

CREATING A WOMEN'S GATHERING

1. Our Creator God made us to be creative like Him. We have the Holy Spirit to inspire us from His Word, so BE CREATIVE!!! STRETCH your mind!!
2. Choose a Bible verse. Focus on what key words in the verse could be used as a concept to expand into the items listed on sheet that will help organize a women's fun activity/event. Here are some examples:

O Taste and see that the Lord is Good. The Grafton WMF went on the word "taste" with a coffee party; "A Latte Fun" had a coffee and chocolate bar with many different selections. Coffee jelly beans as table favors, coffee door prizes, a coffee bean decorated frame of the theme verse. A Program with fun music, then led to more spiritual music, a speaker on the theme. The goal was to invite new neighbor ladies and friends for outreach and fellowship.

Use to help you create your own women's gathering:

Select a Setting: from your theme verse

Select an Activity: from your theme verse

Select your spiritual goal from your event:

Below are some verses and activities that the 2011 WMF Leadership breakfast came up with to help you in your creative plans:

- A. Psalm 127:1 "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain."
- B. Psalm 119: 103 "How sweet are Your words to my taste."
- C. Psalm 89:15 "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim You, who walk in the light of Your Presence, O Lord."
- D. Psalm 33:12 "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chose for His inheritance."
- E. Hebrews 12: 1 b "---let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."
- F. Psalm 89:1 "I will sing of the Lords' great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations."
- G. II Peter 3:18 a "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
- H. I Thessalonians 4:18 "Therefore encourage each other with these words."
- I. Hebrews 10:23-25 "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as Is the habit of some, but encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Worksheet on the backside of this page to help you work up your special gathering.

CREATE A WOMEN'S GATHERING

VERSE:

SETTING:

ACTIVITIES:

SPIRITUAL GROWTH:

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY:

OTHER:

PROGRAM IDEAS FOR WOMEN'S MINISTRY

(The ideas below are only IDEAS to get your creative juices flowing. Please feel free to use the idea as is OR make adjustments to the idea just for your own group. You know the ladies in your congregation and community best, so whatever you can do to minister to them in a creative, fun way is GOOD!)

The ideas below have been shared by several women from various churches in the AFLC. Feel free to use them or take those ideas and expand into other areas as you see fit.

1. Using our resources – could have demonstrations or a speaker present ideas on using our resources well – buying, preparation and use of food.
 - a. Food preservation (canning, freezing, and drying of foods) can be demonstrated by someone.
 - b. Bread baking
 - c. Making fruit preserves
2. Pot Gardening – If someone lives in an apartment or condominium, they might enjoy having some fresh vegetables they can grow in the “pot garden”. Or if you are limited by mobility, pot gardening might be something you can do to enjoy fresh vegetables that are your favorites. Someone from a garden store, or someone you know with experience in this area, could be the presenter.
3. Demonstration with flowers – getting the maximum out of the minimum whether using garden varieties or from a florist. You could certainly ask a florist to do this demonstration but maybe there is a lady in your community who is just really good at flower arranging who could help you out here.
4. Summer (or any season) food demonstration. Someone could prepare, in a demonstration format, a special seasonal dish. Of course there would be “tastes” of it for each person attending.
5. Craft ideas – there may be many ladies in your community who are crafters. They could demonstrate a craft and maybe even lead a series of classes on certain types of crafts like knitting, crocheting, quilting, beading, scrapbooking, etc. Maybe you could have a craft night each week (for about 6 weeks?) and several people could demonstrate a certain craft. Good fellowship and mentoring opportunities can happen when we do that.
6. Have someone demonstrate remodeling clothes that are not worn out but that could be used by someone else if they were updated.

MORE WAYS TO MINISTER TO WOMEN:

7. Have a get together once a month where women will share a devotional that has spoken to them during that month. This might help encourage them to be in the Word and also to share their blessings and be an encouragement to others.
8. Special Events:
 - a. Mother's Day Tea or luncheon
 - b. Christmas Tea
 - c. Picnic on a patio or picnic in the park (Hold your regular women's meeting in the park and have a picnic potluck lunch).
 - d. An outing to a historical place in your area – spend time thinking about your heritage – especially your Christian heritage and how it has affected your life.
 - e. District WMF rallies – be sure your women know about and are encouraged to attend the rallies that your district has. You will get to know other women from other churches and you will also have opportunity to fellowship with women from your own church.
 - f. WMF Day at the Annual conference of the AFLC. Be sure to encourage the women from your church to attend the WMF Day. The annual conference has been called the great “family

reunion” of the AFLC. The WMF Day, which is held the day before the annual conference, can be called the Women’s reunion! It is opportunity for people to get to make new friends and renew old friendships. If all of you cannot go, can you pay for your president to go to WMF Day?

