



# MISSING

## Finding and Including Younger Women in the Church

by AMY NAPPA

### WOMEN'S MINISTRY CHECKLIST

Speaker for our next event  
*She's gonna be great!*

Decorations for the tables

Child care helpers

Delicious snacks  
*Be sure we have chocolate!*

Music

Younger women  
*Still missing these!  
Who knows how to find them?*

Younger women. Are they missing from your women's ministry? If you're like the majority of churches, younger women are nowhere to be found! Just how bad is this problem? As part of Group's State of the Church 2009 research, we dug into the situation, and here's what we learned:

1) **NINETY-SIX PERCENT** of women's ministry leaders say that reaching younger women is important to their women's ministry. It seems to be universally acknowledged that younger women are not attending women's events. Almost everyone wants to reach this group—but few know how.

2) **THE HARDEST HIT** area is retreats. Twenty percent of leaders say there are *no* younger women attending their retreats. Thirty-one percent say only 5 to 10 percent attending are younger.

3) **BIBLE STUDIES** are another area where younger women are rarely found. Twelve percent of leaders say there are *no* younger women attending their women's Bible studies. Forty percent say only 5 to 10 percent of the women attending are younger.

4) **SOCIAL EVENTS** are the most likely

to be attended, but it's not a much better picture. Six percent of leaders surveyed say *no* younger women attend social events, but 38 percent say only 5 to 10 percent of the women are younger.

And just so we're clear on who a "younger woman" is, most leaders consider a woman who is in her 20s to be a younger woman.

We see younger women all around us—even sitting near us in a pew at church. But when it comes to women's gatherings, they're just not there. We wanted to know how to capture the attention of these younger women and get them involved. So...we talked to them! From these conversations we learned ideas that we'll pass along to you here.

### ■ BEFRIEND

Befriending younger women is one of the first steps in getting them involved. After all, if you don't know who they are, how can you include them? And 71 percent of leaders say they need to improve how well they reach out to younger women. Here's what some of the younger women said about outreach activities: ►►



"I would love to plan or attend events that are very casual and where girls...gabbing, snacking, and laughing. I don't mind speakers, but I think we miss out on relationships with other women at our church because we go to an event, hear a speaker, and go home." (Stacie, 26)

"Most activities are scheduled during the work day and are aimed at moms. They're not really age-appropriate for women under 30, and the topics discussed don't apply to my life very often. I think they should plan things on the weekends—something as simple as a Saturday morning hike or a movie night on a Friday night would be great." (Anne, 28)

EVENTS THAT ARE FOCUSED on outreach and meeting others are perfect for making those first connections. The key focus should be getting to know each other in a casual setting. Several of the younger women we talked to mentioned small groups, time of day, and age-appropriateness. You might try:

- Planning weekend or evening social gatherings.
- Offering a variety of fun activities that women of all ages can quickly join. Try pottery painting, a movie night (let a younger woman pick the movie), jewelry-making, a bike ride with a stop for ice cream, or a game of volleyball.
- Keeping groups small. Focus on relationships over numbers. It's easier to get conversations started and to feel included when the group is smaller, and

this is something younger women mentioned time and again.

## ■ BELONG

Once you've started casual friendships with younger women, it's important to get them connected in more meaningful relationships. Do younger women feel that someone knows their name at your gatherings and is glad to see them? Fifty-seven percent of leaders say they need to improve how well they do in creating a community where younger women feel welcomed and that they belong. Here are some insights from the younger women:

"I wish there were more options for younger women other than singles groups or MOPS." (Abby, 28)

"Everyone is just really friendly. They do a good job of connecting new women with women who already attend the church. These women invite them to get involved and start serving and meet others." (Erin, 20)

"I'd like to see a women's service day. I feel a part of a community when I'm serving, so I'd like to see more opportunities to do this." (Jill, 26)

AGAIN, THE YOUNGER WOMEN are looking for smaller groups, variety in both meeting times and kinds of interest groups, and several mentioned service projects or volunteering together. You might try:

- Offering small groups on several weeknights as well as on a Saturday morning.

- Broadening the types of groups you offer, and being sure a few of them are service-oriented. Ask the younger women in your church what activities they already enjoy, and then create groups based on those activities. You might have a small group that goes hiking, one that does yard work for older women, and one that gets together to discuss relevant current topics.

