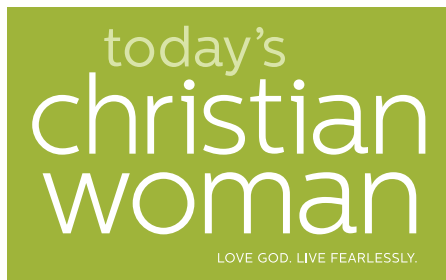


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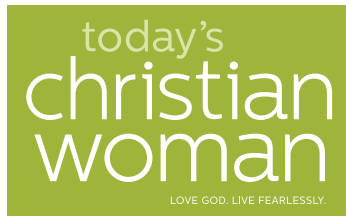


Ministering to Working Women

How your women's ministry can better meet the needs of women who work outside the home



A Women's Ministry Resource from:



Ministering to Working Women

How your women's ministry can better meet the needs of women who work outside the home

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Introduction

Confessions of a Bible Study Dropout

By Kelli B. Trujillo

In the past six years I've developed a rather poor record of dropping out of women's Bible study groups. I work from home as a writer and editor, and one of the supposed perks of this type of job is the freedom it gives me to create my own schedule. So, of course, it seemed obvious that I could (and *should*) attend the year-long morning women's Bible study offered at my church. And I *did* ... and it was great ... until I dropped out.

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I discovered that I just couldn't squeeze it in alongside my other work without piling on too much stress as I try to juggle work commitments, marriage, motherhood, and various other things. And my experience is not unique.

I've got some brilliant friends around the country; some of them are friends who've chosen to work at home as mothers and homemakers. Others work in careers as surgeons, lawyers, insurance advisors, newspaper editors, interior designers, museum directors, cardiologists, and corporate leaders. And a trend I've observed (that I'm certain would be borne out in a scientific study) is that often women who work in careers other than homemaking have a low participation rate in church women's ministries.

Has this been your experience too? And if so, how can your women's ministry better reach out to women who work outside of the home or in a home-based business? In this download, you'll find some challenging thoughts to consider as you evaluate your own women's ministry as well as some inspiring, practical ideas and strategies for better connecting with and ministering to the career women in your church.

Oh, and by the way, I'm excitedly looking forward to a women's Bible study I *will* be participating in this summer at my church. Thankfully our women's ministry group has been intentional about offering evening Bible studies for working women as well as some short-commitment studies. This July I'll be doing a study

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that's just five weeks long ... I'm making space in my schedule for it! This is something I *can* do and I can't wait for the spiritual nourishment I'll find there.

Grace,

Kelli B. Trujillo

Managing Editor, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN downloads,
Christianity Today International



Leader's Guide

How to use this Women's Ministry Resource

As a women's ministry leader, you've got a lot on your plate. Whether your church is large and you've got other co-leaders and volunteers helping to run things or you're the sole leader of a women's ministry program in a small congregation, you've got a big job in front of you. At Today's Christian Woman and Gifted for Leadership, we share your passion for ministering to women—and we want to do all we can to equip and inspire you in your efforts. That's why we've created these "Women's Ministry Essentials" downloads, designed specifically for women's ministry leaders like you to help you think through key aspects of your ministry, to provide new ideas, and to help you evaluate your current ministry and cast a vision for its future.

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How to Use this Women's Ministry Essentials Download

The bulk of this download is meant for you—and, of course, for any of your women's ministry co-leaders. It's full of articles and extras to both encourage you and address practical issues in how to run your women's ministry. But toward the end, you'll find a "Tools" section that includes an assessment tool you and other ministry leaders can use to evaluate your ministry as well as a second assessment tool you can pass out to the women in your church to gauge their thoughts and feelings. The price you paid for this download includes permission to make up to 1000 copies of this material for your local church's use—so use these assessment tools with as many women as you'd like!



▶ Leader
to Leader



Why I Don't Do Women's Ministry

When you don't quite fit in traditional women's ministry.

By Amy Simpson

I really hate those "home parties." You know, the ones where you go to someone's house and hear about the latest gadgets, skin-care products, or overpriced home decor. The hostess serves brownies and everyone talks about their kids and how busy they are. Then the sales representative stands up and gives a hyper-peppy presentation punctuated by polite gasps of delight from the women packed in the living room.

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Why I Don't Do Women's Ministry

A few of the women get really giddy about the whole thing and start ordering everything that catches their eye. Some of them find just a couple of things they like, grab another brownie, and head home. I twitch uncomfortably and look for the least expensive item on the order form. I feel obligated to order something. After all, the hostess cleaned her house and made snacks for us, and if I don't order she might not get her free "hostess gift."