I’m sure many of you have many ideas that you can use to minister to women – both from your congregation and those outside your congregation. Whatever “fun” event you choose to plan, always include a devotional which will point you and those in attendance to Jesus. That is the purpose for which we live.

Meetings for the Seasons

EARLY WINTER

Christmas Event – TOYS OF JOY UNDER THE TREE

At your ladies Christmas party, consider asking each lady to bring a toy from a provided list to replenish the church's nursery or preschool department. The centerpieces at the table could be miniature Christmas trees with miniature gifts or toys under them (these can also act as door prizes). Have a large tree for women to put their toys under. Have a woman from your church share how a tree is a picture of our walk with Christ. For favors, consider giving each woman a wooden cutout Christmas tree.

LATE WINTER

Extreme Make-over

Spring is just around the corner and many women are concerned about making their bodies more presentable for the summer months when many wear shorts or capris and short-sleeved tops. Why not plan an Extreme Make-Over program – to “make-over” our spiritual lives as well?

Plan workshops similar to the following topics and ask the women to move from space to space around your church and learn about these various areas of their personal lives:

- **Make over your quite time:** How to have an effective personal Bible study time. Resources in preparation for the leader may be How to study the Bible by Kay Arthur or How to study the Bible for Yourself by Tim LaHaye.
- **Make over your prayer time:** Experiencing God's presence. A great resource for this would be Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence by Ruth Haley Barton.
- **Make over your Pocketbook:** God's plan for your finances. A possible resource could be Personal Finances by Larry Burkett

I'm sure you can think of many “MAKE OVER” women's issues where it would be good to speak truth in a workshop setting.

This program idea also gives women in your WMF the opportunity to enlarge their gift for public speaking.

SPRING/ EARLY SUMMER

Garden Party: Sowing Seeds of Faith Tea

Plan a Tea based on Matthew 13, the parable of the sower. Recruit one of your women or ask an outside speaker to share about how our walk with Christ is represented by the parable. Consider having a woman read the story, The Trellis and the Vine, that tells the story of a tiny seed growing into what God had planned for its life.

Base your decorations on a garden theme. Set the buffet table with gardening décor, burlap covering the tables, clay pots, stepping stones to set the food on, new, clean watering cans for the beverage, etc. Each table can have a clay stepping stone with a potted flower and tea lights as the centerpiece. Door prizes can be gardening items. Each woman can receive a packet of flower seeds. Consider serving open-faced cucumber sandwiches (or another vegetable sandwich) fresh fruit, cookies, and more than one flavor of tea.

Consider selling two tickets for the price of one, so the women can invite a friend, coworker, neighbor, etc. Also, consider having a table where the women can sign up for various church ministries that need laborers in the field! Planting and harvesting a garden takes labor and so do the various ministries in the church of Jesus Christ!

FALL

A Slice of Heaven

Featuring hot apple pie and espresso. Decorate everything in Fall leaves and apples. Print the programs in the shape of an apple. Decorate the tables with red table cloths and fall leaves with a whole apple pie at the center of each table.

Can small jars of applesauce for each woman to take home with her. Attach an apple shaped tag with the scripture from Psalm 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me in the shadow of your wings.”

Have a speaker who will encourage the women sharing by sharing about the fruits of the Spirit; or bearing fruit for the Kingdom by someone leading a Bible study on Matthew 25:14 – 30 – using our gifts; or John 15:1-17 – the vine and branches.

Bountiful Blessings – A Night of Praise

Plan a women’s dinner that is focused on the blessings and praises that we receive from God. Decorate each table with cornucopias and all the fall trimmings! After the meal, have the leader focus the women’s attention on the word PRAISE. Consider choosing 6 women from the church to represent a letter from the word PRAISE. Give each of the 6 women the question, WHY DO I PRAISE GOD? And assign one letter to each woman. The first word in their answer should begin with the letter assigned to them. Such as:

- P – Praise God for my Provisions (home, finances, job, other material things.)
- R – Relationships (family, friends, neighbors, church.)
- A – Abilities (all that God has equipped me to do.)
- I – Identity in Christ (I am His child.)
- S – Savior (From the beginning of time, God planned for the sacrifice of His Son to redeem me.)
- E – Eternal life – living eternally committed to Him, both here on this earth and in heaven forevermore.)

Have each woman expound on their answer for 3 – 5 minutes.

More Program Ideas for special Women's Ministry programs

Submitted by Carol Hensrud, Bethel FLC, Grafton, ND

SPRING TEA: "Growing in the Garden of God"

Plan a tea with the theme "Gardening God's Way" based on John 15 – the vine and the branches. "I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener" and Gen 2:8 "Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east." Could promote it as a "Mother-Daughter" event, with all ages taking part. Recruit one or two of your own women to share their expertise on gardening, and relate it to our spiritual life – preparing the soil, planting, weeding, pruning, harvesting. First have the speaker giving a devotional based on Scriptures listed above; then demonstrate how to plant a patio flower pot. Discuss soil, fertilizer, types of flowers, etc. Take questions from the group. When the pot has been planted, have a drawing to see who gets to take it home! You may wish to include other door prizes for young girls to grandmas!

