

Philosophy of Women's Ministries: Roles and Objectives

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy according to *Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary* (Selected definitions):

- Love and pursuit of wisdom by intellectual investigation and moral self-discipline
- Inquiry into laws and causes underlying reality
- Inquiry into the nature of things based on logical reasoning rather than empirical methods
- Analysis and critique of fundamental beliefs as they come to be conceptualized and formulated
- The synthesis of all learning
- All learning except practical arts and technical precepts
- A system of fundamental or motivating principles: basis of action or belief
- The overall values by which one lives

This sums up what we want to talk about in this seminar. It is all about what Women's Ministries is and in spite of what some jokingly say about women, it can be logical, self-disciplined, practical (yes, it might even include technical precepts).

RATIONALE

Some people wonder why Women's Ministries was established. "Why do women want to go off and have their own ministry? Why can't they work with the rest of the church?" they ask.

The philosophy of Women's Ministries is to compliment other ministries and to help women become involved in all areas of church life and its mission. The biggest challenge for us as a department is to help women, and men, understand that it is not a social club, not a women's society, but a ministry. Women's Ministries is a ministry that nurtures, supports, and inspires women in a unique and personal way. Many women are what could be called "givers." They give to husbands, to children, to parents, to their job, to their church, and seldom take care of themselves, emotionally, spiritually, or physically. Women's Ministries help to address these needs from a spiritual, and feminine perspective.

Women have, of course, been involved in the life of the church since the beginning, but because most of the leadership has been male, and because most sermons and worship services have been led by men, nurture has come with a male point of view. There is, of course, nothing wrong with that point of view. It is just that there is also a female point of view that is important to women. In the stressful, demanding world of today, isn't it right and advantageous for the church to reach out to love its women? And then can't those women minister to others? Isn't the time right for the church to remind the women that they are important? That the church wants and needs them? To help them become all they can become? And that they have a special something to share with their church? As Christian women, we must reclaim our extraordinary heritage of public and private ministry—a model for ministry that is rooted in the teaching of Jesus.

MINISTRY TO WHOM?

Let's look first at the variety of women there are in the church and then we can begin to talk about ministry to and through them:

How many categories of women can you name? (Let attendees list and you add missed categories.)

- Young mothers
- Single women
- Professional women
- Lay workers
- Church employees
- Widows
- Physically challenged women
- Divorced women
- Pastor's wives
- Abused women
- Burned out church volunteers
- Women caring for both children and parents
- Women feeling guilty because their children have left the church
- Teens and collegiate women
- Single mothers

POLICIES, MISSION STATEMENT, AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

Before we look at the possibilities for ministry, let's take a quick look at the policies, mission statement, and other documents that can give us guidance.

We will not take time to read these in detail now but you have them in your packet and you should read and become familiar with them. [Presenter: some of the more important sections you need to point out are underlined for you.]

2003-2004 General Conference Working Policy

First, the *2003-2004 General Conference Working Policy*:

FW 05 Philosophy

The Department of Women's Ministries is committed to encouraging, challenging, equipping, and nurturing Seventh-day Adventist women as they do their part in carrying the Gospel message to the world.

"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 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." *Welfare Ministry*, p 145.

FW 10 Purpose

The primary purpose of the Department of Women's Ministries is to nurture, facilitate, and support women in their Christian lives as disciples of Jesus Christ and members of His World Church. In consultation with administration and other departments of the Church, the department shares the responsibility for developing a global evangelistic strategy and provides training to equip the women of the church to uplift Christ in the Church and in the world.

"... we may do a noble work for God if we will. Woman does not know her power ... There is a higher purpose for woman, a grander destiny. She should develop and cultivate her powers, for God can employ them in the great work of saving souls from eternal ruin." *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol 4, p 642.

The Department of Women's Ministries will focus on the six critical issues that have been identified as barriers preventing women from reaching their full potential: illiteracy, poverty, risks to health, abuse, length of workday and poor working conditions, and the need for training and mentoring for greater involvement in the mission of the Church.

