

Program Planning for Women's Groups

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PRC– Practical Resources for Churches

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Starting a Women's Group

If your church doesn't have a women's group yet, here are a few steps to take in establishing one.

Of course, you should **pray about it**.

You'll also want to **talk to other women in your church** and see who else is interested and willing to help you with organizing and leading the group.

If you're in a denominational church, there probably is a **national women's group** that you can plug into. This group may provide you with a set structure, purpose statement, resources, mission projects, etc.

You'll want to **let your church's leadership know** that you're interested in starting a group and get whatever approvals are needed.

Find out what the women in your church want from a group. You can do this with a **printed or online survey** as well as by having a get-together and discussing it. You should have a list of suggestions available.

Knowing the **purpose of your group** will help you when you start programming.

Purpose of the Group

It's good to have a purpose or mission statement so that you can refer to it when planning programs and evaluating your group. You can find examples of these by googling "women's church program mission statement" or something similar. Your mission statement can be simply a sentence or two and some things you might want to include are listed here.

- Help members grow closer to God
- Help members identify and use their spiritual gifts
- Help members improve themselves through practical life skills including healthy living
- Build friendships as members share and support each other
- Serve the local church and beyond

Practical Considerations

Diversity of program areas

If you're starting a new group or re-evaluating your current group, there are some practical considerations which will affect your programming. You'll want to attract as many women as possible so consider offering a diversity of programs. Women are not all the same. They may be single, married, or widowed; with or without children; working outside the home, etc. Choose resources that appeal to women's intellectual and spiritual sides, as well as their emotional sides. Some women love making crafts or doing needlework but other women want nothing to do with them. You may not be able to always offer a program that appeals to all the women in your church, but if you offer nothing that appeals to a particular woman, then she'll probably want nothing to do with your group.



Structure: small groups or circles

If you're in a large church, then you may have some options on how your group is structured. For instance, you might have small groups which meet once a month or so and focus on different areas of interest, such as book discussions or shawl ministry. Everyone can then come together a few times a year for a luncheon or to work together on a service project.

Where will you meet?

You may want to meet at your church, especially if you have a large group or need a large space for your program. Meeting in someone's home is another possibility and may be a less intimidating place for women who are not connected with your church but have been invited by a friend.

When will you meet?

It's sometimes very hard to find a good time to meet that works with everyone's schedules. Many older women prefer to meet during the day but this time doesn't work for most working women or those with children involved in school and other activities. You might want to consider alternating between day and night meetings each month. If there are a lot of women who work nearby, perhaps a lunchtime meeting on a weekday might work. An occasional program which children can attend along with their moms (or grandmas) might be fun.

Childcare

Some women may not be able to attend programs without childcare, so don't forget to arrange it if necessary.

Publicity

Make sure you have a person or team willing to publicize the group.

Plan your programs

It's also great to have a team to help you with program planning. You might want to lay out your plans for an entire year. Building in a break for summer or the holidays is something to think about. Consider having your programs relate to the season. Perhaps your group has a tradition, such as a spring tea or Christmas luncheon for thrift shop volunteers, which you'll want to continue. If not, how about starting a tradition?

Program Possibilities

Below is a list of possible program areas, but there are many other possibilities. Brainstorm with your group to add to this list.

- Bible or other studies
- Book or movie discussions
- Prayer or spiritual practices
- Mini-retreats or longer retreats
- Crafting for charity
- Other service and mission projects
- Outside speakers
- Social activities
- Seasonal programs

Online Resources

The list below includes denominational organizations for women. Most of these are considered mainline churches, except for The Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod. Much of the information on them pertains to those who belong to that denomination. However, if you have time to explore another denomination's website, you may find some things that could be useful.



- [Women of the ELCA](#) and [Gather magazine](#)
- [The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod: Lutheran Women’s Missionary League](#)
- [National Episcopal Church Women](#)
- [Presbyterian Women](#)
- [UCC Women](#)
- [United Methodist Women](#)

[The Resources area of the Women of the ELCA](#) does offer a number of free downloadable program resources, which can be used by women's groups of various

denominations. They're available in English and Spanish and may have a single session, several sessions, or be suitable for a short retreat.

[Julia Bettencourt Blog](#)'s blog includes an Event Themes index for women's ministry events with enough information in them to put together an event. There is also a section of the blog with women's devotionals.

Another website that offers free resources is [Women's Ministry Toolbox](#). It includes information for women's ministry leaders; tips on such things as forms, food, publicity, and childcare; ideas for special events; resource lists; and guest posts.

Caution

A word of caution in using any online resources that aren't related to your denomination. You might have to adapt them to fit with your church's theology and focus. You may also want to substitute a different charity from the ones suggested.

The [CTA](#) or Christian Tools for Affirmation website offers gifts to purchase but also offers [free downloadables](#) such as retreat guides. There are some free printables as well as items to purchase which go along with the themes for the retreats.

Of course, Pinterest is a great place to find ideas for program planning for your group. You can search for [women's church group programs](#) and see what comes up.

You can also find plenty of free discussion guides online for many books and movies.

Resources to Purchase

[Cokesbury](#) and other religious publishers, both denominational and ecumenical, offer a wide variety of resources, such as Bible and other studies, some specifically for women.