Decorate the tables with potted geraniums, china cups and saucers, bright spring-colored napkins, and individual petit-fours. A traditional English Tea menu of cucumber sandwiches, ribbon sandwiches, strawberries dipped in chocolate, and a small cookie may be served.

Musicals selections for the program may include the hymn, "Thy Word is Like a Garden, Lord" and/or the piano duet entitled "Tea for Two."

Invitations can be sent/given to all the women of the church encouraging them to come and bring a friend. Tickets could be sold two for the price of one.

Yawn! A Board Party

*Invitation taken from the book "Creative Hospitality" by Marlene D. LeFever.

Invitation:

"Come on and be 'board' with us"

We're planning an evening of good, old-fashioned board games.

Come and meet our church "at play".

When: _____

Where: _____

Food Sure! We're making "whatever soup"

We'll have the stock simmering and you

Bring something to add to the stock. The soup will

Be what you make it.

Or, bring something to add to the lettuce.

We promise you won't be bored!

Various Program Idea Starters

Determine your focus as a WMF. The number one focus should be Christ and the relationship of your ladies to Him. Bible study is the way to begin. The other programs, projects will grow from that. If you do nothing else in your church begin with Bible study and prayer. As the ladies grow in their relationship with the Lord encourage unity with the group by involving them all in various programs and opportunities.

Is there a Senior complex in your area. Check out to see if there would be any interest in a Bible study held there. Publicize the study, time and location. If possible your ladies could contribute a snack or coffee favor for after or during the study.

Do you have young mothers to offer a Bible study time for? Get some women together and offer babysitting so the mothers can fully focus on God's Word.

How about a prayer breakfast? Have the ladies gather around breakfast and then close with a time of prayer

How can you reach the children of your community? Can you have a monthly (or how ever often you deem you can handle in your schedule) Kids club. It is easy to work with if you get VBS material to use as your base.

Are there organizations either locally or nationally that you could provide things for such as: Food pantry needing helpers or food to stock their shelves. Quilts for the homeless shelters. We also have our mission organizations that can use your help. The cost of postage to ship overseas is high but it is well worth it at the mission. Brazil has the Miriam Home, which can use several different supplies. Alaska has need of quilts to hand out as well as cookie mixes when The Net is open in the spring.

Is your group interested in a cookbook? Pulling together recipes and organizing them and then publishing them into a book and handing out or selling them to raise funds for missions or a missions project.

How about a craft night? To create crafts, cards, etc. for the church or personally. Time spent together creating things. Maybe making new Christmas ornaments for the trees at church.

How about hosting activities that can help the community out such as, blood drives, financial seminars, Veterans' Day celebrations, etc?

Congregational gatherings to build fellowship and unity in your church might be, Valentine's Day, Easter Breakfast, Fun supper (Mystery Supper), Fall supper, Christmas Dinner.

Practice a Jesus heart, be available. Always be willing and able to help with whatever is needed, no matter how last minute.

Is there a Prison ministry or a women's shelter that you could make hand-made cards to give to women in prison so they can use them to write loved ones. We've collected stationery, pens and stamps to send to women in prison as well. We've also had blanket parties where we do the fleece tied blankets and bring them to battered women's shelters so that children that are brought in have something they can keep and comfort them. Take some time to pray for those who will be receiving the gifts that you present to them.

Anyone interested in ministry to women could be involved in planning activities. Ladies with special talents could be asked to do demonstrations on the things they do. Gatherings can be planned that would encourage the ladies in various ways. Here are a few suggestions but don't be limited to just these:

- Setting up a mentoring program matching mature ladies with a younger one with the idea of mutual teaching?
- How about a quilting group that gathers to make quilts for missions or community needs?
- A card making group to make cards that can be given to prison ministry or women's shelters?
- A sewing group could make toys and/or simple clothing for missions or women's shelters, depending on the needs expressed by these missions?
- You could also have a visitation ministry for the elderly and/or shut-ins in your congregation to show the love of Christ.
- How about a Young Mother's study, a Girls Night Out, or a Women's Retreat (one day or a full weekend)?

What other ideas could you come up with that would minister to your ladies? You can always ask the ladies what they are interested in. There is also the opportunity to get involved through the Samaritan Shoe Boxes and Christmas Tree Ministries (take a need off of an ornament hung on a tree) or other legitimate organizations.

Ecclesiastes Program Ideas

When planning your WMF activity calendar for the year, please consider using all or some of the following ideas from Ecclesiastes:

A time to be born: Presenting newborns with Cradle Roll Packets.

A time to die: Serving a light lunch or meal at funerals.

A time to plant: Planting flowers on the church property or nursing home.

A time to heal: Honoring those who have served in the military.

