

What's Happening to ECWs? Generational Values Impacting Our Organizations

*"The nature of organized women's ministries has changed, but the need for
Christian women to be together in community will never go away."*

Mary MacGregor, Women's Ministry Consultant

What are women doing today in churches that are addressing their needs to be in community? Organizational models, activities, fellowship opportunities, and outreach efforts are being profoundly affected by the values of living generations.

Silent and Builder Generations -- Women born before 1945

The oldest generations of living women. They are most comfortable with activities that are closely associated as being "women's" work.

Organizational models – traditional, hierarchical models: Boards of directors, appointments of persons to get the tasks done, decisions made in democratic fashion. Parliamentary procedure often followed. Terms of office often not enforced. "Volunteers" recruited to "work." They hang in through good times and bad. They are very loyal to the group and often exclusive without realizing it. "Been there, done that" attitude among many, yet long to not have their organization fold.

Fundraising – And lots of it! The types that often appeal to women of this generation: bazaars, craft shows, thrift shops, antique shows, luncheons, dinners, bake sales, food sales. Funds raised usually to support the needs of the church rather than outreach.

Programs – Done on a small scale. Speakers from the community address a number of topics, from human needs to civic concerns. Spiritual emphasis also done: teaching, Bible study, ordained persons speaking on a variety of topics.

Fellowship – Some traditional guild groups, Bible study groups, handwork groups, groups that meet to create items for fundraising.

Outreach – Lots of signing checks (tied to fundraising). Learning about outreach efforts visiting outreach centers to raise awareness is important. Food pantry and thrift shop work are important efforts.

Baby Boomer Generation -- Women born between 1945 and 1964

This "bridge" generation of women still enjoy doing some of the activities that their mothers enjoyed, but this generation has more women working outside the home, more demands made of their time, and are much more selective about how they spend their time. They are more focused on activities, programs, etc. that will meet their needs. Do not meet out of obligation or guilt.

Organizational models – Board of directors still okay, but they must have clearly defined job descriptions and terms for job commitment. This is a generation that doesn't have time to waste and has no patience with poor leadership. This group would prefer to do specific tasks in the context of a team with goals and ending points. This generation has a strong desire for women to work together efficiently, and they will be more outspoken when

Fundraising – This generation is still interested in doing some fundraising, but not as their older sisters in Christ. Their fundraisers are often simple without much up-front planning. Examples: garage sales, no-bake sales, phantom auction, broad annual appeal.

Programs – High quality is a standard. Excellent speakers and inspirational presentations desired. This generation would rather go to an occasional program that is exceptionally well done than more frequent activities that are not well planned. Self-development, Women of Vision types of programs are attractive. “Less done well is better” is a motto.

Fellowship – This generation wants to meet together more for prayer and study than their older sisters in Christ. Support groups of women of similar ages and needs are important. Doing things occasionally just to have fun is important because of their need to “escape.” Retreats and Quiet Days that are very well done are attractive to them.

Outreach – This generation is a more “hands on” group of women. They want to participate in outreach activities (thrift shop, Habitat for Humanity, etc.), but with very short terms of time commitment. This is a generation that is more likely to get involved in prison or street ministry, and other activities that older women didn’t consider appropriate for women’s involvement.

Baby Buster or Generation X Generations -- Women born between 1965 and 1978

The youngest generation of adult women who may be interested in church activities designed for women. Many do not want gender division. Very age, stage of life sensitive.

Organizational models – Boards of directors not preferred. They would rather have short term committees, ad hoc groups, team leadership tasks with well defined job descriptions and short terms of commitments. They will tell you that they don’t want to attend board meetings.

Fundraising – Most not interested because of time commitments. They would rather write a check than have to do work.

Programs – Only want to participate occasionally. Want outstanding speakers that can address personal and spiritual development. Not as much interest in learning about topics of civic and human need concerns as the older generations.

Fellowship – Bible study, prayer and support groups, common interest groups, retreats, quiet days, and get-away fun activities are preferred.

Outreach – Want to do “hands on” short term work more than contribute money. Short term mission work is very attractive to this group.

Millennial Generation -- Women born after 1978

MUST be personally invited to participate. They need to feel loved, accepted, respected for their opinion. They want to be heard, not talked at or told what to do. They need to understand the purpose of an ECW and why it would benefit them to participate. They are willing to help if asked! They want to know that their involvement will be important and make a difference. They want to have other young women their age participating also. They like to be in on the planning and have some responsibility, but they don’t want to attend meetings to do so. Being accountable through phone calls and email is sufficient for them. The EXPECTATION is that the ECW will be involved in spiritual activities and that women will model Christ-like behavior. Research has shown that if they believe in the cause of the group they make excellent volunteers. But they are waiting to be asked!