

STEPS TO ORGANIZE A WIDOWS MINISTRY

How can churches respond to the widow today? The problem is complex for several reasons. First, churches today are varied ranging from small struggling bodies with limited resources both in staff and financing to mega-churches whose staffs are lean and depend on volunteers to minister to most needs other than teaching. Second, the experiences and needs of widows vary widely and there is no 'one model fits all' to be created. Recognizing that the following recommendations must be adapted to the individual church, here are some suggestions.

1. Form a leadership group including at least one widow

Scripture is clear that there should be appointed leaders in the body to oversee the care of widows (Acts 6:1-7) the ministry arm might well be done through deacons and deaconesses following the model of 1 Timothy 3:8-13. I would personally add that all leadership groups related to widow's ministry have a leading member who is a widow. Ministry leaders are typically married men who understandably cannot fathom our circumstance. It has been my experience that lacking this leading widow, churches decisions of how to serve us often miss the mark of meeting the real needs of widows.

2. Survey widows needs

Once the leadership team has been established, determine who are the widows, and then follow up with a survey to discover their needs. A survey is included at the end of this article as a sample. Feel free to make any changes, additions or deletions to this survey. Make it relevant for your congregation. While financial needs and help with upkeep of living space are common, need for connection is typical. Remember the 75% loss of friendship networks? Most connections with the church are broken upon becoming a widow. This time period is the widow's most painful, lonely and vulnerable part of her journey, a time when she needs believing friends near her.

3. Address the needs as expressed in the survey.

Some churches have sources of help in place. Do not assume that a new widow is aware of your household helper team or any other resources you offer. We prepared a referral list which is also included at the end of this article. These are

typical needs of widows in our area. Ideally contact will be made with new widows to inform them of your resources.

4. Provide a specific connection for widows to the church

In our Widow to Widow ministry we study Scripture together, share our journey, and do fun things together as well. If your church has few widows, you might partner with other churches and provide a seminary day.

Yes, as widows, we have changed. We have learned to believe Romans 8:28 with a new tenacity. We have new and relevant gifts to offer not in spite of, but rather because of our loss. We are bold because we have already faced death in a part of ourselves. We laugh at things many people fear and count blessings among the mundane events of an ordinary day. Invisible? Let's change that. Welcoming the widows reflects the heart of God.

Go to www.widowconnection.com for more information on starting a group or to find resources for an ongoing group.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WIDOWS

Name _____ Date _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____ email _____

Years of being widow _____ Age _____

Ages of children _____ Do they attend this church? _____

What is your greatest need? _____

What is your greatest fear? _____

How can we help? _____

Would you be interested in events for widows? (Rank Preference 1-low, 5-high)

_____ Discussion Group

_____ Bible Study

_____ Social events at church like game night or crafts

_____ Social outing off campus

_____ One time Seminar or resources

Names and addresses of other widows who might benefit from this ministry.

What topics would you like for us to include in our studies and discussions?

Sample Referral List Date compiled (your church logo)

Include name and phone contact for each referral. If church number, include extension.

Get permission from each resource to list them.

Note: assume there are costs unless noted otherwise or the church has predetermined they will cover the cost.

Attorney/estate probate/trust/will/real estate transaction

Auto repair/tires

Benevolence at your church

Cars ministry

Financial information

Food pantry

Home maintenance

Biblical Counseling Center

Carpenter/Handyman

Computer help

Counseling (Counseling through your church)

Electric

Financial Advisor

Financial Counseling

Church financial counseling resource

Trained Crown Financial counselor in your area

Heat/Air/Furnace

Insurance Agent

Roofer Painter

Plumber

Windows/Siding/Roof