A time to tear down: Visiting shut-ins.

A time to build: Partnering those in your congregation 18 years old and younger with an adult who will pray for and spend time with them.

A time to weep: Abortion. Be informed and inform on National or State issues that Christians should be aware of that could influence politicians to vote according to God's laws.

A time to laugh: A gathering to share a video from Ken Davis or other Christian comedian. Popcorn could be served and entire families could be invited.

A time to mourn: Visit with those who have lost loved ones and support them however needed.

A time to gather stones: Raking leaves in the church lawn and other collaborative efforts.

A time to gather them: Prepare a list of needs for the kitchen with a sign-up sheet for individuals to purchase.

A time to embrace: We had a head usher who insisted on hugging everyone. It took a while to get used to, but when he moved, we all miss this sincere gesture.

A time to search: Searching for verses to comfort a person going through a particularly hard time.

A time to throw away: Purging the church kitchen and storage areas.

A time to mend: Making quilts.

A time to love: Host a Valentine's dinner honoring couples who have been married 50 years and more.

DAY OF PRAYER SERVICE

There is a movement of prayer sweeping across the land that could be the prelude to a season of spiritual awakening. This suggested service may be used for a format for women of the AFLC to join in united prayer on at least one dedicated occasion.

The following is one model for an hour of prayer:

1. PRELUDE (10 minutes)

Scripture – Psalm 138, 146, 148 or 150

Worship in Song – Choose a hymn like “We Praise Thee, O God,” or a couple of praise choruses, that addresses the Lord personally.

Prayer – for Himself, Who He is and what He has done.

2. PREPARATION (15 minutes)

Scripture – Psalm 51:1-17

Prayer – Searching the heart, confession of sins and personal revival.

3. PETITION (20 minutes)

Scripture – Matthew 7:7-11

The Lord’s Prayer

Worship in Song – “Sweet Hour of Prayer” or another favorite prayer hymn.

Prayer – specific requests

- World evangelization
- Our nation
- Our local congregation and the AFLC
- Personal ministries

4. POSTLUDE (15 minutes)

Scripture – Psalm 100, Philippians 4:4-7

Worship in Song – “Thanks to God” or another hymn that expresses our gratitude to the Lord.

Prayer – thanksgiving

- For answered prayer
- For the family of God
- For the work of God around the world

NOTE: Involve as many women as possible...a leader, Scripture readers, etc. You may decide to open each section of the service for free prayer or to assign certain individuals for specific prayer topics. A combination approach is also possible, with at least one person prepared in advance for each section plus opening the time for free prayer by any who want to participate. Finally, try to follow the time divisions as carefully as possible so that you are finished in one hour. Remember most of all that a Day of Prayer should not just be another program but a step in the process of pressing on from where we are now to where God wants us to be, from what we are now to what God wants us to become.

PRAYER PARTNERS

By Lori Willard

GIRLFRIENDS UNITE!

Here are few ways that you can encourage prayer amongst the ladies in your church:



At the Altar – Our congregation was blessed when God called two men from our church into ministry. My heart was burdened for those men and their families! Our church family had a responsibility to pray for them during those years! Our pastor's wife agreed with me because she also had a strong sense to begin a regular prayer time at the church. Together, we met at the altar every Saturday morning with no agenda and no prayer list – just seeking God's heart – what He wanted us to pray about. As we were quiet for several minutes, the Lord directed our prayer time as our petitions went back and forth between us. Although we verbally announced the prayer time to other women, we had few others attend. Some would come for a short season and not return. Others would come only once. The amount of people did not seem to matter. God made it clear that He wanted us to be consistent as He showed us answers to prayer during that very first week and beyond! God is so gracious to us! If we will humbly answer His call to pray, He will work in and through us! Sometimes the Lord would make US the answer to our prayers! Even though I have moved and am not able to attend that church anymore, guess who I call on when I KNOW I need someone who will PRAY?!

Walking – Women love to walk for exercise! Why not incorporate prayer into your times of walking?! You can walk in good weather or bad. Outdoors can provide wonderful fresh air and sunrays. Inside your church can provide a warm, dry spot for those stormy or rainy days. Regardless, grab a walking partner and start praying as you stroll together.

Coffee/Tea Time – Invite a girlfriend or two who would love to come to your house and pray.

Sitting in Traffic – We do that a lot where I come from! How about taking the time to pray with those in the car? Alone? How about praying by yourself? Make the most of the time given to us.

As the Lord provides us grace, we are to be: united, joyful, in prayer, focusing on the Word, and sensitive to others' needs – we, quite possibly, may be the answer to their need – according to Philippians 4. What better way to unite together, as sisters, than in and through prayer?!