FW 15 Objectives

In order to fulfill the purpose of the Department of Women's Ministries, eight objectives have been identified by which the women in the Church may be empowered to share the good news within their families, among their fellow believers, and in ever expanding circles in the unsaved world.

FW 15 10 Objectives—

1. Elevate women as persons of inestimable worth by virtue of their creation and redemption.
2. Enable women to deepen their faith and to experience spiritual growth and renewal.
3. Underscore the broad spectrum of needs and concerns of women across the life span from multicultural and multiethnic perspectives.
4. Liaison and cooperate with other specialized departments of the church to meet the needs of women. [Only one not part of the Mission Statement]
5. Build networks among women in the World Church that encourage bonds of friendship, mutual support, and creative exchange of ideas and information.
6. Mentor and encourage young Adventist women, creating paths for their involvement in the Church as they reach for their full potential in Christ.
7. Bring women's unique perspectives on issues facing the Church to decision making bodies.
8. Seek expanding avenues of dynamic Christian service for women, challenging each Adventist woman to use her gifts to complement the talents of others as they work side by side to further the global mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Departmental Staffing

FW 20 05 Director and Associate Directors

The Department of Women's Ministries shall have a director and associate directors as needed. Qualified personnel shall be elected on the basis of their expertise and experience to care for the activities and responsibilities encompassed by the work of the department.

FW 20 10 Specific Responsibilities

Each individual shall have specific responsibilities and assignments, which will be made known to other appropriate levels of Church organization.

FW 20 15 Responsibilities of Director

1. The departmental director or designee shall chair the Women's Ministries Advisory. The director will maintain continuous contact with the staff and coordinate staff functions.

2. The director shall represent, and serve as advocate for departmental goals, programs, and activities to the administrative bodies of the Church; shall represent administrative viewpoints to the departmental staff; and shall serve as liaison between other departments and the Department of Women's Ministries.

Church Manual

The *2000 Church Manual* also has a section on Women's Ministries that can give us guidance as to the roles and objectives of the department. It has many of the same ideas as expressed in the Policy Book. Please look at it in your handouts. We will talk now only about the Women's Ministries Committee:

The Department of Women's Ministries exists to uphold, encourage, and challenge Seventh-day Adventist women in their daily walk as disciples of Jesus Christ and as members of His World Church. The mission of Women's Ministries is, in the larger sense, common to all Christians—that of uplifting Christ in the church and in the world. In doing this, the ministry seeks to:

1. Foster spiritual growth and renewal among women;
2. Affirm that women are of inestimable worth by virtue of their creation and redemption, and to equip them for service in the church;
3. Minister to the broad spectrum of women's needs across the life span, being sensitive to multi-cultural and multiethnic perspectives;
4. Liaise and cooperate with other specialized departments of the church to facilitate the ministry to women and of women;
5. Build goodwill among women in the World Church that encourages bonds of friendship, support for service, and the creative exchange of ideas and information
6. Mentor and encourage Seventh-day Adventist women, creating paths for their involvement in the church as they reach for their potential in Christ;
7. Find ways and means to challenge each Seventh-day Adventist woman to use her gifts to complement the talents of others as they work side by side to further the global mission of the Church.

WOMEN'S MINISTRIES LEADER

The Women's Ministries leader is elected by the church to develop specific ministries, foster specific ministries, nurture women, and equip them for service to God and to the church. She serves as Chair of the Women's Ministries Committee, encouraging ideas and plans which maximize women's contributions to the mission of the church. As Chair, she is responsible for putting together the agenda, moderating discussion, and developing group cohesion through personal sharing, prayer, and fellowship.

She also serves as a member of the church board, integrating activities and programs for women into the larger church program. It is her responsibility to keep the church informed of the contribution of Women's Ministries to church life. The leader's liaison for training and resource material is the local conference/mission/field Women's Ministries Director.

