

The Story of Women's Ministries in Billings Montana



The Women's Ministries program in Billings, Montana is based on a four part approach; Spiritual, Physical, Social & Outreach. Each year we have a theme and the four growth areas follow that theme. We meet every Tuesday at the Uncell Center at the Church from the beginning of February to about mid November. Starting at 5:30pm with a light potluck meal. Our meals aren't planned but somehow we almost always end up with a fairly balanced meal of entree, sides and desserts. At the end of the meal we often split the leftovers to share with spouses or others. Given that it's Montana, sometimes we do have to cancel an occasional Tuesday based on bad weather, but that's just the price we pay for living in such a beautiful state. After our meal we try to settle down to a short devotion and then get into the activity for the evening. We end our meetings no later than 8:00 each Tuesday. We have an ongoing text chain to keep up with the things we wish the whole group to know or requests for the group during the time we don't meet. For those who don't text we'll coordinate who will call whom about announcements (such as canceled meetings), requests for prayer or great news. Our core group is about 12 strong.

I begin my planning for each year as soon as the previous year ends. I'm a big one for having a plan and not just winging it. I've found my particular group of ladies really appreciate having a written plan so that they can plan their own personal events to not miss the most important women's meetings to them individually.

So, you are probably wondering. How do we have or start a successful Women's Ministries program in my church? How can we make ours better? Ideas Lady, Ideas.....

Before I lay out our yearly plan I figured I'd give you a little history on the Billings path.

Our story: in 2018 I was asked to assist another woman in the church with getting the Women's Ministries back up and running after having it languish for a number of years. She had a real heart for WM and was at a time in her life that it was important to her to devote time to this area of our church growth. For me, I'd never really found my place in the church, being single with no kids I didn't really have a calling to help with the children's ministries, my faith is very quiet so leading a sabbath school class wasn't an area I was comfortable. I'm not musical in any way. Giving a sermon would break me out in hives! I have a very stressful, demanding full time job and I'm not comfortable speaking up front in church. I do regular sabbath morning greeting in the foyer. I did an occasional children's story and an even fewer reading of the scripture or tithe and offering call. I always wondered in the back of my mind where I fit in? How do I serve? How can I make a difference? So when she asked if I would assist I said "sure why not".

When we first met to decide how we wanted the Billings Women's Ministries to serve the church and each other, we came up with the concept of meeting the spiritual, physical, social and outreach areas for the ladies in the church. We wanted to foster a group that developed friendships, laughter and a longing to spend time together outside of just meeting at church each week, prayer meeting or another bible study group. Throughout a big part of my childhood I was part of a church where we were friends outside of church and I knew the fun things about my fellow members because we did things together like an annual church campout, picnics, saturday night volleyball games. I wanted that for the ladies of our church.

We all know that once you've gotten out of your education years it becomes harder and harder to make friends. Especially if you've moved to a new town in your later years, or you've lost or never found your life companion. We've all found that breaking in a new friend group is very difficult. We wanted to give our ladies a safe space to develop friendships again. Friendships that meant in the middle of the week you had someone to call and say... hey you want to go shopping with me, and someone would answer that call. So we started our plan. The upside for me at that time

was that the original leader was responsible, as women's ministries leader, for being on the church board (I hate meetings, too many in my own job) so win win for me. All the fun but not the responsibilities.

So in 2018 we began. For the spiritual, she had several spiritual series on DVD with accompanying books that she'd been wanting to share, so we had that covered. I'd always felt the lack of time spent together laughing and sharing our personal stories kept us from bonding. That led to - what about outreach or our health? How are we meeting those areas for the women of the church? So now we had our plan. Each year since 2018 we've refined that plan. We had a couple of building years and they were great. In 2020-21 unfortunately our fearless leader had circumstances that lead to her moving out of state. By then I was hooked. I knew my ladies stories! I knew the stories of Delores's and Florence's births in the early 20th century. I knew who couldn't stand onions in any dish. Who to go to if we needed sourdough starter. Who could be counted on for a funny quip if things were getting too serious. We all knew who takes tons of pictures of extended family and can't wait to share on her phone. We know who we need to drag back into paying attention at a meeting. I couldn't let our progress go. I had found my place. To keep our forward progress I was even willing (albeit still reluctantly) to sit on the church board as the official Women's Ministries leader. We had a Covid year where we couldn't meet but we didn't give up. I was told by lots of our group that they really really missed each other. We'd reached our goal. We'd fostered friendships. We'd helped each other get through a difficult time.

So, once restrictions were lifted we began again. So this time I was on my own and I'm a planner. I more formally refined what we'd been doing.

So here's what we do. Here are the themes for the last two years, and what those look like here in Billings, Montana.

For 2023 our theme was Joy and Gratitude and for 2024 our theme is Healthy Prayer, Healthy Me

Spiritual: in 2023 I asked the ladies to come up with a list of books that they thought would be appropriate for our spiritual growth. We'd already decided to forgo any more DVD type series as none of us wanted to sit and just watch a DVD then discuss it afterwards. That approach was great when we started on our path but we felt we were past the awkward stages where people were hesitant to speak up and share. After getting a list we voted on which book to use and the concept of the yearly theme was born. Our book for 2023 was Choosing Gratitude by Nancy Leigh DeMoss. We read one chapter a month and discuss what we gleaned during the meeting, sort of like a sabbath school class. My mother is a person who likes a study approach and was a perfect leader for the 'book' meeting each month. In 2024, I didn't have to get a list of books from the ladies because our pastor had inspired me during one of his sermons using excerpts from The Power of a Praying Husband and The Power of a Praying Wife by Stormie Omarrhian, leading me to wonder if she wrote The Power of a Praying Woman, which I very happy to find on a quick research trip thru Amazon she had. And because we have some serious prayer warriors in our group of women, using Prayer as our central theme for 2024 was perfect. Unfortunately, I discovered that there are 30 chapters in The Power of a Praying Women, which is way past the 8 or so months we meet. [But don't give up, I'll address this book later]. While scrolling through the books..... I found Fervent, A Woman's Battle Plan for Serious, Specific and Strategic Prayer by Priscilla Shirer . Bingo I'd found our book.