Hebrews 10:24-25 NKJV

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”



Christmas Gathering Meeting

By Barb Strand

As many of you know, there are 11 Bible lessons in our Bible study book, so in our local WMF, we use December for our Christmas gathering (party). One member usually volunteers to host the Christmas event, and it is an excellent opportunity to invite women of the congregation that don't usually attend the WMF meeting and others in the community to come and join the Christmas festivities, and celebrate our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Often times we have mothers, sisters, special friends, and others that are included in the gathering.

Everyone who wishes brings a dish to share...often their Christmas baking specialty, special dips or sauces, or a new recipe they are anxiously waiting to try out...there is usually an abundance of food. We have started to bring recipes to share too...especially if it is something new we have tried.

Also we bring something to share...a reading, a portion of scripture that has spoken to us during the Christmas season, or sing a favorite Christmas carol, or maybe a prayer request. Maybe the words of a Christmas hymn have spoken to you during the advent season, and what a wonderful time to be able to share with a body of believers...all women.



For Members In Retirement Homes Or Nursing Homes

By Barb Strand

Keep in touch with the member of your WMF...good way to include these ladies is to make sure they receive the Bible study, so they can be doing it at the same time your local WMF does.

Have an officer or friend of the member in a facility contact the WMF member in the facility and see if she would like to host a monthly WMF meeting.

- They may be able to secure a room for the meeting if given enough lead time.
- Allow the hostess to pick the date and time for the meeting in her new facility.
- Offer to have other members bring the lunch, but allow the hostess to do so if she wishes.
- Be sure and announce the change in venue for the monthly meeting – maybe a couple of months ahead so members can make arrangements to attend.

Make a valid attempt to attend the WMF meeting of the member in the facility.

Allow enough time to see the new home of the member.

Be sure to pray for the member in a new setting.

Send minutes of the monthly business meeting to members if they desire.

TEA PARTY

Karen Sletten, Bethel Lutheran W.M.F

Our minister's wife had a "Tea Party" for an elderly member who will soon be leaving for an assisted living home. She made it seem as old fashioned as possible. The tables were covered with yellow, brown and green plastic tablecloths, down the center was old beautiful cream pitchers-- fine china ones. Each place setting had quaint dainty napkins with a spoon and fork. Each place setting had a beautiful (and fragile) cup and saucer. Many of us had brought our best ones from home so each setting was unique.

The food was served from a serving table and the tea, coffee, punch and lemonade were served at their tables. This way they only had to carry the plate and the tea cups and saucers stayed at the table so there was no worry of dropping or spilling of the fragile borrowed china. The hot water for tea was in a big olden teapot that came from Holland some years ago. This was on display but tea was served at the table for those who wanted it.

The program (while everyone was sitting down) consisted of a devotional, a solo, and some poems-Helen Steiner Rice type. Since the honoree was a retired teacher and several former students were in attendance, they gave interesting stories about their remembrance of being in the third grade room with her as their teacher.

The afternoon was delightful!!! Many of our younger gals had never actually been to a real Tea Party.



GROWING YOUR GROUP

By Lynn Wellumson

I wish there were five steps to building numbers in your local WMF group. There is no magical formula that works in any group, let alone every group.

Obviously, and foremost, make it a matter of prayer. Pray that God would lay it on women's hearts a desire to be involved in mission work at home and abroad. Pray that Biblically sound AFLC printed materials would be a desire that lay on their hearts.

Every WMF group has to evaluate and determine the best time and date for the ladies involved in their church. Whether it is morning, afternoon, or evening, be careful of the time. Meetings that seem to have no purpose or drone on are a drain on everyone.

With God's help, make your group a safe place to discuss hardships or heartaches. Burdens shared and genuine empathy are so helpful and we fulfill scripture concerning bearing one another's burdens.

Perhaps, someone could be hired from the community to babysit young children while moms attend WMF. Is there a community service project your area needs?

One idea is for each woman involved in a local WMF to be a friend/mentor to a fellow church attendee. This involves praying for, encouraging, and urging participation at the local WMF level. If every member that currently attends the local WMF meeting could encourage and invite one other woman, that would be 100% growth. PRAY, first and foremost, that God would lay on that person's heart a desire to see His kingdom furthered and allow them to be a part of that process.



GIGGLES Girls Group

By Chanyce Dahl

WMF is a special and unique aspect of the AFLC. It exists to minister to women, support missionaries and serve others. The opportunities for positively impacting your local church, community and the world are endless. As we consider the command to “Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.” Mark 16:15a, it makes one wonder if the women of our AFLC are fully embracing the simplicity of WMF in order to do our part.

As our Evening WMF attendance numbers began to decline, we prayed for a solution to why women were not compelled to be a part of such an integral part of the church. The Lord put the idea of GIGGLES on my heart.

GIGGLES stands for Growing In God through Games, Lessons, Experience and Service. This is a junior WMF program aimed to mentor the next generation. Girls ages eight to twelve are invited to attend our monthly WMF meeting. We encourage their moms to attend as well. We want to give them a taste of the fellowship and the ministry opportunities along with the joy that comes with being an active member of the church body.

