## INTRODUCTION

“The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed.” *Review and Herald*, Aug. 26, 1902.

One of the most important aspects of a successful evangelistic program is proper groundwork. No matter how well you conduct a campaign, it will not be successful if good preparation in the community has not been made first. In your community, church members must create an interest in the church and its programs. It is important to form personal friendships so people will want to attend. The Women’s Ministries department can be involved in developing these contacts as well in conducting the evangelistic meetings themselves.

Not all Women’s Ministries meetings have to be evangelistic meetings, but all meetings should have an evangelistic purpose. In other words, you can, and should, plan a wide variety of programs that appeal to various groups of women. But these meetings should have the dual function of meeting community needs and building friendships. Be warm and welcoming. Make friends. Then when you hold evangelistic meetings, you will be inviting friends. They will know women in the church. Because they are familiar with the church and its quality of programs, prejudice will have been broken down.

In Bible study groups or other informal meetings, allow women an opportunity to share and visit. Personal relationships are very important to most women. This is an ideal time for the women of the church to establish lasting friendships with women who are not church members. As soon as possible, pair a newly interested woman with a more mature Christian woman for mentoring and friendship. (See Titus 2:3-5).

In deciding on programs that will be of interest to former members and women in the community, think of the needs of women in your area. You may want to consider the list the General Conference Women’s Ministries Department has identified as the six critical needs women face worldwide. These concerns are illiteracy, health risks, poverty, abuse, work load, and lack of training/mentoring.

If you are in an area of the world where there is substantial illiteracy, beginning a literacy program, even in the church, can be an excellent outreach. You can use the Bible as one of the textbooks, which can lead to religious discussions. If the people are not open to using the Bible, you can still build friendship and trust using other materials. In some areas of the world, second language instruction can accomplish the same thing.

You can also build interest with programs that help women understand their bodies—that teach them about health, breast cancer, reproduction, menopause, nutrition, cooking, exercise, and other health issues of particular concern to women. Again, such programs lead to religious questions and build friendships.

**“NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN” LITERACY PROGRAM**

“Never Too Late to Learn” is a program developed by the Women’s Ministries (WM) Department in the Southern Asia Division (India). The first adult literacy program, “Never Too Late to Learn,” was organized in ten centers in the Northeastern part of India in 2001.

This literacy program enables the women to reach out to non-Adventists. The prayers offered on their behalf for wisdom, healing, abusive husbands, and wayward children; the kindness and patience of the facilitators holding their stiff fingers to form a letter of the alphabet; their door to door visitation, helping the absentees in their homes, touch the hearts of the learners. The church becomes a loving, caring, witnessing church.

Other programs addressing these challenge issues would include programs on abuse, financial management, stress control, time management, communication, and more. (General Conference Women’s Ministries leadership materials and handbooks give many ideas for such programs. [www.adventistwomensministries.org](http://www.adventistwomensministries.org) )

# Survey of Community Needs/Demographics

An excellent way to decide which programs suit the needs of your community is to do surveys and research. Who lives in your community? What do they feel their needs are? What groups make up your community?

When planning ways to reach the community, you may ask, “What do you think is the greatest need in our area?” Half of what they say will involve issues the church cannot do anything about, like high prices. Your objective is to get them talking about personal issues that the church can reach. —Rick Warren, Pastor, Saddleback Church in California

There are many things that are helpful to know before you began planning an evangelistic program of any kind. Some of it you will know if you have lived in the community for any length of time. Other things you will have to research. If you are new to the community, there are many things you need to learn in order to plan outreach events that will appeal to your community.

**Demographics**. You can find out what the community is like (population, religious preferences, income, etc.) by learning the demographics of an area. Depending on where you live, you may be able to get demographic information from Census studies, or the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University[[1]](#footnote-1)

* Office of Community Development
* Local Department of Commerce
* Local city, university or college libraries

**Survey Community Needs**. How do you find out the needs in your community?

* By mingling with people as Jesus mingled.
* By personal ministry in the homes.
* By asking the right question: “What do you need?”
* Through research.
* From interviews with civic leaders. Ask them what they see as significant needs in the community and what contribution a church organization might make.
* By asking local community service agencies.
* By driving in the community noticing housing patterns, physical boundaries, traffic, etc.
* Check out local newspapers.
* Participate in the Welcome Wagon program.
* Community surveys
* Have church members profile or describe the needs of their extended family as well as family, friends, coworkers, or neighbors (but with no names given.)