Side note: both books we've used have the added benefit of also being available on CD so one of the ladies in our group who is mostly blind can listen to the book instead of reading it.

Devotions: 2023 I asked for volunteers each week to give the devotion. We were given lots of insight from each other by going this route and were even treated to a couple of mini concerts by our resident songwriter and singer. In 2024 I had really wanted to use The Power of a Praying Woman as our spiritual book but as mentioned above about the number of chapters it didn't work but as our devotion book it was perfect, as there are 30+ chapters and we meet approximately 30+ times for the year.

Social: Here is where our ladies have shined. Previous to 2023 I came up with questions designed to draw out the ladies' personal stories. Tell us who they are as people. Share their personal stories. This approach led to long forgotten memories, laughter and an occasional tear. I got to know women I'd known most of my life on a personal level. Women who'd been involved in my growth from childhood to adulthood, but who I didn't know as a peer. Even stories from my own mother I hadn't known. In 2023 keeping with the theme all questions were designed to draw out joy, laughter and gratitude. In 2024 we are going with fun "Questions in a Jar". From silly things like would you rather be a tiger or a lion and why. To more serious questions like would you rather sit at Jesus feet or prepare a delicious meal for Jesus and his disciples. I'm very much looking forward to everyone's answers this year and the insight it might bring into who each lady is and inside, "you had to be there" giggles about elephants.



Physical/Health: in 2023 we didn't focus so much on the physical/exercise. We filled this week with lots of different things including a cooking demonstration from one of the men in the church, a couple of classes/demonstrations from each other such as talks about activated charcoal, herbal balms or DIY beauty treatments. We even had a couple of guest speakers in for health topics like osteoporosis or the need for healthy sleep. In 2024 we are actually going to have exercise demonstrations and handouts. No zumba or anything like that but things like stretches, chair exercises and a strength and balance routine to keep falls to a minimum.



OutReach/InReach: we've done prayer shawls to give out (not as successful as most of our ladies don't crochet). Helped support our local LaVie program. Do a deep clean on our church kitchen/social center that hadn't been done in years. We also make and send birthday cards each month for church members near and far to let them know we think of them. We are looking for ideas each year to fit in to either help in our community (OutReach) or to help our church or members of our church (InReach). This year we are also creating a W.M. meal book using the recipes and food choices we come up with on our weekly potlucks. We'll see how it turns out by the end of the year.



Our last meeting of each year is two-fold. We meet November to plan our Cookie Gifts for members of the church. We figure out who is going to bring what cookies and in December one final time for the year to decorate boxes and fill them with cookies. Then assign each person to deliver either to shut in's or members of our

congregation whom we didn't see much of in the year or take to members who we especially want to Thank for all their work in the year devoted to work in or around the church.



pocket so naturally I got a \$1 water bottle from walmart and vinyl'd "A Joyful Heart...." on the side to go along with our message of a joyful heart is good like a medicine. This tote waterbottle and notebook are ongoing items to be a visual reminder about the power of our WM program.

Tools that foster a group atmosphere: I work in the promotional products industry so naturally that gives me an understanding about the power of 'things' that foster the sense of being part of something.

At the beginning of 2023 I was able to get canvas totes in a bright turquoise inexpensively and with the power of HTV and a Cricut machine personalized totes for all the ladies to bring their things too and from our meetings. There is a side



health
and



For the first meeting of 2023 - I had each lady bring a 3 ring binder that we decorated to our individual tastes and made divider tabs to keep all our WM stuff organized from week to week. I know the ladies love to bring their totes to each meeting. It states that they are a part of something great. At the first meeting of each year everyone receives their spiritual book for the year. Provided by the WM church budget. I never want someone to feel they can't afford to join because the lack of the ability to afford a book.

Tabs for our notebooks included the following:

Directory: names, phone & birthdays for all the regular attendees so that if you needed a friend you had their contact information.

Schedule: the plan for each tuesday so you know what the plan is for the coming tuesday

Prayer Requests: when someone mentions a need you have a place to write down that need as a reminder to pray.

Notes: for all your personal notes or handouts received

Gratitude Journal: pages to use to write down all you were grateful for during 2023

Joyful Me: the question pages for the social days in 2023

In 2024 we've added Recipe Book, Exercise & Fervent tabs.

I'm so grateful to the Lord for directing me to this ministry. I'll never be one to get up and have a talk in church, but I have found beautiful souls and loving friendships thru my work with Women's Ministries. If anyone anywhere wants to brainstorm ideas or if anyone wants to use any of the things we have used here in Billings please feel free to contact me and I'll gladly share. I hope that sharing our story might help others who maybe struggle to get or keep a WM program in place and I am so looking forward to hearing what other women around the state of Montana do to lift up the ladies in their churches.

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