During our WMF Bible Study, the GIGGLES girls have their own Bible study led by one of the moms or a high school mentor. They attend and take part in our business meeting. Other things that they do throughout the year are lessons received from women in our church such as baking, embroidery, card making, etc. We also encourage them to take part in service projects such as missionary cards, shopping for Christmas gifts for Angel Tree, Christmas caroling to our elderly in the church and serving on Sunday mornings during coffee hour.

The young girls are so enthusiastic and want to learn and serve. They breathed life into our WMF group and blessed so many through their service. Hopefully their experiences and knowledge gained through their time involved with WMF make a lasting impact in their walk with the Lord and their desire to be active members of WMF one day.

Joseph – A Tender Portrait at Christmastime

By Amy Engwall

Have you ever felt like your life has been unremarkably ordinary and dotted with failure? Then take heart, dear one, for you are in good company. Scripture paints a beautiful portrait of an extraordinary man named Joseph who probably did not see himself as anything particularly special. He was born into a family in Israel at a time of spiritual drought; a virtual silence from God that had lasted four hundred years. Joseph would have the privilege of witnessing God shatter His silence. God was preparing to send His only begotten Son in the form of a helpless babe to be light in the darkness, the hope of salvation to a lost and dying world. In his wildest dreams Joseph would never have imagined himself in the epi-center of this fulfillment of prophecy. As God unfolded His will in His high and mysterious ways, He included Joseph, a simple laborer and crafter of wood. While at times uncontrollable circumstances must have made Joseph feel like a complete failure, God chose him because of something he did have control over - his faith and his character.

In Matthew 1:18-19 we see Joseph's humility.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly."

These verses tell us that Mary and Joseph were betrothed. In those days a betrothal was like an engagement period, but it was legally binding. A betrothal could be broken only by a legal transaction, much like a divorce. The betrothal lasted about twelve months and during that time the groom would busy himself preparing a home for his bride which was typically attached to his family's home. The bride and her family were busy preparing wedding clothing. When the father of the bridegroom determined the newlyweds' home was finished and the time was right, he would look at his son and say, "Go and get your bride."

It was during this time of great anticipation, preparation, and hope for the future that Mary was found to be with child. Can you imagine how devastating this news would have been to Joseph? He knew he wasn't the father of the child. What an embarrassing and humiliating turn of events! Joseph surely would have initially felt betrayed. But Matthew tells us that Joseph was a righteous man. Matthew also indicates that Joseph was a very humble man. Humility is the grace to not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to, but to honor others above ourselves. A betrothal could be terminated on the grounds of adultery and the punishment was sometimes death by stoning. Matthew 1:19 gives us a glimpse into the tenderness of Joseph's heart when it reveals that he planned to send Mary away secretly. No revenge, no spite, just kind humility – a reflection of the character God looked for in the man who was to be the earthly father of Jesus.

While Joseph didn't initially embrace Mary's pregnancy claim that 'the Holy Spirit did it', God didn't leave Joseph to wonder for long if Mary was the most imaginative storyteller on the planet. God sent a special angelic messenger to Joseph to confirm Mary's outlandish explanation.

“But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.” Matthew 1:20 – 21

The angel was intentional in assuring Joseph’s upcoming role as Jesus’ earthly father by telling him that he would name the child, a distinct honor reserved for the father.

We get another confirmation of Joseph’s humility as the story continues in Matthew 1:24-25.

“And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife, and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.”

Obedience, humility, and patience walk side by side. Joseph immediately followed through with what the angel of the Lord commanded. He took Mary as his wife. He didn’t demand his rights as a husband but protected Mary and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to Jesus.

If a mere human had written this story, it is at this point that the highly favored couple would become famous, pampered and protected from all earthly hardship. God, in His infinite wisdom, orchestrated a much different turn of events.

In Luke 2:4-7 we see the Joseph’s humanness.

“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register, along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was with child. And it came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Joseph had no control over the political decisions of his day. He had no special authority, no world-wide clout. He was helpless to change the situation when Caesar Augustus decided to take a census of the whole inhabited world. He was forced to travel nearly eighty miles to Bethlehem with his very pregnant wife. If Joseph and Mary traveled with a caravan and Mary rode on a donkey (which the Bible never verifies) then the journey probably took four days. Ladies, can you imagine being almost nine months pregnant riding a donkey twenty miles a day for four days straight? We can expect that upon arrival Joseph hustled to the “Bethlehem Inn” to claim the room that God had surely mercifully and miraculously reserved for them. As Mary’s warning of “the contractions are coming harder and faster” rang in his ears, the cold, uncaring pronouncement of “NO VACANCY” from the innkeeper must have hit Joseph like a kick to the stomach. The Bible has already assured us of Joseph’s care and protection for Mary. How he must have agonized over not being able to find a suitable place to stay. It was obvious that the baby’s birth was imminent. So, they found shelter in what surely was the stable carved out of rock in the Bethlehem hillside housing the spotless, unblemished lambs that were to be taken to Jerusalem and sacrificed for the sins of the people. What must have been going through Joseph’s mind? Perhaps something like this,