I learned my lesson when I once tried to leave one of those parties without buying anything. I had spent the entire party looking at my watch and thinking about how if I wanted to, I could make those doodads myself with some cardboard, fabric scraps, and magic markers. But I didn't want to. And I certainly couldn't imagine paying for any of them. But as I tried to leave, the sales representative cornered me with a desperate smile and asked me what I was going to buy. Everyone else stared at me as if I had been caught shoplifting. I did manage to escape without lightening my checkbook, but not entirely unscathed.

I don't go to those parties anymore. I've conquered my sense of obligation to attend. I don't even try to come up with excuses anymore. I just picture myself at the party, looking at my watch, wondering why in the world I agreed to spend my evening there. I imagine the feeling of watching the other women and wondering why I seem to be the only one who isn't enjoying myself tremendously. And I politely decline without bothering to explain.

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Why I Don't Do Women's Ministry

I must confess I've had the same experience with women's ministry events. It's been a long time since I attended a women's Bible study, luncheon (why don't they just call them "lunch"?), or anything else just for Christian women. I've spent enough of my life feeling bored, self-conscious, and out of place (think junior-high gym class).

In my experience, the people who plan these events make all kinds of assumptions about who I am as a woman. For starters, most assume I'm a full-time stay-at-home mom (and the best time of day for a meeting is, of course, 10:00 in the morning). They also seem to believe I enjoy making refrigerator magnets, spend most of my time thinking about fashion and chocolate, and can think of nothing better than getting away from my husband and kids (even though I've been at work all day), and hanging out with my "girlfriends." This isn't me at all.

I used to think I just didn't fit. Somehow I wasn't like most women, and this probably had something to do with my spiritual life, so I should try harder to fit in. Now I realize that's not true. In fact, the funny thing is, I don't really think I'm a misfit. Most women I know feel the same way I do about women's ministry programming. I know that women's ministries do connect with many women and provide important opportunities for growth. But they seem to be focused on serving a relatively small segment of the population. So I wonder: Why do so many of our women's ministry efforts treat women as if they all have the same lifestyle, schedule, goals, affinity for June Cleaver, and penchant for pink roses? And why are we expected to call ourselves "girlfriends"?

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Why I Don't Do Women's Ministry

I don't mean to undermine the importance of women's ministry, or trivialize the effective ministry that's happening in many churches. But by and large, I believe our churches are running shallow, one-dimensional programs that miss important opportunities to minister to many women.

And I suspect I'm not the only one who has felt misunderstood and discouraged by the "ministry" we have experienced. We can be and do so much more. Why don't we challenge each other? Why don't we take ourselves seriously? Why do we alienate so many women with our ministries?

So how can we make women's ministries more effective? Here are a few ideas:

1. Recognize that women are not all the same. Those who are called to women's ministry have their work cut out for them. It's not an easy job to minister to such a diverse group of people. But anyone who wants to appeal to women in general must recognize that women come in many different shapes and must create programs that appeal to more than one type. This is the same for any demographic group in the church, but perhaps most of all for women. Our lifestyles, circumstances, and preferences are so diverse. Not everything has to appeal to every woman—but if NOTHING about a church's women's ministry program appeals to a particular woman, she'll quickly get the message that she's not OK and not wanted.

2. Respect women's intellectual abilities. Too often, we seem to buy into the world's lie that we are purely emotional beings, at the whim of fantasy and hormones, and not smart enough to go deep. God created us to feel and to think. Our souls hunger

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not only for the presence of God, but also for knowledge of his truth. Ministries that focus only on women's emotional needs, or that stay on a shallow level, are doing a disservice to their women and to the larger body of Christ. And they're failing to reach many women, who will never be engaged by a ministry that does not challenge their intellect.

3. Recognize that women are not just wives and mothers.

Women aren't required to fill these roles in order to see God's purpose for their lives. I'm both a wife and a mother, but if I were neither, God's calling on my life would not go away. It's pointless to ignore the importance of these roles in the lives of many women, but we must acknowledge that women are unmarried, childless, divorced, single, struggling with infertility, focused on their careers, and everything in between. They're all important to God, and none of them should have the impression that God's plans don't include them.

