

## **Women's Ministries Consortium "Change"**

**Linda Hardin**

Change—a word that strikes fear and creates excitement. What comes to mind when you think about change?

As I prepared for the Women's Ministries General Council meeting in February, I developed a proposal for this morning's consortium based on the changes that have occurred in Women's Ministries in the past three decades. As the Council met, it soon became obvious to me that change was more than a theme for the Consortium—it was something that God was doing in us right then and there.

One highlight of the Women's Ministries General Council meetings is our devotional and prayer times. Confession time here: In the early years of the council meetings, I would get concerned about the time we spent praying for each other. After all, we have a LONG agenda to cover! I soon learned, however, to turn my watch so I couldn't see it. You see, I learned that God redeemed the time—and we accomplished more in the time that was left than I ever anticipated.

So when God started changing things in February, I released my plans and relaxed knowing God was in control. We'll talk about changes in Women's Ministries in the past three decades and the implications for our ministries today as we begin to new quadrennium—and you'll get to experience some of our devotional and prayer times.

Let's start by considering the changes have you experienced since the last General Assembly. Here are some of my changes:

- New Ministry name
- New apartment
- Hearing aids
- New ministry add
- Entered a new decade
- New building

Based on the history I found, Women's Ministries started in the late 1970s with Ruth Gibson as the first Women's Ministries Coordinator. At that point, the focus was regular monthly meetings. Ruth produced a regular newsletter with program ideas and ministries leaders subscribed to it.

Lillian Johnson followed Ruth as Coordinator and continued the newsletter format and authored a booklet on Women's Ministries. Anyone remember "Insights" booklets? I arrived on June 28, 1988. In the early 1990s, we compiled and published a notebook of program ideas and resources from previous newsletters with the goal of adding additional information each year.

In the 1996, the first Women's Ministries General Council met. We release a notebook at General Assembly in 1997 in San Antonio. Thanks to the work of Norma Brunson and Ana Zani, it was translated into Spanish. We made revisions to the Handbook and continued to sale it through the Women's Ministries office. Last year, the Handbook was updated and revised. It is now posted on the web as downloadable files—and no cost!

After about two decades of printed newsletters, Adult Ministries created Adult Ministries Connection and began web-based newsletters. One of the major purposes was to have one place where Adult Ministries' leaders could find resources. We also hoped this would increase awareness of all the ministries under Adult Ministries' direction.

I can't remember when the first information was posted on the Women's Ministries section of the denominational web site. The Women's Ministries General Council and I continue to update and add new sections. There are two new items on the web site that I'm happy to introduce to you. The first is a section for Post-Abortive Women. This section developed in response to a woman who responded to some questions I posted. We also learned from testimonies given at Come to the Fire Conference that women are seeking help and comfort as they deal with abortion issues. In this section, you'll find two women's stories as well as resources to help you minister to post-abortive women.

The second new section is "Ministry Musings." This resource is designed to help Women's Ministries leaders' integrate the four concepts—affect of change, accountability, Living the Holy Life, and being the Body of Christ—in your ministries. We don't want you to just have a good experience this morning—we want it to motive you to evaluate your ministry, determine how well you're reaching the women in your congregations and communities, consider the involvement of young women, and develop means to make the connection the women in your congregation. We'll add an edition for each year of this quadrennium.

I'm pleased to announce an addition: PWR—Pastors' Wives Resource. We'll officially introduce this web site at the workshop on Friday afternoon at 2PM. The site is designed for pastors' wives—at this point, anyway,—to share prayer requests, to encourage each other, and to share their stories.

These are some of the changes that happened in Women's Ministries—and we continue to experience changes in our lives. Let's consider some of them and how they affect Women's Ministries.

First, the age diversity among women causes many churches to change how ministry is done. What worked for the builders and boomers doesn't work as well for the young women. We need to bring women together to listen to each other. Wisdom and new ideas can create new ministries, ideas, and programs. We need to talk and learn from each other to determine how to minister effectively to the women in our congregations.

