## INTRODUCTION

Women ministering to women is a joy, and when we minister to women we know and love, it is even more pleasant. We can be actively involved in speaking words that will cheer, comfort, and encourage. Solomon tells us: *“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”* Proverbs 25:11. Ministering to women in this manner makes us all artists. Artists who create beauty in the midst of pain and heartache. Artists who enhance the beauty that surrounds us in every area of our womanhood. Women are the ones who can best reach other women and help them.

As we minister to women, our goal is to help them move beyond pain and hurt to become cheerful, happy, productive women.

*“Women who have the cause of God at heart can do a good work in the districts in which they reside. Christ speaks of women who helped Him in presenting the truth before others, and Paul also speaks of women who labored with him in the gospel. But how very limited is the work done by those who could do a large work if they would.*"Ellen White*, Evangelism,* p. *465.*

If you would, you too can do a great work. Women's Ministries is a great work.

*Ellen White assures us, "Women can learn what needs to be done to reach other women."* *Welfare Ministry*, p. *160.* This is a statement meant for every woman. Although we are not limited to this work, we can learn how to minister to other women and to plan programs which meet their needs.

When beginning a Women's Ministries program in your local church, you will want to have a clear vision for what you wish to accomplish. Ideally, your program will touch the women in many areas of their lives. Some of these may be:

1. The personal enrichment of the lives of the women

2. Education in life skills

3. Spiritual growth

4. The enjoyment of friendship

5. Assistance in the healing processes

6. Enabling women to better themselves economically

7. Outreach

8. Nurture

9. Financial security

## STEPS IN ASSESSING NEEDS

Although some needs may be clear, there may be other areas of need that you will not think of. Therefore, you will have to develop a means of assessing needs of women in your church to know what they want and need.

## Meet with your committee

When you began your program, you selected a committee of women as leaders. Use these leaders as a resource to help you decide what your next step will be in assessing the needs of the women. Keep your plans in harmony with the mission statement of Women’s Ministries, your church, and your goals

1. **Begin with prayer**

Prayer is the key to success. Saturate your ministry with prayer. You cannot stress enough the need for prayer. It is what Women's Ministries is founded upon. In your planning sessions to decide which avenues you will use to assess women's needs, always begin with prayer. In every aspect of the work of Women’s Ministries, much can be accomplished when you ask God to guide you and instruct you. Ask Him to lead you to the women who are in need of your program. He will help you formulate questionnaires, hold town meetings, and form focus groups that will give you a picture of what programs the women would like.

Invite the Holy Spirit into your meetings to guide you, instruct you and be your counselor. Without the help of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit your work will be as nothing. With their direction, you can accomplish great things. Pray unceasingly for help as you begin to assess the needs of the women. When you seem to hit a dead end, stop your meeting and pray for help. Remember you are doing the work God wants you to do. *(You may want to share a personal experience about a time when your prayers were answered in a very direct way.)*

1. **Make love foremost**

Pray unceasingly for the love of Christ to fill your heart. Without His love shining out through you, your work will not succeed. Ask Him for a revival of His love within you that you may be prepared to go forth to do His work.

1. **Get to know your church members**

“Women can reach hearts...Remember that you can break down the severest opposition by taking a personal interest in the people whom you meet.” (*Welfare Ministry,* p. 162). Make friends with the women. Let them know who you are and that you are interested in them as a person. Women need to establish a level of trust with each other so they will feel free to respond in an open and truthful manner. Observe the women in your church. Look for the areas where they would appreciate your help and concern. Pray that God will lead you to those who will respond to your love.

1. **Become acquainted with your neighbors**

If you plan for your programs to reach out into the community, you will need to become acquainted with your neighbors. It is a rare occasion when someone will come to your church who does not already have a friend in the church. Open your home to all women, and find occasions to welcome them into the inner circle of your family. (Ask women to share ideas as to how they can become better acquainted with their neighbor women. List these ideas on a flip chart or chalkboard.)