Qualifications of the Women's Ministries Leader--The Women's Ministries leader should be a woman with a sensitive, caring nature, a burden for women's ministry and concerns, a balance in her perspectives so as to represent a broad spectrum of women, and an ability to encourage other women to cultivate their spiritual gifts. She should be able to work well with the women in the church, the pastor, and the church board.

The Women's Ministries Committee -The Women's Ministries leader works with the pastor and church board to establish a Women's Ministries Committee to foster a ministry to women in the church. This committee should be composed of persons interested in the broad spectrum of women's needs and services. To form a balanced team, the members should be persons with varied talents and experience. The major responsibilities of the Women's Ministries Committee will be the following:

- To assess the needs of women in the local church and community, by utilizing surveys and interviews, and in counsel with the pastor and church leaders;
- To brainstorm, develop strategies, and cooperate with other specialized departments of the church to foster programs and activities which minister to women;
- To plan and implement these and other initiatives which relate to women's specific and varied needs, in cooperation with the pastor, departmental specialists, and other church leaders;
- To facilitate local church participation in annual programs and activities initiated by the conference/union/division/General Conference such as the International Women's Day of Prayer, Women's Ministries Day, and small group ministries to support and encourage them in service. Information regarding these programs is available through the conference/mission Department of Women's Ministries.

WOMEN'S MINISTRIES MISSION STATEMENT

And then there is the Women's Ministries Department Mission Statement with which any Women's Ministries leader, at any level, should be familiar:

Mission Statement

General Conference Department of Women's Ministries

The Department of Women's Ministries exists to uphold, encourage, and challenge Adventist women in their pilgrimage as disciples of Jesus Christ and members of His world church.

Our mission is in the larger sense common to all Christians – that of uplifting Christ in the church and in the world. But more specifically, we are called to:

- elevate women as persons of inestimable worth because they have been created and redeemed
- enable women to deepen their faith and experience spiritual growth and renewal
- build networks among women in the world church to encourage bonds of friendship and mutual support and the creative exchange of ideas and information
- mentor young Adventist women, encouraging their involvement, and creating paths for them as they reach for their potential in Christ
- address the concerns of women in a global context
- bring women's unique perspectives to the issues facing the world church
- seek expanding avenues of dynamic Christian service for women
- challenge each Adventist woman with her potential to complement the gifts given to other women and men as they work side by side to further the global mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that out of the fullness we as women have personally found in Jesus Christ, we may be empowered to share the good news within our families, among our fellow believers, and in ever expanding circles in the unsaved world.

These documents form the foundation for our philosophy and give guidance to our roles and our objectives.

ASSUMPTIONS THAT AFFECT PHILOSOPHY

Assumptions about women in general:

1. Are relationally oriented
 - Want and need fellowship and friends
 - Lonely if these needs are not met
2. Need support and reinforcement of other women in similar situations
3. Tend toward intimacy
4. Like to talk and share opinions
5. Want to feel needed, respected, and appreciated
6. Often suffer from low self-esteem and self-confidence
7. Often competitive and comparative, especially toward other women
8. May gossip and complain unless directed constructively
9. Oriented toward self-improvement
10. Need role models
11. Are busy: family, personal, and career responsibilities
12. Want relevancy—will join if a ministry interests them
13. Have practical needs
14. Have differing specific needs in various stages in their lives

There are also some basic spiritually oriented assumptions:

1. Women matter to God
2. Jesus Christ is the example of how women should be treated
3. Women are sensitive to spiritual feeding
4. God is the ultimate solution to their problems and their attitudes
5. Women matter to the Seventh-day Adventist Church
6. Women are at a variety of levels in spiritual growth
7. Women have been involved in the mission of the Church in the past.
Leadership and involvement are not new.