4. Make it safe to talk about real life. In my experience, most topics are off the "approved" list at women's ministry gatherings. This is a systemic problem in many churches, so I don't think it's fair to blame it on women's ministries. But if a women's ministry program were able to make it safe to talk honestly and biblically about our experiences with spiritual doubt, depression, injustice, loneliness, temptation, abuse, regrets, sex, career success, insecurities, need to achieve, perfectionism, financial worries, sexual harassment, boredom, anxiety, exhaustion, great books, compulsive eating, addictions, and things that keep us awake at night, that ministry would produce some powerful life change.

5. Affirm real women. We should not walk out feeling worse about our potential in Christ than we did when we walked in. Many women feel torn down and devalued by the church—simply because they are women or they are the sort of women God has made them to be. And while some may think that I seem to be whining about my own experiences or feeling sorry for myself, I'm actually not too worried about myself. My commitment to Christ and to the church is intact and independent of what I experience in women's ministry. I am truly concerned about those women who have written off the church, and by association Christ, because of what they have heard the church telling them about their own worth. Any women's ministry program must help everyday women feel like they belong.

6. Challenge women. Besides the nursery, women's ministry may be the only place where many of our ministries seem designed only to make us comfortable. Instead, women's ministries should be catalysts for greater spiritual growth by nudging us out of our comfort zones and into new, risky places of dependence upon God.

I realize these ideas aren't very specific. So here are a couple more specific thoughts:

- I belonged to one church that had a sports ministry for women.
- Consider running a book club that encourages intellectually stimulating conversations.
- How about get-togethers that don't require mothers to leave their children behind? Moms who work outside their homes aren't looking for more time away from their

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kids, so they might be more likely to attend events that welcome their children.

- How about helping women to form intentional mentoring relationships with each other? Many women are looking for mentors but don't know how to ask for one, get started, or keep it going.
- Hold a lunchtime Bible study for women who work outside their homes, in a location convenient to their work.
- Ask women to share their stories, or to teach each other about something they're passionate about.
- Get women together to do some powerful service in your community—and welcome families to participate as well.
- What if interested women ran a business together and used the proceeds to help other women get on their feet?

These are just a few ideas—and I hope they've stimulated some of your own.

Amy Simpson is Vice President and Publisher of the Leadership Media Group at Christianity Today International. This article was originally published as two separate posts on GIFTED FOR LEADERSHIP in August and September of 2007. You can read the posts and the many spirited comments they generated at http://blog.christianitytoday.com/giftedforleadership/2007/08/why_i_dont_do_womens_ministry.html and http://blog.christianitytoday.com/giftedforleadership/2007/09/ideas_for_womens_ministry.html.



A Paradigm Shift

Who most women's ministries exclude . . .
and what to do about it.

Interview of Ronna Detrick Miller by Joy-Elizabeth Lawrence

Ronna Detrick Miller has been a speaker, teacher, and trainer for over 15 years in both religious and secular settings. She currently owns and manages a coaching and consulting business called Renegade Voices. Ronna is also a blogger (<http://www.ronnajomiller.blogspot.com>), a spiritual director, and a mother of two. In the following interview, you'll hear some of Ronna's candid thoughts about the common disconnect between working women and church women's ministries.

Ministering to Working Women

A Paradigm Shift

In your experience, what demographic do most churches focus on in regards to women's ministry? Why do you think this is?

More times than not, intentional focus is not given to demographics; rather, a broad "invitation" is made and whoever shows up becomes the demographic. Without meaning to ostracize on purpose, many women's ministry opportunities are scheduled at times that would not work for women who work outside the home or don't take into consideration the time constraints those women have.

If full-time, female staff is limited or non-existent in a church, it is nearly impossible to create a culture within that church in which ministry by and for women is truly affirmed. When money, staffing, and resourcing are not prioritized for this purpose by the church itself, women (especially those who work outside the home) cannot see or experience themselves as a priority either. When these kinds of women's programs are facilitated by laity, though they may be passionate and committed, their time and resourcing is also extremely limited, thus making it hard to exert a concerted, ongoing effort.

I think this is because churches often focus where they know they'll have success. It is easier to create women's ministries that appeal to new, stay-at-home moms or the older women who have been part of the church for years. But it takes intentional, creative, resourced, and persistent work to minister to specific demographic groups like women who work outside of the home. Sadly, those within the church are often too taxed and weary to take this on or sustain it.

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A Paradigm Shift

Have you ever been involved with a women's ministry in which a significant amount of the participants were women who worked outside the home?