1. **Value every woman's response**

Keep in mind that even if you don’t have an interest in a certain topic, it may be what is needed to help someone else. What one woman is brave enough to admit needing may be exactly what others will appreciate having you address.

An example of one or two women expressing their need for help is illustrated with the following experience that took place in the Mid-America Union of the North American Division.

When women began to come forward telling of the sexual abuse they had experienced as children, a decision was made to hold a “Take Heart Retreat” to address their pain. When it was first advertised, organizers expected perhaps 20 or 30 women. They were amazed when hundreds of women called. Each of these women was thankful the church was addressing the issue which affected every area of her life, including her spirituality. It was shocking to discover how many women had suffered this humiliation and pain. The women who called and those who came to the retreat were from many different denominations or no church at all. By listening to the concerns of a few, their Women’s Ministries was able to reach many women.

1. **HOW TO MEASURE NEEDS**

There are various means of assessing the needs of the women in your church. Three useful methods are town meetings, focus groups, and surveys. We will consider all three. Be sure to use a variety of methods to gather ideas.

1. **Town Meetings:** Town meetings can be helpful and productive. Invite women from your church, and ask for their ideas on the needs of women in your church. Create an atmosphere of acceptance. Choose a woman as moderator who is warm and loving. Some women will be willing to speak out about their needs. Others are timid and will need to be encouraged to contribute ideas. Express empathy and validate the women for being willing to share their thoughts. Record all the topics suggested. Assure the women they and their opinions are valued. Use the information to plan your programs and implement them as quickly as possible.

**2. Focus Groups:** Gather women for an informal meeting. Again, create an atmosphere of calm and unity. Explain the reason for the meeting. Divide the women into small groups of three to five and give them a pad and pen to record their thoughts. Have them prioritize their lists. Bring the groups back together and ask them to share their lists. Listen carefully for the comments that are made at this time. These comments often express the most urgent needs. Keep a record of the results of these discussions and use them to plan your programs. Assure the women that their ideas are valued. Observe the natural leaders in the group and utilize their expertise.

1. **Surveys:** Surveys are a common method of providing information, either anonymously or with names included. They give each woman an opportunity to express herself. When using surveys, allow room for women to record ideas not touched on by the survey. Those completing the survey may have other needs. These may be the very areas other women want.

If your programs will be offered for women in both the church and community, be sure to get input from your community also. Good information on how to do so is presented in the unit on “Needs Assessment in the Local Community.”

1. **DEVELOPING A SURVEY**

(Presenter: Have attendees take the survey included in the handout packet.)

After you have had your initial planning sessions and have a working committee, survey all the women of the church. A survey will help you identify the needs of the women in your congregation and will locate those who can help meet those needs.

**1. Survey contents**

A good survey will tell you:

* which ministries now active in your church are of interest to women
* what their needs are
* who the women are
* what their interests or talents are
* the ways women are willing to minister to other women

The survey will include:

* a place for name, address, phone number, and age group
* a box to be checked if they wish to attend anticipated ministries
* a list of anticipated ministries
* an area to indicate which of the current ministries they are participating in
* a box to check if they wish to join current ministries
* blanks to list their special skills or interests
* a box to check if they wish to help
* a place for them to list their special needs
* topics or ministries for each age group, and for the married, single, and widowed

Distribute the surveys to every woman to achieve a maximum number returned. Try passing out the surveys at church or another church meeting. Ask them to complete the survey and turn it in as they leave. You also may choose to hand it out or mail it with a self-addressed, stamped return envelope and ask that the surveys be returned by a certain date. Your survey will be more helpful if the women have time to think through their answers first. Do not become discouraged if you do not receive a 100% return on your surveys. No one ever receives a 100% return on a survey.

Don’t take a survey until you are ready to use the results for program planning. To do a survey and not utilize the results will lead to a credibility loss. Solicit only the information you will need for the next year. You will want to take a new survey each year.

**2. Surveys will identify leaders**

Look for leaders and those who have expertise in different areas. Some of your women are rich treasure houses of information and abilities.

The story is told of a sheep rancher telling about his faithful lead dog. He said, “She’s getting very old, but she has enough energy and wisdom to train one more dog before she goes down.” Every woman has a talent to share. No one is so bereft of ability and wisdom but that they have a bit to share with others. Wisdom comes from above.

An encouraging, character building resolution for leaders is found on page 166 of *Welfare Ministry*: “Let every individual member of the church ask himself [herself], ‘What part can I act to win souls to Jesus Christ?.... I will consecrate myself to God, and my desire for selfish gratification shall be killed before it buds and blossoms and bears fruit.’ This is a good resolution. It will please the Saviour who has purchased you.” God will bless each one as they adopt this resolution as their guide and as they are willing to share their leadership skills. Your survey will help you identify these leaders.

1. **Be creative**

As you design your survey, be creative in thinking of ideas for ministries and activities that will attract the attention of the women. Use the ideas you have gathered from your focus group or town meeting. Look to your own country, state/province, village or city to find programs suited to the local culture. Look for things to do that will not be beyond the budgets or time constraints of the women or beyond the resources available to you.

**TIME TO SHARE**

**Group activity:** Distribute sample surveys and divide the women into groups of four or five. Ask the women to spend fifteen minutes discussing the surveys and adapting them to their areas and to the culture of their women. When finished, have all return to the main group and share their ideas. After you have finished this exercise, you will have a good start on creating a survey that will work for your church.

1. **Be sensitive**

When evaluating the responses, be sensitive to the different needs expressed. Do not judge the women because they have expressed their innermost thoughts. Instead, be friendly, accepting, and supportive to each woman. By understanding their needs, wants, and pains, you will be a source of encouragement and help. Remember when the women feel comfortable with you as leaders they will open their hearts in ways they never have before. The way you treat their confidences will affect the success of your programs.

1. **Consider local resources**

When planning your programs, look to the local community for professionals who may be willing to speak on pertinent topics. Also be aware of the helpful agencies and professionals in your locale that address various needs and issues. Be knowledgeable so that you are able to utilize these experts as presenters and also to refer women to professional help when needed. Compile a list of Adventist women available in your conference or area as resources and as referrals.

1. **Value Teamwork**

As you plan, share your plans with your pastor and the church board. The success of any program is greatly enhanced when you have the cooperation of the pastor and church board members. Endeavor to solicit their support and become a cohesive team.

**E. CONCLUSION**

Women have a great work to do that only they are capable of doing. Take time to assess the needs of the women in your church and your community. Consider the resources you have available, and develop plans that will be a blessing and benefit to the women you serve.

The Lord desires that each of us do the work He has given us. He will give us the talents, the resources, the time and the courage to do what is needed. Pray unceasingly for His guidance and direction. Go forward in faith knowing that the Lord is with you and will guide you.

## About the Author

**Evelyn Glass** enjoys her family and loves having her grandchildren live next door. Evelyn and her husband, Darrell, live in Northern Minnesota on the farm where Darrell was born. Evelyn is active in her local church and her community, writing a weekly column for her local paper. She is Women’s Ministries/Family Life Director for the Mid-America Union of Seventh-day Adventist.

**May-Ellen Netten Colón** was born in Hartford, Connecticut, USA. Her husband, Gaspar, and she have two adult children and one grandchild. From 1988-1997 May-Ellen and her family were missionaries for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Africa-Indian Ocean Division (5 years), and the Euro-Asia Division—the former Soviet Union (4 years). May-Ellen and her husband were co-directors of Family Ministries in those divisions. Currently, she is an Assistant Director of the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department, and Director of Adventist Community Services International. May-Ellen has a Ph.D. in Religious Education from Andrews University.