## ■ BELIEVE

Helping women of all ages grow in their relationship with God is key to any women's ministry. Sixty percent of leaders said that their church needs improvement regarding the opportunities they provide for younger women to grow spiritually. Here's what the younger women shared about why they don't attend Bible studies at their churches:

"There really isn't anyone my age that attends the Bible study." (Nicole, 22)

"I'd want to attend if some of my friends were going. I get the impression it is mostly women in their late 30s to 50s. Not that I have anything against them, but people your own age are kind of like a security blanket or comfort food. It just helps me feel more comfortable." (Erin, 26)

"I doubt there are women my age that attend, and it's nice to be able to connect with others my age." (Karen, 26)

"The only women's Bible study they currently have scheduled is during a time I'm at work." (Amy, 28)

"I don't attend because I haven't gotten much info about it. Also, I'm not sure if it would fit into my schedule or if any of my friends are doing it." (Catherine, 19)

"They are only offered during the weekdays when I'm at work." (Stephanie, 28)

And here's why some of them are involved:

### WHAT YOU THINK THEY'RE SAYING

We asked leaders to share one word that they thought younger women would use to describe women's ministry at their church. Here are the top words:

- BORING
- OLD
- LACKING *ouch!*
- DATED (or OUTDATED)
- FUN

*seems to be missing OVER HERE...*

**SO HOW WOULD THE YOUNGER WOMEN IN YOUR CHURCH ANSWER THIS QUESTION?**

### WHAT THEY'RE REALLY SAYING

We asked younger women for one word that they would use to describe women's ministry at their church. Their top words:

- DATED
- UNEXCITING
- SUPPORTIVE
- INTIMIDATING *uh oh!*
- SERVICE
- POWERFUL

**WHY DON'T YOU ASK THEM!**

"I love the girls in my small group. They're my family here. Small groups for young women only, led by older women in the church, have been super helpful." (Stacie, 26)

"Fellowship with 'just the girls,' time to unwind, and praying for specific needs of the group are my favorite parts of small group." (Jill, 26)

"I love the women in my group, and knowing that I have a group of people that I can count on for prayer, friendship, and accountability. Plus we always have very meaningful, in-depth, heart-felt discussions." (Brienne, 27)

**NOTICE ANY TRENDS** here? The comments were incredibly consistent in this area. Younger women want to be in smaller groups where their friends are, and at the times they can attend. Several of them said that they do want the intergenerational aspect—they value input and friendships with those who have gone down this road before them. But they want friends of their own age to be there as well. Additionally, discussion and prayer were much more important to them than hearing a speaker. You might try:

- Challenging a couple women who are *not* in their 20s to invite several younger women into one of their homes for Bible study—instead of the traditional gathering of the masses on a weekday morning. This creates the intimate setting that the younger women are longing for. Allow plenty of time for friendship and prayer. Nothing should feel "canned" or as though it doesn't relate to the real life of younger women.

- Inviting three or four of the younger women who do attend out for coffee. Ask them if they'd be willing to invite any of their friends to join your Bible studies. Then listen to their responses. If they're not willing, find out what you could do differently that would help them feel excited about inviting friends. And be willing to make those changes!

## ■ BECOME

Finally, we all want to raise up new leaders, especially from the younger generations, and help them become the women God intended them to be. Fifty-three percent of leaders say they need improvement in including younger women in their leadership teams. Nearly 40 percent of churches say they don't have any younger women on their church's women's ministry leadership team.

When asked about leadership and using their spiritual gifts, here's how the younger women responded:

"I have never been approached to discover my spiritual gifts or connect with a leader on how to apply them. I would be very interested in this, and I think it is important." (Jill, 26)

"I think having more opportunities to get involved would help women connect and use their gifts." (Abby, 28)

**OF OUR GROUP OF YOUNG WOMEN** who were interviewed, only one was involved in leadership with women's ministry. One other was involved in leadership of young adults—but outside of the women's ministry. Overall, these younger women seemed very willing to get involved in volunteering their time and talents as leaders, but they want to be asked. You might try:

- Talking to the women on your current team. Ask each one to pray about a few younger women who could be invited to join your team—and then invite each of them personally.

- Inviting several younger women to one of your leadership team meetings simply to brainstorm. Let them know you value their input on what could be done differently, and then listen to what they say.

- Being open to change.

## IT'S NOT IMPOSSIBLE

to get younger women involved—but it won't happen by accident. Be intentional about reaching out to them. And the best idea of all? Talk to them!



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### ▶ Group's State of the Church 2009



For additional in-depth details and practical ideas for using this women's ministry research, as well as exclusive research on children's, youth and volunteer ministries, go to [Group.com/church09](http://Group.com/church09).

## RESOURCES

Our research showed that churches that are members of the **GIRLFRIENDS UNLIMITED** association for women's ministry report *more younger women attend their events* than attend events at non-member churches. Also, Girlfriends churches reported having *more women of all ages attend programs* for women. Learn more at [GirlfriendsUnlimited.com](http://GirlfriendsUnlimited.com).



**THAT MAKES TWO OF US** (Group) explores reaching the younger generation through lifestyle mentoring. Author Connie Witt's upbeat and encouraging approach focuses

on being intentional in relationships and using your own life as a guide instead of following a prepackaged curriculum.



**LIT 'N' LATTES** (Group)—This fun book club resource features 24 books with enough variety to appeal to all kinds of women. Each book entry includes a short summary of the plot, relevant discussion questions and Scripture passages, suggestions for a food idea that ties to the book's theme or characters, plus ideas for decorations, invitations, and gifts.