I experienced a short stint with a group of women who primarily worked outside the home. Most of us were from the same church, but others participated who either did not attend church at all or went to other communities of faith. Interestingly, we self-organized and met on our own—with no resourcing, promotion, leadership, or support by the church. We met for no other reason than mutual support and friendship. Though we had studies or books we considered from time to time, there was no particular agenda other than relationship. It was probably the best small group I've ever been part of.

Why do you think it is that many women who work outside the home are not involved in church ministry, specifically women's ministries?

More often than not, the reasons why women who work outside the home are not involved in ministry are because creative, appropriate, time-sensitive options that fit their life are not being offered, and because their time and energy are incredibly limited. For a woman who works outside of the home, to add one more thing to the schedule, it would have to add significant value and somehow *not* take away from the many other pressing priorities she manages in her busy life. Those kinds of "additions" are hard to come by.

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A Paradigm Shift

In your opinion, what's the best thing women's ministries can do to involve and minister to women who work outside the home?

Having women in full-time, salaried, significant leadership roles within the church will make the largest impact.

Women who work outside the home need to see and be led by other women who do the same; whose outside-the-home work is inside-the-church. These are the women who can think on behalf of other women like them, who can build and sustain programs that will minister to those needs, and who will see and understand the unique realities of these women's lives and respond respectfully and profoundly.

In summary, why is it that traditional women's ministries so often exclude women who work outside the home—even if that exclusion is more accidental than intentional?

These women are excluded from "traditional" women's ministries, though I wouldn't say it's "accidental." It's reflective of paradigms that too often don't think of women first; instead, they're an afterthought. Churches have been created and sustained on

*Ronna Detrick Miller mentions issues of outdated paradigms, women in church leadership positions and "cultural realities that no longer exist." The problem of churches' lack of ministries to women who work outside the home is more than a question of which program to use or what time to meet. It's a problem that calls for a redefinition of what it means to be a woman in the church today. If you're interested in reading more about this topic, consider reading **Living on the Boundaries: Evangelical Women, Feminism and the Theological Academy** by Nicola Hoggard Creegan and Christine D. Pohl (InterVarsity Press, 2005), and **Liberating Tradition: Women's Identity and Vocation in a Christian Perspective** by Kristina LaCelle-Peterson (Baker Academic, 2008)*

—J-E.L.

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A Paradigm Shift

aging models, outdated demographics, and cultural realities that no longer exist. "Traditional" women's ministries no longer apply. If nothing new is being created or developed then by the very nature of that choice, women are being excluded. And if women are not in significant positions of leadership, there is a "do as I say, not as I do" reality that is nearly impossible to overcome.

Joy-Elizabeth Lawrence (MCS, Regent College) is a freelance writer living in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with her husband.

REFLECT

- *Do you agree with Ronna that a paradigm-shift needs to take place for churches to truly minister to working women? Why or why not?*
- *Ronna heavily stresses the importance of having women on staff at a church as full-time employees. Do you agree with her emphasis on this point?*
- *If your church has women on staff, has it made a difference in your women's ministry? Or if your church doesn't have women on staff, do you think that's hindered your women's ministry? Why or why not?*



Moving Targets

Rethinking women's ministry in our ever-changing culture.

By Naomi Gaede-Penner

“I thought planning women's programs would be easier,” sighs the leader of women's ministries as she sits down in the pastor's office.

“What seems to be the problem?” he asks.

“Well, the women in our church are so different. There's Barb, who runs her own company. We designed an evening Bible study for her and some others, but since she is away from her family all day, she'd be more interested in attending a couples' Bible study with her husband.

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"Then there is Mary, who is home with children all day, every day. She wants to get together with other mothers—anytime, anywhere, as long as she can get a break from her kids.

"Beth has a part-time, home-based business and doesn't know if she fits better with the career women's breakfast or the mothers of preschoolers.

"Nancy is a single mother who works full-time, and childcare is always a concern. Plus, she doesn't feel comfortable with any group in the church.

"Ellen is retired but works as a volunteer tutor—when she isn't taking care of her mother. So she doesn't have time to invest in a weekly program."

"And don't forget," adds the pastor, "our single women can hardly be lumped together: Lois is a widow; Betty is 40 and never married; Christy is 22 ..."

"Our church isn't large enough to have separate ministries for each of these women," concludes the women's leader. "So, how do we minister to them all?" Given the opportunities, choices, and stresses of today's woman, it's no wonder churches have begun to approach women's ministries creatively.

Tracking the Trends

A look at current social trends bears out the experience of churches: today's women are complex. Studying these trends also provides information that can help churches design effective women's ministries.