There is so much to learn! We need the energy and vitality of young women to keep us current. We need the wisdom and faith of mature Christian women to keep us steadfast. We need new ideas to maintain interest. We need Bible studies and prayer groups to keep us Christ-centered. We need vision to see beyond “but-we’ve-always-done-it-this-way.” We need passion to reach the women in our congregations and communities who long for acceptance. We need compassion for women without a relationship with Jesus Christ, to pray for them, to form relationships with them, and to introduce them to Jesus Christ. We need small groups to disciple women on their journeys with Jesus Christ. We all need accountability as we live in a culture so often without a sense of right and wrong. We need women to join together to reach our world with the good news of the Gospel.

Second, time demands for women are so intense. When was the last time you talk with a woman who had extra time? That’s what I thought—you can’t remember! There is always something or someone asking for time. Some of us remember when computers were a new thing. They were going to make life so much easier. We would live in this paperless society. We’d have extra time to invest in our interests. Did it happen for you?

Today’s woman is pulled in many directions—and many of those pulls are for good and wonderful projects, people, and other things. All these demands make it difficult for women to invest in Women’s Ministries events. You’ve experienced this. It’s difficult for women to commit to a Bible study more than six to eight weeks long. Many attend Bible studies, desiring to know more about God and how to live the Christian life. As leaders, you’ve discovered that many don’t have time to complete the pre-session materials.

Technology is another change we’re experiencing. Have you noticed that email is vying with facebook and other network sites as the communications tool? I belong to several facebook groups but I’m so facebook challenged that by the time I figure out what I need to do, I hardly remember why I went there in the first place! Then I’m not sure I want everything I say to a person to be visible by the whole world.

To reach young women, the Women’s Ministries General Council established Nazarene Women’s Network on facebook. Check it out—you may be surprised by what’s happened there. One woman asked a question about church in the town where she was moving and received answers that will help her find a new church home. A mother asked for suggestions about reading the Bible to her pre-school children. The responses were amazing as mothers shared ideas and lessons learned.

Look at your cell phone. What used to be a means of talking with another person is now a mini-computer—well, maybe it’s not so mini!! I often wonder if I’m the only person on the planet who doesn’t send and receive text messages. What happened to face-to-face or at least phone conversations?!!

Texting is the # 1 way to communicate with college students—and it’s probably here to stay. This means I HAVE to adjust and learn to communicate in their preferred manner as I can. Could this be what Paul meant when he said, “By all means, win some?”

This is when I realize I need to keep up with the technology or at least surround myself with people who understand and know how to use it. Young women and the future young women will be accustomed to on line learning. We'll need to find ways of having Bible studies on line. Perhaps some of you are and can help many of us develop and use this ministry tool.

One of my mottos is "It's not an either/or. It's a both and." I'm convinced this is descriptive of Women's Ministries. We'll need both an on line Bible study and one that meets in a physical location. We'll need ministry that is specific for various age women, even as we provide occasional events and gatherings that bring all women together. We'll need mentoring relationships where the older, more experienced woman learns from the younger, less experienced one, too. We'll need experienced moms to help young moms learn to manage all the demands. We'll need older women who will learn from younger women that it's OK to say "No." We'll need younger women who will learn to say "yes" even when they don't feel adequate.

Change is here to stay. I think we're living in a time when change is happening so fast that we often find our minds swimming in information.

In the midst of all this change, we have something and Someone who is unchangeable! Additionally, we have what many women are searching for. Two traits that young adults are seeking are relationships and dependability. What does Christianity offer? Relationships and dependability. We must constantly yield ourselves to the changing power of Jesus Christ! We must allow Him to mold and make us, to work in our lives to be all we can be for Him. We must allow His Spirit to fill us so that our main desire and priority is to live for and represent Him well.

In the midst of all the changes life brings, we can count on God's dependability. After all, we have a Solid Rock that remains dependable and firm in spite of any storm life sends our way. And because...

Sing "The Solid Rock"