“God trusted me to take care of the woman who is carrying the Savior of the world and I have failed. Horribly! Completely! Epically!” Joseph was powerless to provide Mary with even basic essentials like a bed or even her mother. Instead, they were surrounded by smelly animals. How could he have known that this stable was the perfect place for the Lamb of God to be born? It must have hurt Joseph, the skilled carpenter, to lay this precious newborn baby boy, the Son of God, not in a cradle lovingly made by his own hands, but in a dirty feeding trough. Nothing was going the way Joseph had hoped, yet all of heaven knew God’s plan was playing out perfectly. While Joseph was berating himself for this “epic fail” God was writing a breathtakingly beautiful script that humanity would embrace and celebrate into all of eternity. Sometimes God uses us most remarkably when we feel like we are failing most miserably.

In Matthew 13:54-55a we see Joseph’s honorability.

“And coming to His home town Jesus began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they became astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom, and these miraculous powers? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary.....”

Joseph honored Jesus by raising Him as if He was his own. All of Nazareth recognized Jesus as the son of Joseph the carpenter, even years after Jesus was grown. Even though Jesus did not share one drop of blood with Joseph, it is Joseph’s genealogy that is recorded in Matthew 1. Both Mary and Joseph descended from David but it is Joseph who descended from David’s son Solomon while Mary was descended from David’s son, Nathan. The right to royalty came through Solomon who was David’s heir to the throne. So, it is through Joseph’s adoption of Jesus that He was granted the legal right to be the King of the Jews. If Jesus had been the son of Mary without her being the legal wife of Joseph, His royal claim would have been rejected. As the virgin-born son of Mary, Jesus had no legal right to the throne. As the adopted son of Joseph He had every right. Joseph would be lost to history if his greatest accomplishment had not been that of stepdad to Jesus, our Messiah.

A look at the life of Joseph gives us hope that God treasures those who are obedient to Him, and He will use those who trust in Him even if circumstances seem to indicate differently. The few verses that give us insight into the character of Joseph reveal a man with a heart full of love, integrity, and tenderness. This Christmas season when you see a nativity scene, notice Mary’s humble husband by the manger looking down in wonder and experience with him the miracle of being invited to embrace Emmanuel, God with us.

For a beautiful and poignant addition to this talk, you can play by audio or video “Joseph’s Song” by Michael Card found on YouTube.

Our Church's WMF Journey

Sent in by Betsy VanMuenster

The WMF ladies' group has been functioning at our church since our church's beginning. According to the WMF records here their opening offering was in January 1988. The group has been faithfully meeting on a monthly basis. Sometimes not very many ladies come and sometimes a lot of ladies come.

A couple of years ago, at our church's annual meeting, the WMF leader and treasurer suggested that the WMF group combine with the quilting/sewing group, due to low attendance at the WMF meetings. This suggestion was a good one and that's what happened. The two groups combined forces!

Here's how we do it: we gather on the 3rd Saturday of every month, at 9 am for sewing. At 11:30 we stop to have devotions, review of our missionaries and what is currently going on with them, and we end with prayer, always lifting up to God the work of our missionaries and their needs. A donation is collected from this group, (as well as a ladies Bible study group, who also donates to the quilting/WMF group. The church is also very generous to the WMF, giving to us as well). Afterwards we have lunch break then we get back to our sewing!!

We have received many donations of sewing machines, yards and yards of fabric, thread, sewing utensils, etc. We always have a goal in mind, sewing quilts, blankets, bags, etc. to send to our missionaries and their work. So far, we have sent quilts to Brazil at least twice, Alaska, and Mexico. We made 40 book bags for our Kids Club out of donated old jeans and jean material. We are currently making lap quilts for our local nursing home. (One of our quilting/WMF members was temporarily in that nursing home). We make fleece tie blankets for our graduating seniors!! We have many baby blankets that have been made by our group or donated that we are looking for a place to donate to.

On each blanket that we make, we always include God's Word somewhere on that blanket to remind the recipient of our intentions.

When we have a project ready to send off, we present it to the church and our pastor always prays over it. We also, pray for the recipient of each completed blanket, bag, Christmas box, that God would use it and His Word to draw that person to Him. That God would bless this person and their family.

We recently decided to name our quilting/WMF group. During our devotion time we had discussed 2 Timothy 3:1-6. In this scripture, Paul is talking about godlessness in the last days, people who are lovers of themselves, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God, "having a form of godliness, but denying its power." Paul then goes on to say that "they are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women..." We named these women: www (short for weak willed women)! We knew that we didn't want to be one of these www (weak willed women), but instead we wanted to be Women of the Word (WoW)! So, we named our group "WoW."