Consider just two trends that affect most church ministries:

I. Women working outside the home. Over the last decade, more than 70 percent of American women work in some type of career outside of the home (or in a home-based business). "A highly visible consequence for the church," states Lyle E. Schaller in *It's a Different World*, "is the shortage of volunteers in those churches that have traditionally depended on homemakers to fill volunteer roles and the decline in participation by younger women in the women's organizations."

Pat Wilson, director of adult ministries at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church in Englewood, Colorado, has felt the impact of this change. "Last year we had 450 women attend the annual mother-daughter tea. This year, we could find only two volunteers to plan it, so we had to cancel it."

Because women working outside the home have less time to participate, they often opt to attend events that include family members rather than participate in activities strictly for women.

2. Women's quest for content and spirituality. Sherry Stahly, coordinator of women's ministries for the Rocky Mountain Conservative Baptist Association, developed a Needs Assessment Survey to identify churched women's concerns. Initial results show an increased interest in spirituality. She comments, "The survey assesses needs

in areas such as self-esteem, emotions, parenting skills, and relationships. The responses we've collected thus far show the greatest interest lies in personal spiritual growth."

Pat Wilson verifies this: "I'm finding that whether the woman works outside or inside the home, she wants something challenging to ponder. She doesn't want something 'just for fun' or entertainment; she wants programs that offer something meaningful."

What Is Working?

What are we to do with these challenges and changes?

Some churches continue with traditional sewing circles and bake sales, while others experiment, offering ministries such as video-style Bible studies in the marketplace. Some churches try a general-interest approach, inviting all women to quarterly Saturday brunches. Others slice the pie more thinly and attempt to promote programs and activities for specific women in a variety of situations.

A number of strategies transcending differences in church size, available resources, or types of women are working.

Remember your mothers. Women's ministry leaders are nearly unanimous: mothers' groups work. Some ministries target mothers of teens, employing a variety of formats in doing so. "Ours is mostly a support group," says one leader. "We don't have speakers, since our purpose is primarily relational. So far, we find it to be effective." Another says, "The mother of a teenager has very little discretionary time since she is often working outside the home or going to school or volunteering in ministry. Ministries for this stage of a woman's life must have a strong purpose."

Offer meat-and-potatoes spirituality. Leaders of women's ministries continue to see Bible studies flourishing.

"Although Bible studies build relationships and provide opportunities for caring, that's not the only reason they work," says Janie Miller, a women's ministry leader.

"Women want content and application, and a Bible study accomplishes both purposes."

Another lay leader tells about the dual focus of their Bible studies: "Our women's Bible study is a winner because, among other reasons, we offer concurrently a Bible lesson for the preschool children. The women can do something for themselves without feeling guilty about leaving their children."

Integrate. "Although many tend to think of women's ministries as activities only for women, we've seen a lot of enthusiasm about our groups designed for both men and women, and partly because they meet women's needs," says Pat Wilson. "Our *koinonia* groups include men and women, singles, retired persons, homemakers, and women working outside the home." These groups of 12 to 17 people mix Bible study and fellowship.

"In fact," Pat adds, "we have a number of divorced women who find they fit best in these groups. Having come from troubled marriages, they like being with healthy families."

Help women evangelize women. Whether church women are at home or in the marketplace, many are extending their hands to unchurched women. It is not uncommon to find that in ministries to mothers of preschoolers, one-third of the women who attend are unchurched.

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"This ministry to mothers becomes a natural way to get women through the church doors. It meets their needs, and I feel comfortable inviting my neighbor," says one young mother.

Women's sports is another evangelistic ministry. "It's not threatening to invite my non-Christian friend to join our women's softball team," says another woman. "Besides, softball is fun, although it's not the usual way I think about evangelism."

Another church uses its annual women's Christmas Candlelight Dinner to help women reach other women. The dinner is held off the church site—at the community college, for instance. A beautifully decorated room creates a festive spirit for a carefully planned program that includes music, an evangelistic speaker, and a presentation on local missions.

Last year, a leader from an inner-city women's ministry spoke, and the participants were extended an opportunity to contribute to the inner-city program. One corner of the room contained handicrafts made by women in the church. The craftswomen kept 90 percent of the sales price, and the remaining 10 percent went toward underwriting the evening.

"We've done this for six years, and last year our tickets were sold out the first Sunday they were offered," says the women's ministry leader. "Not only is this a success with our church's women, but about one-third of the women attending are guests, who learn about our women's ministry."

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The women's ministries of Galilee Baptist Church in Denver have extended into the marketplace. Every week, in four downtown offices, women gather with brown-bag lunches to view a 30-minute video that addresses, from a biblical perspective, such needs as self-esteem, friendship, and stress. The leaders, who come from different churches and denominations, are trained at Galilee to conduct a discussion following the viewing.

"After one year," Denise Farrar comments, "one hundred different women have attended, about 50 percent of whom are non-Christian."

In one way or another, women's ministries find they must work to keep up with the American woman, who is no longer found in one place. Among the cacophony of change and challenge, however, bright sparks of enthusiasm and quiet inner growth are found as churches find creative ways to minister to women.

Naomi Gaede-Penner is an author and a counseling instructor at Denver Seminary. A full version of this article was first published under the title "Ministries Among Today's Women" in the Winter 1991 issue of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.



What Working Women Say

Insights and ideas for women's ministry from women who work outside the home.

On p. 35 of this download, you'll find an evaluation tool you can use to find out what the women in your church who work outside of the home really think and feel. But take a moment first to consider some of the candid comments and helpful ideas shared with us by women around the country.

Ministering to Working Women

What Working Women Say

"When I attend a women's Bible study or event, I need some time to get to know the other women. I'm not interested in coming from work to a Bible study where I have to watch a video or listen to a speaker for an hour before I can talk to the women sitting near me ... and then only answer specific questions related to the video. I need something related to my life!"

—Amy, editor at a publishing company

"When people at church find out I'm a general surgeon, my career is frequently a conversation stopper, especially in conversations with Christian women. Suddenly, they don't believe that we can have much in common, so there isn't always a lot to say. Maybe they're right. People often cannot understand how I could choose to fix a hernia over feeding my 6 month-old peas and mushy oatmeal.

"Perhaps I'm too hard on people and it's my own sense of guilt that makes me feel judged. But I also think that women who work need to be applauded for answering God's call on their life the same as the women who answer the call to stay home. Some women work because they have to and some because they want to, but we all love our families the same. We who are career-minded often struggle with balance and guilt issues enough on our own—we don't need the 'help' of women at church looking at us with a judgmental eye."

—Jennifer, surgeon

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What Working Women Say

"I think it's important for women who work to feel validated in their choice to do so, encouraged along the way, and trained in how to continually seek the Lord's guidance in making healthy decisions for their families, professionally and personally. So for me, an ideal women's ministry event would be a series of classes/workshops or a Bible study focused on how to be sure I'm making constructive decisions for my family while working. This would include topics like parenting, marriage, financial responsibilities, and still making time for myself (like exercise, Bible study, and friendships)."

—*Sarah, marriage and family therapist*

"One thing I lack is older women in the church to look up to because it seems that most of them have been traditional homemakers. I wish I could find a Christian mentor—a woman who has juggled both work outside the home and being a mother at the same time. Instead, particularly among the older women in the church, there seems to be an element of judgment toward the women who work outside the home. As moms, we're all trying to do the best we can, and it's not like we have specific 'mom standards' or achievements or goals that we can check off the list! Mothering is an ongoing job ... I'm learning! It would be so great if I could get input and encouragement along the way from a wise Christian woman who's made it through the juggling act of career and motherhood."

—*Katie, public-school Spanish teacher*

Ministering to Working Women

What Working Women Say

"I think a lot of the problems that I have had with women's ministry events is trying to 'fit in' when I am at events that I actually can attend. I have made an effort in the past to participate in women's events, and I found that the 'non-working moms' are closer with each other and don't realize that others are feeling excluded. It seems like the only thing that the majority of these women want to talk about is home life and children because that is the primary focus of their life, and I can understand that. But the problem is that I spend 50 percent (or more) of my life doing something *else* that I would like to be able to talk about that too. Instead, it often seems that the subject of work or career is taboo. So how can I really connect with others if I cannot talk honestly about a huge and important part of my life?"

—Julie, independent insurance agent



Beyond the Tea Party

5 Strategies for Reaching Working Women.

By Kelli B. Trujillo

Traditional women's ministry events like tea parties, morning Bible studies, and retreats can do a great job impacting the lives of the women who attend! But we must think outside the "traditional" box when it comes to ministering to women whose career is a primary focus of their energy, passion, and time. So, along with the many ideas you've read so far, here are five more principles you can employ in your women's ministry to better meet the needs of women who work outside of the home or in home-based businesses.