After you collect enough information, analyze it and honestly consider the potential resources in your church and community. Then decide what programs and ministries you can realistically implement in the community and church.

# Community Programs and Ministries

There are many ways to meet the needs of the people in our community. The list would be as varied as the people in our community and the people available to lead seminars and programs. Some of the common outreach programs we may think of include:

In Madras, the South India Union, a few women have set a goal for themselves, to enter every hut to assess living conditions and to teach about cleanliness and proper diet, sharing God’s love and even supplying some with basic food items. —Southern Asia Division

**Health seminars**

* Cooking and nutrition schools
* Stress seminars
* Disease prevention
* Stop smoking programs
* Weight control
* Community sanitation
* Heart health
* AIDS prevention and caregiving
* Childhood diseases
* Women’s health concerns such as breast cancer, osteoporosis, or reproductive health.

**Other seminars could cover topics such as**

* Aging
* Mental health
* Depression and suicide
* Grief recovery
* Divorce support
* Growing up in a family with alcoholism, abuse or other trauma
* Self-esteem

**Family matter seminars**

* Child abuse
* Step families
* Single parenting
* Marriage enrichment
* Pre-marriage classes
* Discipline
* Teen challenges

Women’s Ministries has established six sewing centers in Pakistan with the help of some additional funds from ADRA. In addition, they have been holding seminars on health, education, spiritual growth, poverty, etc.

**Self-help seminars**

* Financial management
* How to pray
* Time management
* Communication
* Second language courses

Many other ministries might be developed to address community needs, depending on the trained personnel and resources available.[[2]](#footnote-2)

* Aid to adult victims of child abuse
* Establishing alternative schools or private schools
* Child advocate services to represent hurting, abused, and abandoned children in the courts, in foster homes, etc.
* Coffee houses. Places for young people to enjoy a safe, friendly environment
* Computer Literacy. Teaching underprivileged youth basic computer skills
* Post-incarceration assistance
* Crisis hotlines
* Economic and community development, such as permanent housing programs, microfinance, etc.
* Employment ministries to offer encouragement and training
* Foster homes
* Health, medical, or dental clinics
* International student outreach
* Mediation ministry designed to mediate or arbitrate legal disputes or interpersonal conflict, particularly among Christians
* Peer groups and guidance for mothers of preschoolers
* Night ministry designed to provide emergency shelter and meet other needs of people who roam the streets in our large cities at night
* Ministry to prostitutes, offering safety, friendship and support

We need to be continually alert to the changes in our communities. We have to be creative, revising our programs to address important community needs.

# Guiding principles

* As we hold seminars and meet people’s need, key principles will help us be more effective. First, since we are ambassadors for Christ, we must create within each event or ministry an atmosphere of loving concern for people. People are more important than programs or ministries.

In our latest cooking school, we not only had the best lecturers and demonstrators we could find, we also recruited members with people skills and love for others to be hostesses and hosts at tables for eight. We trained them ahead of time in one short session. Some of them are keeping up the friendships after just six cooking sessions. It made a difference to be intentional. —Cynthia and Russell Burrill

* Second, to accomplish this, bathe the seminar or ministry in prayer. Pray that the Holy Spirit will use you and guide you. Pray for those you will minister to. And take every opportunity to pray *with* the participants. Schedule time also to pray individually and corporately with your associates. Recruit people in the church to pray for you, for those who will attend the seminars, and for your team of helpers. Keep the prayer support team informed about what is happening and the prayer needs.
* Build friendships all along the way. We must make friends with people long before they come into the church, and then continue those friendships, whether they join the church or not. We will have more people joining us and staying with us if we take the time to form lasting friendships.
* Be intentional in helping your members make friends. Train them ahead of time, and give them opportunities during the ministries and programs to develop friendships. Having support groups and small groups integrated into the seminars makes it easy to form strong friendships.