Some points that need to be considered in developing a viable Women's Ministries:

- Every born-again believer should have a ministry: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." *Matthew 28:19, 20*.
This, of course, includes women.
- "The Adventist Church teaches the priesthood of all believers:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." *1 Peter 2:9.*

- The Bible instructs women to minister to each other:
"Teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God."
Titus 2, 3-5.
- The world has changed and many women no longer have the close support and mentoring/training they used to receive from the nuclear family.
- We need to help women find their spiritual gifts and motivate them to press a little beyond their comfort zones.
- We must be creative in helping women find ministries. Consider all ages, physical abilities, finances, and transportation, time, and circumstances. Remember that ministries can be done individually and in various places—Women's Ministries should not be confined to a meeting at the church or to a retreat.
- Your ministries should be needs-based. Find out what the needs of the women in your congregation are as well as in your community. Women will be in various life stages and have various needs. Find women who can minister to those needs.
- Most women today don't have the time or the interest in spending time at "just another meeting." We must reach out to women at the point of their needs. That is real ministry.

"Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'" *Ministry of Healing* p. 143.

- It is important to provide leadership training, mentoring, nurturing, and lots and lots of encouragement.
- Women's Ministries consists of everything women do in the church: teaching a Sabbath School class, singing in the choir, working in the

kitchen, teaching a Bible study, leading a prayer group, or cooking a dinner for someone who just got out of the hospital. The list can go as far as your mind will allow it, but try to see that women are doing these ministries by choice and are happy doing them. They should not just be “doing what women are supposed to do” and not allowed to try new things and expand their horizons. Help them to obtain the skills they need and the opportunities they desire for ministry.

- Ministry groups, support groups, special events, classes and seminars, and individual ministries can all be part of meeting needs and the outreach of Women's Ministries. Examples of these might be (Ask for suggestions—some have already been mentioned—suggest others they may miss)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support groups for single moms ○ Working women's brown-bag lunch Bible studies ○ Ministry to the disabled ○ Financial management classes ○ Religious book clubs ○ Cancer prayer and support groups ○ Assisting with funeral dinners ○ Event evangelism ○ Hospital visitation ○ Mentoring young women ○ Abuse support groups ○ Prison ministries ○ Discipling new members ○ Diet and nutrition classes ○ Exercise classes ○ Clothing bank ○ Child-care cooperative ○ Mother's Day Out programs ○ Literacy classes ○ Sexual abstinence programs for teens ○ Writing devotionals or other spiritual materials ○ Helping with pastoral visitation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conducting Breathe Free for Women programs ○ Addiction support groups ○ Grief support ministries ○ Preaching and public evangelism ○ HIV/AIDS education and care ministries ○ Hospitality ministry ○ Developing small enterprise projects for women in poverty ○ Serving on church committees and boards ○ Reclaiming former members ○ Clergy appreciation ministry ○ Transportation ministry ○ Supporting Women's Ministries mission projects ○ Specific ministries to non-Christian women living in your area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Buddhists ▪ Muslims ▪ Jews ▪ Secular humanists ▪ Atheists |
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CHALLENGE ISSUES FACING WOMEN

There are six challenges facing women around the world that form part of the philosophy of ministry to women. We look at them not as social gospel issues, but as witnessing opportunities. If we look again at a point made earlier, "Most women today don't have the time or the interest in spending time at 'just another meeting.' We must reach out to women at the point of their needs. That is real ministry," we need to minister to the needs of our own women. We also need to minister to the needs of the women around us. And as the quote says, if we are to minister as Christ ministered, we need to know the needs of women. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'" *Ministry of Healing* p. 143.

We are going to take only a brief look at these six issues. Women's Ministries has a brochure called "Six Challenge Issues Facing Women" that gives details about them and ideas for ministry. The same type of information is available on our web site as well. These challenges occur in all parts of the world to one degree or another, both in the church and out of the church as well.