Our WoW group is such a fun time of fellowship, encouragement, and love and as an added benefit, we have children who join us on occasion. They always brighten our day and help with the work.

We hope this little story of our church's WMF group will be an encouragement to each of you, to continue in your work for the Lord, "because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 1:58

WMF Camp Gathering

By Margie Lee

For the 3rd year, the Western North Dakota/ Eastern Montana family camp included a special WMF gathering. This year's event was hosted by Emmanuel Free Lutheran from Williston, ND. Around 30 ladies, young and old, attended our WMF Lemonade/Coffee.

Everyone received a devotional booklet entitled "Lemonade, when life gives you lemons...." which contained scripture, recipes, craft, and game ideas.



An icebreaker included everyone writing an answer to complete the sentence "When life gives you lemons..."

We also played a game called "Hot Lemon" (similar to hot potato) and passed our "artificial lemon" to music about lemons. When the music abruptly stopped, the gal holding the lemon shared an answer to a "table talk" style question and also won a door prize. All the young ladies who didn't "win", were also given a door prize.

Lime bars, lemon bars, lemon cookies, and CHOCOLATE brownies were served along with coffee and fresh squeezed lemonade. The gathering concluded with Jeanie Sheldon sharing from a book she was reading about a missionary. It was informal, fun, lasted about an hour, and enjoyed by all ages. A Thrivent card was used and that covered all of our expenses. I would recommend other family camps include a special gathering time for your WMF. It is a great opportunity to introduce our young ladies to our faith, fellowship, and service as future WMF members.



IDEAS that WORK

By Mary Pollestad

Let me encourage each women's group to always have one special event that women



enjoy and one in which they can invite their friends to come along to. Every woman likes to bring their friends to something just so they can be together. This also enables the Christian gal to bring her non-Christian friend to a non-threatening event in the church. This has really proven to be a wonderful time of outreach. Also, it helps the younger gals to have a special time with their Christian Friends. In this busy

world women don't all have the time to get together. What could be a more wonderful way to get together than at the church around a Christ centered event. It proves to be a wonderful time for all! Always provide childcare for those single gals with children. This way the money issue of a sitter is not a stumbling block to stand in the way for the young mothers. Don't forget the older generation. They enjoy being there too. It is a wonderful time for them to be around the younger gals. Hope this is an idea that you can possibly use and that all can enjoy.

Creative Program Starter Ideas

Ideas gathered at the Sunnyside Free Lutheran Fall Tea September 2021

Theme: John 3:16, "For God so Loved"

Setting: This could be done at church and out into the community.

Activities: gardens/spring or fall

Spiritual Growth: sharing with others

Learning Opportunity: God is love and we should love.

Other:

Theme: John 3:16

Setting: A church or private home.

Activities: Helping others

Spiritual Growth: Bible study.

Learning Opportunity: Emphasis that we are not alone, God is with us.

Other:

Theme: Hebrews 12:1

Setting: A race of running but have the clothing of a woman NOT dressed for running.

Activities: A race of getting "dressed up" and then trying to run with all the material things hindering your performance of "racing."

Spiritual Growth: Not needing material things or image to be the person you can be.

Learning Opportunity: Open your heart and loving who you are, who is with you and putting your faith in God.

Other: Being able to help others by an example of being true.

Theme: 1 Thessalonians 4:8

Setting: At church.

Activities: Use Scripture. Connect -share needs and prayer

Spiritual Growth: Encourage through Scripture and memorizing Scripture.

Learning Opportunity: Through CD's, Radio Broadcast, mixing with people of different cultures.

Other:

Theme: Unto us a child is born – Mary's response to God that needs to be us.

Setting: A Christmas Tea

Activities: Demonstrations of Lefsa making, knitting, other Christmas crafts. Have a giving tree, bring in gifts for Angel tree, nursing home, group home

Spiritual Growth: Use our gifts to share. Keeping the meaning of Christ in Christmas.

Learning Opportunity: Serving, giving, sharing, honoring God.

Other:

Theme: Hebrews 12:1

Setting: Addiction

Activities: Self-Awareness-Finding out if each individual has or is prone to addiction

Spiritual Growth: Living an addiction controlled life.

Learning Opportunity: Find Scriptures that pertaining to addiction and how to turn it over to God. Learning you are not fighting alone

Other:

Theme: Proverbs 19:17-Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord and he will repay him for his deed.

Setting: Meet at the church.

Activities: Gathering items to give to the needy such as clothing, etc.

Spiritual Growth: The joy of giving.

Learning Opportunity: Putting a smile on someone else's face. Learning it's much better to give than to receive.

Other:

Theme: Luke 18:16

Setting: A Park.

Activities: Games, balloons, rock painting, petting zoo

Spiritual Growth: Taking care of nature and animals.

Learning Opportunity: Taking care of God's land and creatures.

Other:

