Let's talk about it...

What is this handbook, really?

It is the product of much committed effort, fervent prayer, sacrificial giving, and a desire to coach local church women's groups and leaders as they seek to minister to and through women in their community.

What is it for?

- It is to *inform*
- It is to *motivate*
- It is to *train*

You'll find *information* about what Women's Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (WMCLB) is, why we exist, how your local women can mobilize for ministry by, through, and to women, what mission outreaches are supported by WMCLB, what resources are available to you – and much more!

You'll be *motivated* by the examples of women's groups that are thriving, and by practical ideas and programming that have brought them to that place.

You'll receive *training* in many practical aspects of women's ministry -

From mentoring young women - to writing a constitution

From selecting gifted leaders - to dealing with difficult followers

From choosing Bible study materials - to planning retreats

From assessing the needs of your women - to evaluating past programs

How shall we use it?

It is to be shared with your leadership team, and referred to often as your ministry progresses and needs arise. Make copies of sections most useful to individual team members. (While the book is copyrighted, your purchase gives you permission to make copies of sections of it for use within your own church.) Choose a topic, such as “writing a purpose statement” to brainstorm together with your team. Add workshop and training materials as our Director of Women’s Ministries visits your district. In short, keep it active and in circulation!

What is it NOT?

It is not exhaustive!

There are volumes and volumes of excellent books on the topic of women’s ministry. (See list in the Resource Section of this handbook.) There are many wonderful workshops, tapes, websites and almost endless information available. You can also study for a college degree in Women’s Ministries. So obviously this is just a beginning, a tool designed with particular information for our denomination. We hope it will stimulate you to further study.

Who has written the handbook?

The leadership team of WMCLB, which is called the National Women’s Ministry Team (NWMT), has collaborated to write sections about their particular area of expertise and interest. Because these women are currently active in many areas of ministry and have proven leadership skills, you will find the contents practical, unlike that of many manuals filled with theory and principle, but little usefulness.

Why Should a Church Have a Women’s Ministry?

1. Because believing women are uniquely GIFTED by God for ministry – to win others to Christ, to nurture them in their faith, to train them for leadership, to encourage and support them in life’s challenges. They can do this as part of the local church, the body of Christ, just as ministries to youth, children, singles and men also do.
2. Because women are directly CALLED in Titus 2:3-5 to model faith and mentor younger women. *“Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.”*

3. Because woman-to-woman evangelism and discipleship is **HIGHLY EFFECTIVE**, based on common experience. They can understand and relate because they've "been there."
4. Because women's ministry can provide an **ENTRY POINT** to the church's entire ministry. A woman who finds friendship and acceptance, and comes to faith in Jesus, will quickly want to see her children taught the truth, and her husband find the Savior she has met.
5. Because women reached through evangelism and training can result in a larger service and mission outreach. To quote Henry Blackaby in *Experiencing God – Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, "You cannot be in relationship with Christ and not be on mission. Ministry emerges from our relationship with Christ." Christian women need to pass the torch of mission along not so much by giving women mission **PROJECTS** to do, but by giving them a **HEART** for Christ.

Author Rhonda W. Kelley has stated in workshops that women need such groups for three things:

- Acceptance ("Someone cares about me just as I am!")
- Affirmation ("I am becoming a woman of God, supported by my sisters in faith.")
- Accountability ("I will be missed if I don't attend. Others need me, and I need them!")

In Lyle Schaller's helpful book, *44 Ways to Revitalize the Women's Organization*, he begins with several basic assumptions that are worth thinking about as you decide the value of beginning or renewing your church's ministry to women.

1. **Past effectiveness.** Women's fellowships have been vitally effective in the past
 - by promoting Bible study
 - advocating for missions
 - being sensitive to social action concerns
 - serving as an entry point to newcomers
 - providing leadership training
 - giving prayer support for the church members, leaders, and missions
 - being aware of new trends and new areas for ministry
 - supporting the needs of the elderly and the lonely
2. **Missions.** The worldwide missions movement in response to Jesus' Great Commission is still active and vital, and supporting it can be a central purpose for the women's ministry.

3. **Opportunity.** No one congregation can offer a comprehensive program that can meet all the needs of all the people. The women's group can assess what is being done and look for ways of ministry that are not being accomplished.

Are there lonely widows who would love mutual support, fellowship, and opportunity for service?

Are there new, young believing women who would flourish in a Bible study group if eager volunteers cared for their young children?

Are there single young women who would be thrilled to be mentored by a godly role model?

4. **Uniqueness.** A large number of women still believe in the importance of an all-female organization in the church and are convinced that new methods can be used to reach a new generation of women. They are open to change and renewal, and are unwilling to "do yesterday all over again."
5. **Interests.** The great increase in numbers of women who are employed outside of their homes has not made ministry to them impossible, despite their busy schedules. Schaller suggests three "winners" in determining how women spend discretionary time – and the implications for reaching them are obvious!
 - Highly structured, well-organized Bible study groups with trained leaders. No one has time for endless and aimless discussions of marginal issues – or, worse yet – business!
 - Personal health and fitness
 - Marriage enrichment and family concerns
6. **Participation.** It's important for a believing woman to be part of a worshipping community and a women's group often introduces her to that fellowship.
7. **Evangelism.** Winning the world for Christ is the responsibility of everyone, not just the pastor or the evangelism committee. We can see ourselves as the extended hand to bring the Good News of Christ to women.
8. **Social concern.** It's central to Jesus' teaching that believers consider the needs of people around them and reach out in practical ways in Jesus' Name.

Have you ever noticed how often we use terms about eyesight when discussing our activities?

“How shortsighted they were to build so small!”

“It was blind of her not to see that conflict coming!”

“Hindsight is 20/20!”

“She has such poor insight into personal relationships!”

Vision is all about observing and planning to avoid such mistakes.

Clearly, women’s ministry is important. So how do you get started?

Let's Talk About Vision

When we see a need or an opportunity, we set about addressing it in three ways. So you want to establish ministry by, through, and to women? You'll need to think about:

Vision – What you want to do

Value – Why you want to do it

Strategy – How you'll accomplish it

Notice the Purpose Statement of the WMCLB in our Constitution: (See Organizational Tools)

The purpose of this organization shall be:

- *To call women to a living faith in Christ*
- *To encourage, equip, and edify all women of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren for ministry, service, and fellowship on the local, district, national, and international levels*
- *To provide mission support for the ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.*

This statement serves as a pattern or template, which can be placed over any proposed activity. Is the activity directed toward the target group? Does it fall under the stated purpose of the organization?

Observe:

1. The target group is “all women.” The assumption is clear that women need to be called to come to faith in Christ. They are not born that way, nor does church attendance or good work make them so.
2. The task is to encourage (support/help), equip (provide tools/train), and to edify (teach/inspire) SO THAT they will minister, serve, and have fellowship WITH PEOPLE who are local, in their district, their country, and throughout the world.
3. An additional, specific objective is to provide mission support for ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

You may adapt this Purpose or Vision Statement for your own group, or you may write your own, but you really do need to focus your ministry by stating it carefully. Here are some suggestions for doing that:

1. Be specific. You cannot possibly attempt to do all that the body of Christ is called to do – and you shouldn't try. Focus on your top priorities, and avoid being so general that in years to come anything and everything would somehow seem to be related to your task.
2. Be intentional. Every good vision statement should have a “so that...” in it. You need not actually use the words, but the implication should be clear. What is the intended result?
3. Be flexible. Don't wait to draft the perfect statement. Write it, live with it, adapt it to changing needs and situations or new insights. It is not intended to be as “set in stone” as a constitution.
4. Be concise. A good vision statement is brief enough to be memorized by the leaders, making it a useful tool.
5. Be prayerful. Ask the Lord for clear direction for your ministry. It is His church, after all, and it wouldn't further His Kingdom if He left you in the dark about His purpose. He will show you!
6. Be submissive. Since you are a part of the congregation, it is good to discuss your purpose with your pastor and church board. In most Lutheran Brethren congregations you serve under the umbrella of this leadership. Cooperation and support are both essential and God honoring.

**Yes, it is work to write a Vision Statement,
just as it is work to develop a new recipe or to write a
business plan, but if you expect joyful participation
in ministry, it is critical for your women to know
where you're going and how you intend to get there.**

Sample Vision Statements

Elmbrook Church Women's Ministry exists to serve and minister to women inside and outside Elmbrook Church through teaching the Word of God, providing fellowship and evangelism with the purpose of equipping and encouraging a knowledge of Jesus Christ and a deeper walk with Him so that others may come to know Him.

-Elmbrook Church, Brookfield, WI

The goal of the Women's Ministries shall be: 1) To minister to the women of Northwest Bible Church, 2) To equip women to serve in Northwest Bible Church, 3) To inform and encourage them to be involved in outreach.

-Northwest Bible Church, Dallas, TX

To equip, encourage, enrich, and evangelize the women of this body and this community. To equip through the study of God's wonderful Word, to encourage through meaningful relationships, to enrich through unique events/activities, and to evangelize through verbal messages and lifestyle.

-First Church, Elk Grove, CA

Let's Talk About Values

If VISION is the *what* of ministry, VALUE is the *why*. For example, you likely want your family to have good communication (vision), because it will keep you emotionally close, it will bind members together as a supportive unit, and it will reduce the confusion of multiple, busy schedules (value).

If you could visualize all the women in your community, what would you wish for them? Perhaps that they would:

1. Come – participate, enter a believing fellowship.
2. Have a living, personal relationship of faith in Jesus as their Savior.
3. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him.
4. Exercise their spiritual gifts.
5. Reproduce. Being born to faith and becoming strong and mature is for a purpose. It is to produce “fruit,” i.e., living godly lives, bringing others to faith in Him.
6. Travel safely home to report to the Master.

Notice the sequence:

1. Before people can have a personal relationship with Christ, they need to *come*. You need to reach out to them to capture their interest, to bring them where they can hear the truth and respond. (This is not to say that you do not bring the truth to them in personal evangelism, or that Christ does not call them to faith apart from attendance at a church. We are looking here at the efforts your women’s ministry group can make.)
2. Before they can grow in grace and knowledge, they must *be born into faith*. Much of our discouragement in ministry comes at this very point. Often we try to nurture growth and maturity out of dead material. First, the seed of faith must be planted and sprout before we see beautiful fruit! However sincere our diligent effort, it is the Spirit of God within the believer who produces the fruit.

You may observe the rest of the sequence for yourself, and then think about the implications for your ministry. Be sure to notice, however, that stopping at any point makes ministry incomplete. Don’t get stuck at good attendance (the “coming”), or at salvation. New life must be fed the Word, nurtured in prayer, and led into discipleship. Service follows as an expression of living faith.

These values – often called **Core Values** – are the basic truths upon which the work of an organization rests. The foundation for the work of the Women’s Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren is found in our Statement of Faith. This document is in our Constitution that you’ll find in the Organizational Tools section of this Handbook. It is similar to the Statement used by our entire denomination, a listing of what we believe to be the Biblical truth about our faith.

Here is a list of some Core Values that you might discuss with your leadership team in order to decide what is most important to you in your ministry and where you will place your highest priority. As with so much of our work for the Lord, it is better to do a few things well than to attempt to do too many things. The source of this list is the Women’s Ministry instructional staff at Multnomah Bible College and Biblical Seminary in Portland, Oregon. It was presented at a workshop there, and is not copyrighted, so you are free to copy and use it.

Core Values

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fellowship/Friendship of Believers | <input type="checkbox"/> Team Leadership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Witnessing Awareness (Evangelism) | <input type="checkbox"/> Openness and Transparency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discipleship of New Believers | <input type="checkbox"/> Eagerness to Change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring of Believers | <input type="checkbox"/> Asking “Why?” Welcomed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling | <input type="checkbox"/> Godly Servant Leader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Integrated Prayers | <input type="checkbox"/> Involving/Training for Attendees |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Word Centered | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Caring of Needs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life-application of Biblical Teaching | <input type="checkbox"/> _____* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Growth in Knowing God | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excellence in Quality Sustained | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity and Innovation Welcomed | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Relevance Noted | <input type="checkbox"/> * Add your own thoughts |

Let's Talk About Strategy

Now that you have focused your vision and defined your values, how will you do this ministry?

Look back to the six-item “wish list” for the women in your community and think about them one by one:

1. **Come** How will you get women to come?
 - Perhaps you'll need to get a small *focus group* together to see what women are thinking. What interests do women in the community have which may serve as “hooks” to bring them in? What are their perceived needs? Who are they concerned about? What has worked before to bring newcomers? What hasn't worked? Who is your target group, and how will you get their attention? These responses will be unique to your part of the country, the range of ages you try to reach, the leadership skills of your group, and so on. For example, crafts have worked well in the past in certain areas of our country, while in others, women have little discretionary time and are not at all interested in them.
 - Perhaps you'll use an *Assessment Survey* for the same purpose as the small focus group – but with input from many more women. Samples of these are in the Resource section of this Handbook, and are also widely available in resource books. You could also quite easily devise your own.
 - Perhaps your leadership team will need to take a close look at your *environment*. A useful tool, also from the teaching staff at Multnomah Bible College and Biblical Seminary, entitled “Your Church, Your Culture,” is found at the end of this section.

2. **Personal faith** You must first recognize this as the basic, most fundamental need. You are not, after all, just a fellowship, a support group, or a service organization. You are a birthing unit! How will you reach the unsaved? Will you establish a seekers' Bible study? Will you teach your Christian women personal evangelism strategies? Will you partner with other groups in your church to make home visits for the purpose of evangelism? Will you sponsor an event solely for the purpose of bringing visitors so they can hear the Gospel?

3. **Growth in grace (Christian virtue) and knowledge** What will you teach? What will you model? How will you build a sense of community? Author Chris Adams, in her book *Women Reaching Women* (see Resource Book List) uses a visual picture of a wheel to demonstrate this. In her “Women's Enrichment Ministry Wheel” she shows “God and His Word” at the center, with the inner ring of “Spiritual Growth” surrounding it. The outer ring is divided into four areas: Physical, Relational, Mental, and Emotional. She described it this way:

All ministry must be centered on God's Word and our relationship to the God of the Word. Spiritual growth must be the ultimate goal of each of the spokes: relational (social, family, communication, witnessing, service, fellowship), physical (health, nutrition, addictions), emotional (self-esteem, depression, crisis counseling), and mental (decision-making, time management, finances, leadership skills). In this Handbook you'll find excellent resources for Bible studies and mentoring as well as other programming helps to encourage spiritual growth in your women.

4. **Exercising spiritual gifts** You'll need to teach what Scripture tells about them, help women identify what gifts the Spirit has given them, and provide opportunities for the use of these gifts.
5. **Reproduce** How will you teach women to evangelize others? To share Christ? What events could be planned specifically for reaching unbelievers?
6. **Travel safely "Home"** How can you teach and encourage a faithful life? How can you warn of danger to the soul? How can you support the elderly or ill, walking beside them to the Heavenly Gates?

Some formats for you to consider when thinking about strategy:

- Small Groups - Be sure to think about varieties of time and location to accommodate working women, those with young children, those who do not like to drive in the evening, etc.
- Bible Studies
- Prayer Groups
- Special, targeted events
- Service opportunities
- Leadership Training
- Retreats (see Developing a Ministry)
- Support Groups
- Mentoring (see Developing a Ministry)

Evaluation

When planning is complete and ministry is ongoing, don't forget to continually evaluate and correct course. Just because something worked well last year doesn't mean it will again, or that it cannot benefit from some creative "tweaking."

Here are some questions to ask on a regular and annual basis, stated by Laurie McIntyre in workshop materials from Elmbrook Church in Wisconsin:

- Who are we trying to reach?
- Who is actually being reached?
- Who is absent? Why?
- How has our audience changed?
- What are their greatest needs?
- What are our current barriers to ministry?
- How can they be removed?
- What are our greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- In what ways do we need to change?

That brings up the sometimes-difficult word: CHANGE. Jesus' message to the world is unchanging, but methods can and must change in response to a constantly changing environment for ministry. Move carefully and prayerfully, showing respect for those whose hard work in the past has brought your group this far (remembering that some day your ideas will be considered old-fashioned!), while encouraging newer and younger members to apply their creativity and energy to new challenges. Expect change. Explain it well to your team and to your group. Listen carefully. Be patient with the pace. But persevere!

**All of this ministry happens by design and intention.
It begins with Vision, builds on Values,
and proceeds with Strategies.**

WMCLB exists to help you accomplish it. Remember that our purpose is to “equip, encourage, and edify the women of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren for ministry, service and fellowship.” In this Handbook you’ll find useful tools to make it happen.

So make good use of these tools, and – most importantly – stay in close communication with the Master Carpenter Himself.

You are His worker, on His building, for His glory.

Your Church, Your Culture

Part of Country

East Coast
Northwest
Southwest

West Coast
Northeast
Southeast

Mid-West

Culture

Urban
Suburban

Rural
Homogeneous Group

Ethnically Mixed

Economic Situation (think about what you can charge for special events)

“Blue Collar”
Upper Class

Middle Class

Educational Background (think about what kind of Bible studies you should choose)

High School
Technical Training

High School Plus
College

Graduate Work

Your Church Family Structure

Denominationally Tied
Evangelical

Independent
Mission Affiliated

Main-line Protestant
Church Plant

Philosophy of Your Church

Seeker Sensitive
Purpose Driven
Social Concern/Issues
Apologetic Fortress (Defender of Faith)

Mission
Small-Group Based
Institutional Association

Relational

Leadership Structure

All-Male Leadership
Women’s Ministry Team
Part-Time Paid?

Congregational Rule
Women’s Ministry Director
Full-Time Paid?

Male/Female Staff

Financial Focus

Missions	Evangelism	Social Concerns	Specialized Focus
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Church Strengths (Spiritual Gifts)

Evangelism	Teaching	Service	Discipleship
Faith	Exhortation	Prophecy	Giving

Relationships with God

New Believers	Mature Believers	“Seekers”
Growing Believers	Raised in the Church	New to Church Life

Relationships with Others

Healthy, Bonded Relationship	Autonomous	Cliques
Generational Splits	Generational Mix	

Season of Life

Young (25-35)	Strong Mix of Ages
Middle age (36-55)	Single
Older (55+)	Married with Children
Empty Nesters	Retired and Traveling

Other questions to consider

What ministries are already established for your women?
What hasn't “worked” for the women of your church?
What has been effective in ministry to your women?
What is the passion of the women who want to minister?
What is your leadership's (primarily the senior pastor's) view of women in ministry and the ministry of women within the church?
What needs to be “birthed” and what needs to be “buried”?