1. Use Technology. Women who work part- or full-time in careers other than homemaking often face a serious time crunch. They simply don't have the available hours in the day for meeting with friends and receive spiritual encouragement. Make a commitment as a women's ministry to build up the working women in your church by sending email encouragements to them. You can also use avenues like Facebook, Twitter, or a women's ministry website to help these women feel connected to others at your church without having to physically attend a meeting. You could even try something completely out of the box such as an online Bible study or accountability group in which women can connect online from home rather than attending an in-person meeting.

2. Include low-commitment events. Many working women often cannot set aside the time for a Bible study group that meets weekly throughout the year; but these same women may be able to make a shorter commitment. Consider hosting a group that meets just three to five times to discuss a topic or study a theme. Or create a group that meets monthly throughout the year rather than weekly, such as a book club, a prayer group, or a low-key group that meets for coffee and accountability.

3. Invite husbands and/or kids. This sounds counterintuitive, doesn't it? Naturally women's ministries usually focus on events and groups that are for women only. But women who work outside the home and who have very limited free time often have to choose between contributing to their marriage by spending time with their husband or ditching him to go to an evening women's ministry event.

Ministering to Working Women

Beyond the Tea Party

Or they may feel like they want to spend more time with their kids, so they're not likely to skip out on family time in order to go to something at church. Consider creating some fun events that enrich marriages by including husbands, or seek out ways to nourish the parent-child relationship by inviting kids along too. The best way to do this? Organize some fun social events that include husbands, such as a co-ed game night, group dinner dates, or co-ed service opportunities. Or plan some non-traditional play-dates for working moms, such as a movie and pizza night for moms and kids or a mother-daughter slumber party. Women will bond and build relationships with each other—and will have some good family time in the process!

4. Facilitate Friendships. Attending scheduled church events—even if they are in the evening—can be very tough for women whose schedules already feel too full. But they are often able to make time for meeting with other women if it's on their own terms—at a time and place they've arranged themselves. Make it a priority to strategically encourage friendships among women in your church. For example, set up a mentoring program and pair up interested women, asking them to set their own terms for when and how often they get together. Or identify some of the career women in your church who want to minister to others but don't have the time. Ask each of those women if they'd be willing to arrange a fun get-together with other women simply for the purpose of deepening friendships. An ideal way to do this is to help get working women together for a lunch break at a restaurant near their workplaces.

5. Encourage women in their chosen vocation. Many women who work as homemakers or stay-at-home moms have been hurt and undervalued in our society by the continuous question, "What do you do?" Our culture's obsession with defining a person's worth by his or her job can be very damaging to women who've chosen not to work outside of the home. But often, in a well-meaning effort to uphold the importance of stay-at-home motherhood, churches make the opposite mistake of diminishing and undervaluing the importance of a working woman's career.

There are a few key things you can do to help career-oriented women feel valued in your church community and women's ministry. First, simply ask women about their jobs and try to develop a good understanding of what they do in a given workday. Ask for prayer requests about situations at work. Invite women to share about successes they've experienced in their career. Check in with women who are facing stress or difficulties on the job and encourage them. Second, help women who work outside the home see their job as a calling and an avenue of Christ-focused service. Consider running a career-focused women's Bible study or ask your pastor to preach a sermon on the topic of vocation. (See the Recommended Resources list p. 43 for some specific articles and Bible study ideas.)

Kelli B. Trujillo is an author and editor. Her newest book, Faith-Filled Moments (Wesleyan), will be published in the Fall of 2009.



► Evaluation Tools for Leaders



Evaluate Your Ministry to Working Women

Take some time to honestly reflect on how well your women's ministry is reaching out to and meeting the needs of the women in your church who work outside of the home or run home-based businesses. Use this evaluation as a launching pad for creative brainstorming with your leadership team. Also, be sure to invite several women from your church who work outside the home or in home-based businesses to fill out the "Tell Us What You Think!" survey on p. 40, making sure to include some women who *don't* usually participate in your women's ministry events or groups. Use their responses to help you evaluate your women's ministry, set goals, and dreaming up new ideas.

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Evaluate Your Ministry to Working Women

1. *What percentage of women in your church (regular attendees and church members) "work" as stay-at-home moms or homemakers? (Take a guess—this doesn't need to be exact!)*

2. *What percentage of women in your church "work" full-time or part-time in a career outside of the home or in a home-based business? (Again, take your best guess.)*

3. *Now consider the women who regularly participate in your women's ministry programs (Bible-study groups, special events, and so on). Does the participation of women roughly match the percentages you've written above? Jot down here the general make-up of women's ministry participants at your church:*

_____ *Stay-at-home moms or homemakers*

_____ *Women who work outside of the home or in a home-based business*

Ministering to Working Women

Evaluate Your Ministry to Working Women

4. Off the top of your head, what percentage of your women's ministry groups and events are offered during the day (when most women who work outside the home could not attend)? What percentage are offered on evenings or weekends? How does attendance between daytime or evening events compare?