1. Poverty: Most of the desperately poor and most of the world's refugees are women.
2. Health risks: Women suffer most of the same ailments as do men plus all those associated with reproductive health. As one example, every day 1600 women die in childbirth, and childbirth is not even a disease.
3. Literacy: Worldwide, almost 1 billion adults cannot read; almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of them are women.
4. Work load: Women are incredibly busy in every part of the world. Many now have full-time paying jobs but they still have home and family responsibilities. Just think what that means if they have to search for firewood or haul water from great distances.
5. Abuse: Abuse is a huge problem in all cultures and at all economic levels, and yes, in the Christian church as well, including ours.
6. Leadership training and mentoring: Women are still in the minority in leadership in society, politics, business, and the Church. In order for women to take their places and to make a difference, they need leadership training and mentoring.

HISTORICAL BASIS

Women's Ministries began more than 100 years ago. At the turn of the last century Mrs. S. M. I. Henry, a new convert, felt convicted to begin specific ministries for women in the church. She was concerned that some of the members would think that as a new member she was trying to come in and to change the church. But her conviction continued and one day she shared this conviction with Ellen White, who at the time was living in Australia. Mrs. White responded to Mrs. Henry telling her that for a long period of time she too had felt the need for such a ministry and urged Mrs. Henry to follow her convictions. When Mrs. Henry received this letter from Ellen White she took it as a sign from God that she was to organize some programs for women. She began to travel extensively to speak on behalf of women and their needs. She wrote a regular column for the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Henry's health was not good and she died in 1900, two years after beginning this special ministry. Regrettably, this ministry died as well. (More details can be found in "Introduction to Women's Ministries," one of the seminars in Leadership Certification, Level 1.)

During Ellen White's time it was not unusual to have women involved in church leadership, active evangelism, and even pastoral ministry. And yet Mrs. White often wrote encouraging more involvement on the part of women. Let's look at a few of her admonitions that serve as a foundation for Women's Ministries:

"When a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work, and it will see the loss if the talents of both are not combined." *Evangelism* p. 469.

"There never was a time when more workers were needed than at the present. There are brethren and sisters throughout all our ranks who should discipline themselves to engage in this work; in all our churches something should be done to spread the truth. It is the duty of all to study the various points of our faith." *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1880.

"All who work for God should have the Martha and the Mary attributes blended – a willingness to minister and a sincere love of the truth. Self and selfishness must be put out of sight. God calls for earnest women workers, workers who are prudent, warmhearted, tender, and true to principle. He calls for persevering women who will take their minds from self...and will center them on Christ, speaking words of truth, praying with the persons to whom they can obtain access, laboring for the conversion of souls." *Testimony Treasures*, Vol. 2, p. 405.

Women can be instruments of righteousness, rendering holy service. It was Mary that first preached a risen Jesus....If there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work, we should see many more converted to the truth. The refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth." *Evangelism*, pp 471, 472.

"The Lord has a work for women as well as men to do. They may accomplish a good work for God if they will first learn in the school of Christ the precious, all-important lesson of meekness. They must not only bear the name of Christ, but possess His Spirit. They must walk even as He walked, purifying their souls from everything that defiles. Then they will be able to benefit others by presenting the all-sufficiency of Jesus." *Testimony Treasures*, Vol. 2, p. 404.

"He will raise up from among the common people men and women to do His work, even as of old He called fishermen to be His disciples. There will soon be an awakening that will surprise many. Those who do not realize the necessity of what is to be done will be passed by, and the heavenly messengers will work with those who are called the common people, fitting them to carry the truth to many places." *15 MR 312 (1905)*.

"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." *Evangelism*, p. 465.

CONCLUSION

Our church now has well over 14 million members. About 70 per cent of them are women. These are women with greatly varying needs and abilities. We have a tremendous task ahead of us. An impossible task without the help of the Holy Spirit. Fortunately, this is promised to men as well as women.

In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
Acts 2: 17, 18.

If the task given us is going to be accomplished, we need both men and women actively involved at all levels and in virtually all areas. For this reason, if no other, we need Women's Ministries.