[Group Publishing](#) is a non-denominational publisher which offers resources for women's ministry, such as retreat and events kits, Bible studies and devotionals, resources for leaders, resources for moms ministry, gift items as well as digital downloads for events, devotions, service projects, leadership and more. Some resources available from Group include:

- [Women's Ministry in the 21st Century](#) has over 250 ideas for friendship building, service projects, devotions, Bible Studies, movie nights, retreat themes and outreach ideas. It also includes publicity ideas and photocopiable forms and

surveys. Group calls this “The Encyclopedia of Practical Ideas” and it’s a good reference book to have.

- [*Icebreakers Galore!*](#) has 160 icebreakers and games. Group says that “some of these...are rowdy and packed with energy, while others are quiet and full of thoughtful questions.”
- [*Chick Flicks*](#) is part of Group’s Dinner and a Movie series. It has ideas related to 12 movies including scriptures, recipes, decorating ideas, discussion questions, and other activities.

It’s interesting to note that both *Icebreakers Galore!* and *Chick Flicks* were once available to purchase from Group as hard copies but are now only available as PDF downloads. You can however, still find hard copies for sale from third-part sellers on Amazon.com.

Spirituality Resources

Many people find it hard to “just” pray or meditate. If you want to plan a program with a focus on spirituality, there are lots of creative options.

Prayer beads were once used primarily by Roman Catholics, but now many Protestants are rediscovering this ancient practice. You can purchase prayer beads or make your own and there are several books and websites with directions for making and using prayer beads. One book is [*A Bead and a Prayer: A Beginner's Guide to Protestant Prayer Beads.*](#)

[*Praying in Color*](#) is a book by Sybil MacBeth which is “an active, visual, and meditative way to pray: Active because you draw your prayers, visual because you see your prayers, and meditative because you revisit your prayers throughout the day.” A DVD is also available and the [website](#) has lots of information and free resources related to Praying in Color. Macbeth also published [*Pray and Color*](#), which is a coloring book which teaches how to use different types of prayer while you color.

If you want to explore spiritual journaling, I would recommend using [*Journaling: A Spiritual Journey*](#). It is out of print, but copies are available on Amazon from third-party sellers. It explores six different techniques for spiritual journaling.

[*Illuminated Journaling*](#) is for those who want to actually journal and illustrate in their Bibles while meditating on what they’ve read.

You might want to offer a mini-retreat on a Saturday morning or perhaps even a weekend retreat. There are resources available which go into the nuts and bolts of planning as well as offering schedules and activities for your retreat, based on different themes. [*A River in the Desert: 12 Retreats for Women's Groups*](#) is one such book. Again, it is out of print, but copies are available from third-party sellers on Amazon.

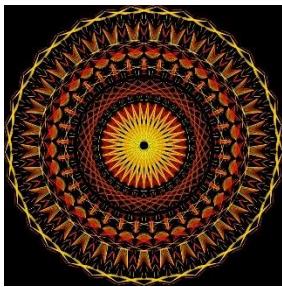
Labyrinth Resources

Programs based on the labyrinth are very popular. If you're not familiar with it, the labyrinth is a path which leads by a circular route to a center and back out again. Unlike a maze, there is only one path, so you won't get lost. Walking the labyrinth is a prayerful, meditative experience which may lead to spiritual transformation.



There are labyrinths all over the world and many are open to the public. There is an [online labyrinth locator](#) and plenty of websites and other resources with information about the labyrinth.

If you don't have a labyrinth in your area, [you can create your own](#). This can be accomplished simply by using stones or masking tape. There are also finger labyrinths which can be purchased or made.



A mandala is a type of labyrinth and a program can be based on them as well. It is a circular shape which represents wholeness and has been used for meditation and other purposes in many religions. Hildegarde of Bingen was a Christian mystic who illustrated her visions by creating mandalas. There are many free mandalas to download online, which can be used as meditative aids while coloring.

Crafting Resources

Crafting can be both a meditative experience as well as a way of providing items to [donate to charity](#). Many churches have a prayer shawl ministry, where shawls are knitted or crocheted and then given to recipients undergoing difficult situations. Prayers are said as the shawls are created and they are usually blessed in a worship service before distribution. There are a number of books with instructions for starting a prayer shawl ministry, prayers, and instructions to make the shawls, such as [The Prayer Shawl Companion](#). The original [prayer shawl ministry](#) group also has a website with a lot of resources.

The book [Comfort Quilts from the Heart](#) offers ideas for 12 quilts and sewing projects to make for anyone needing an extra caring touch.

[Crafting Calm](#) offers an abundance of ways to achieve serenity and satisfaction through creative handicrafts such as desktop shrines, prayer flags, and more.

Many women's group have responsibility in the church for reaching out to members in need, such as the homebound or grieving. Consider starting a card ministry which sends hand-made cards to people. One meeting of your group can focus on making cards for this ministry. [Mailbox Ministry](#) contains ideas for starting a card ministry and includes patterns and directions for cards.

Healthy Living Resources

Spirit, mind, and body are all connected. The support of a group can help women become their best selves in many ways, including a focus on healthy living.

[Christ Walk: A 40-Day Spiritual Fitness Program](#) "outlines a 40-day program for individuals and groups to focus on improving physical health while engaging in spiritual and mental reflection and growth."

[Your Whole Life: The 3D Plan](#) emphasizes that women should "Eat Right, Live Well, Love God." It's a program about living a whole life that incorporates sound nutrition and wellness advice, tips for living well, and daily spiritual readings.

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