



## WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS MINISTRY

### For Older Adults in the Kentucky Conference

## Fifty Percent of Widows Leave Their Church, Part 1

*“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this:  
To visit the orphans and widows in their trouble.”*

James 1:27

According to one statistic, one year after their husbands die or leave due to divorce, desertion, or imprisonment, 50 percent of widows no longer attend the church they attended with their husbands. What does this say to us? We, as a church, need to focus more on widows – especially recent widows.

I often hear comments like this from recent widows returning to church for the first time:

- I feel like a bride walking down the aisle with everyone staring at me.
- Am I going to sit in the same place that my husband and I used to sit in?
- Am I going to cry?

I’ve noticed some widows skirt around this issue by arriving late, leaving before the benediction, and sitting in the back row. As the church,, we need to be aware of how each widow is feeling and how we can assist her in returning to church.

Many widows appreciate a call or visit from their pastor about two weeks after the funeral. Widows say this does not have to be a lengthy visit – maybe 10 minutes. What other ways can you think of that would make this transition easier for recent widows in your congregation?

Below are additional statistics about widows. To help you put a face to each one, look at your church’s pictorial directory or think about a relative, neighbor, or co-worker who has been recently widowed.

- There are over 14 million widows in the U.S. today and an average of 40 widows per church. *Who do you know who is a widow?*
- In 80% of marriages, the wife outlives her husband by 15 years. *Have you noticed in churches and care facilities that women outnumber men?*
- 50% of marriages today end in divorce. This includes society in general and the church. *Are you picturing someone in your church, neighborhood, work, or maybe even a relative?*

- Financially, many widows experience decline and surprises.
- While a widow's needs decrease by 20%, her income declines by 33%.
- The poverty rate among widows is three to four times bigger than elderly married women. Often, we don't hear about this because many widows don't feel comfortable sharing their financial needs. (one church in our conference, that I know of, keeps a food closet that only widows and widowers know about, that can be accessed by the widows and widowers anytime the church building is open if they have a need for food.)
- Emotions of grief, anger, and loneliness intensify. Women react to stress 30% more than men.
- 60% of widows experience significant illness in the first year. *Are we encouraging widows to see their physicians and to share with them information about the death, divorce, desertion, or imprisonment of their spouses?*
- Clinical depression is the most common illness among widows. *Are we accepting of mental health conditions?*
- Upon the death of a spouse, a widow loses 75% of her support system. We live in a couple's society. *Are we attempting to include widows in social activities?*
- Our family tree rearranges.

These facts and statistics help point out widows' needs. Pray God makes you aware of widows' needs in your church so you and other members can help address those needs.

Written by Pat Brandenstein, co-founder of Wings of Hope Widows Ministry and used with permission by Encore Ministry Matters. Published December 2020.