5. Due to the time constraints in the lives of most women who work outside of the home or in a home-based business, they are often less able to participate in extra church events. With this practical caveat in mind, what do you feel would be a good goal for improving the involvement of career-oriented women in your women's ministry?

Ministering to Working Women

Evaluate Your Ministry to Working Women


6. Based on what you've read in this download and the feedback you've received from women in your church, what are some needs and desires that are unique to women who work outside the home or in a home-based business that your women's ministry could better address?

7. What are some changes your women's ministry might consider making to better reach out to women in the "career" stage of life?

Ministering to Working Women

Evaluate Your Ministry to Working Women

Meet with your pastor or another key women's ministry leader to talk about your vision and action steps, inviting his or her insights and ideas.



To get a sense of what participants think, be sure to pass out and tally the results of the "Tell Us What You Think!" survey.



Tell Us What You Think!

We want to do a better job of ministering to the needs of women in our church family who work outside of the home or in a home-based business. Can you help us out by letting us know your honest opinions about our current women's ministry offerings, and your ideas about ways we can better meet your needs? We know you are busy, so we really appreciate your willingness to help us in this way.

Ministering to Working Women

Evaluate Your Ministry to Working Women

1. How "connected" do you feel to our church's women's ministry? (Be brutally honest—you won't hurt our feelings!)

Completely out-of-place, disconnected			Comfortable, involved, connected	
1	2	3	4	5

2. Have you ever felt excluded, judged, or out-of-place in our church or our women's ministry because you work outside of the home or in a home-based business?

I regularly feel that way			I've never felt that way	
1	2	3	4	5

3. Overall, do you feel encouraged and supported in your career by our church and women's ministry?

Definitely not		Yes, I feel encouraged and empowered to live out my calling in my work		
1	2	3	4	5

4. What do you wish our church or women's ministry better understood about your life as a woman who works outside the home or in a home-based business?

Ministering to Working Women

Evaluate Your Ministry to Working Women

5. Dream for a moment: What's one type of group, event, outing, or other ministry you'd love to participate in if we offered it?

6. If we offered groups, events, or other ministries that better fit your needs, realistically speaking, how often would you see yourself participating? (Circle one)

Weekly

Monthly

Every few months

Not sure if I'd have the time to participate at all

7. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us as we consider how to better minister to the women in our church who work outside the home or in home-based businesses?



Additional Resources

Books to help you further

The following articles, books, and Bible studies are ideal for you to pass along to the women in your church who work outside the home or to utilize in your existing women's Bible study program.

Balancing Work and Family Life from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**. This single session Bible study is available at <http://biblestudies.stores.yahoo.net/bawoandfali.html>.

Balancing Work and Home from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**. This six-week Bible study series covers several topics unique to working moms and is available at <http://biblestudies.stores.yahoo.net/bawoandho6st.html>.

Called to Work from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**. This single session Bible study is available at <http://biblestudies.stores.yahoo.net/cogune.html>.

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Additional Resources

Faith & Work from the Christianity Today Study series published by Thomas Nelson (2008; 128 pages). This 8-week small group study invites participants to explore the intersection between their calling in Christ and their career.

Faith in the Workplace, a web resource from Christianity Today International. Go to www.faithintheworkplace.com to find countless articles and insights about living out one's faith in Christ in the context of one's career.

Work is a Sacred Trust by Nancy Ortberg. This blog post from [GiftedForLeadership.com](http://www.GiftedForLeadership.com) can be found online at http://blog.christianitytoday.com/giftedforleadership/2007/03/work_is_a_sacred_trust.html.

Working 9 to 5: 5 surprising ways you can survive—and thrive—in your job by Verla Gillmor. This helpful article can be found online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/1999/novdec/9w6124.html>.

Working to Serve or Serving the Work? by Kelli Trujillo. This blog post from [GiftedForLeadership.com](http://www.GiftedForLeadership.com) can be found online at http://blog.christianitytoday.com/giftedforleadership/2007/09/working_to_serve_or_serving_th.html.

today's
christian
woman

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Christ-centered,
uniquely feminine



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