# Follow up

It is vital that you intentionally follow up seminars and ministry with small groups, programs, events at your church, and other seminars and ministries. We would be more effective in evangelism if we made sure that all our ministries and programs were followed up in some way. At the end of each seminar, you can tell people about the next seminars and enroll them in the activities of interest to them.

When I taught a parenting class, I used to tell the participants that they might need a higher power to help them really love their children. That is all I said. One parent came up to me during the break and told me she had trouble loving her child. After I had talked with her a while, I found out that she was a Christian who believed in God. It was easy then to tell her about God’s love and how He would love her child through her**.** —Cynthia Burrill

# Planning a Community Program

Planning a program that builds community interest is much like the evangelistic meetings themselves. It takes planning, thought, prayer, committees and commitment.

**Here are the necessary planning activities:**

* Gather a planning committee
* Examine available information about the needs in the community
* Define a target group
* Develop an action plan:
  + What are the objectives and goals of the seminars/programs?
  + What steps need to be taken?
  + Develop timelines and a budget
* List the personnel needed for the project. Be sure to include
* An audio-visual operator
* Helpers for set up and tear down
* Cleaning crew for before, during and after the event
* Recruit volunteers. Contact them personally.
* Set up the committees
* Recruit people to pray for every aspect of your ministry
* Set up a phone number to handle registrations and answer questions. Staff it with volunteers with good people skills
* Decide on meeting facilities
* Plan and implement advertising.
* Saturate the area with all available and affordable types of media (Less advertizing is needed if you are well known in the community.)
* Arrange for audio visual equipment
* Develop and arrange for the production of handouts, etc.
* Arrange lodging for out-of-town participants
* Recruit skilled personal ministry specialists
* Registration table: staffed with organized, pleasant volunteers, and materials to distribute
* Refreshments can be provided
* Evaluate. This is essential
* Plan for follow-up of some kind
* Small group
* Invitation by other participants and leader to other events
* Visitation
* Forming friendships
* Names for mailings, magazine subscriptions, etc.
* Schedule a debriefing session

The women in one Michigan church held outreach seminars for their community. They were delighted at the excellent response. “We always had 75 to 80 non-Adventists attend our cooking schools, but we wanted something different,” said the leader.

They formed a committee, planned an entire year of outreach seminars, and called it “Ladies Night Out.” They covered such topics as:

* Instruction from an image consultant on how to purchase good looking clothing
* Instruction on home organization with Nancy Van Pelt
* A Vegetarian Tasting Extravaganza. 45 women attended; most were visitors
* A nurse practitioner spoke on women’s health issues
* What were the results of their year-long program?
* They have names of 75 women in the community on their mailing list for events being planned for the community
* Three women have begun personal Bible studies, and six have requested information on healthful living

# Obtaining Names

One of the most valuable resources you can have for successful evangelism is names—names of people who can be invited, people who know something about the church, people who have attended programs in the past. Some of these names can be obtained before you begin a community project; others can be added as you present programs.

**Sources of names before event begins:**

* Names from church members
* Former members
* Media names, from Breath of Life, Hope Channel, Faith for Today, Voice of Prophecy, La Voz de la Esperanza, Voice of Hope, Adventist World Radio, It is Written, and other radio and television programs
* Pastor’s Bible Class

**Sources of names during meetings:**

* Advertising survey cards
* Sermon request cards
* Attendance cards in the Bible
* Response cards
* Registration sheets

There is a suggested form (modify to suit your needs) that you can use to obtain names of relatives and friends from the church members. Such lists should be worked on some time before any type of evangelistic program is begun. (See Appendix D in the *Outreach is for Everyone: Women’s Ministries Evangelism Manual*, p. 110). This book is also available on line: adventistwomensministries.org

## 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.

**Seminar update based on Chapter 3, “Preparing the Community,”** from *Outreach is for Everyone: Women’s Ministries Manual*, produced by General Conference Women’s Ministries Department.

1. Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA 49104 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Robert E. Logan and Larry Short. *Mobilizing Compassion*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)