

United Church of God Women's Enrichment Weekends Guidelines and Information

Updated: November 10, 2015

The United Church of God Women's Enrichment Weekends began in 1998 in Spokane, Washington, with Seattle soon following. From there, organized weekends began spreading throughout the country as women heard about or experienced their positive personal and spiritual benefits. Over 127 of these weekends (excluding one-day events) have been held in church areas around the world through 2015.

As these Weekends continue to expand into new areas, many questions are asked about how to get them started and how they should be organized. Although there is no single model that fits the needs of every area, we have developed some general standards and guidelines to provide a framework for expanding these opportunities in a unified manner.

These guidelines have been developed with the help and input of several women who have been involved in developing and organizing these weekends for over ten years.

Purpose of the Women's Weekends

The primary purpose of the Women's Weekends is to create an environment in which women actively help one another grow to greater spiritual maturity through:

- Sharing valuable spiritual lessons learned with one another
- Discussing the practical implementation of godly principles
- Helping and encouraging one another through personal trials and struggles
- Developing stronger bonds of unity and friendship

These objectives are achieved through a combination of elements that generally include practical presentations or workshops, interactive discussions, uplifting music, and time for spiritual conversation, reflection, and fellowship.

Considerations Prior to Planning a Weekend

Organizing a Women's Weekend is a major undertaking. Following are some things to consider prior to making a final decision about hosting a Weekend:

- Does the project have the support of the local pastor and his wife?
- Does the congregation have the volunteers needed to effectively organize and implement a Weekend?
- Are there enough qualified female speakers in the region? (See speaker selection section below.) Or are speakers from outside the area willing to travel to the weekend.
- Are there enough women interested in attending to meet any minimum attendance/meal requirements set by the potential facility?
- Is there a Women's Weekend already in the region? If so, are there enough women interested in attending to support a second location?

If the answers to the above questions are positive, then there are many other elements to consider.

Planning Stage Considerations

Theme

Each Weekend generally revolves around a single theme which is supported by one or two representative scriptures. The theme selected should be timely, biblically based, and focused on a specific spiritual principle that will be emphasized in a variety of ways throughout the Weekend.

When selecting a theme, consider your audience and what would help the women in their spiritual journey and aid them with their common trials or circumstances. An appropriate theme often becomes apparent through this analysis. If you need ideas, there is a list of themes available from past Weekends in a separate document.

Important note: Themes and presentations should be inclusive of all attendees. It's a good idea to avoid topics that apply to only a portion of the audience, such as marriage or child-rearing. It's also a good idea to avoid topics that elicit strongly diverse points of view, such as health advice.

Speaker Selection

Speaker selection is a vitally important element of the Weekends. Speakers, especially primary speakers, should be women who are well respected in their local congregations for their spiritual maturity, wisdom, and personal example.

Non-primary speakers are generally those giving presentations of 15 minutes or less. There is more latitude with non-primary speakers to invite younger or less experienced women to participate and share spiritual lessons they have learned in their lives. Several Weekends have featured a special time period where several presentations are offered by less experienced speakers. These segments benefit from being made up of a mix of age groups, personal circumstances, and being drawn from a variety of participating congregations.

The total number of speakers will depend on the length of the Weekend, the length of the presentations, and the availability of qualified and willing speakers. Presenters should be asked to speak at least three months in advance of the event to give them adequate time to prepare.

If your area doesn't have enough qualified or willing speakers, you may consider inviting guest speakers from other regions. If doing so, you may want to offer to cover some or all of the transportation and registration costs.

Types of Presentations

The Women's Weekends provide an excellent opportunity for women to be "teachers of good things" (Titus 2:3).

Presentations can be informational, inspirational, and/or sharing life's experiences and spiritual lessons. Although presentations should always be based on sound biblical principles and use scriptural references where appropriate, they are not sermons or Bible studies.

Historically, the two main focuses of primary presentations have been:

- Better understanding a particular spiritual principle (usually related to the theme) and how to implement that principle more effectively in our lives. The format for this type of presentation can vary widely, from straight lecture, a combination of lecture and discussion groups, or more of a workshop format.
- Sharing of personal experiences in one's life and the spiritual lessons learned through those experiences. Shorter presentations generally fall into this category. (Shorter presentations are good opportunities for less experienced speakers).

Interactive discussions can be extremely valuable since they actively involve those attending and focus on implementation of the discussion topic. Opportunities for interactive discussions partly depend on the type of facility

and meeting room since they generally require more space than a theatre style set-up. Breakout sessions can occur in one large meeting room if it is large enough to set up tables or move chairs around to form several small groups. Discussion groups are generally most effective when kept to around eight participants per group. A facilitator assigned within each group can help keep the conversation on track and encourage participation of those who may be more reserved.

Length of Presentations

Primary presentations generally run from 30 to 45 minutes. An interactive discussion or workshop might require more time allotted. Shorter presentations generally run from 10 to 15 minutes.

Miscellaneous Considerations

Name

In the past, organizers in each area have chosen various designations for their Weekends, such as Ladies' Retreat, Women's Conference, Women's Seminar, etc. To achieve consistency and unity we suggest that the designation "Women's Enrichment Weekend" be used, which reflects the vision and intent of the weekends.

Frequency

There is no set frequency recommended for the Weekends. While many of the more established Weekends are held annually, others meet every other year or only occasionally. This will be determined by economics, attendee interest levels, willingness of organizers, availability of speakers and many other factors unique to each area.

Length of Weekend and Format

There is no single format that fits the needs of every area. Some areas may wish to start with a half-day or full-day event. The "weekend" format may include one or two nights. Factors to consider when determining the length of the weekend are:

- Wishes of attendees
- Number of attendees expected
- Facilities available
- Qualified speakers available
- Cost of overnight accommodations
- Distances, travel times and traffic considerations

Some areas begin Friday evening with presentations and continue through Sunday noon. Others offer optional Friday evening activities then begin their main presentations on Sabbath morning, continuing through mid-afternoon Sunday. Others have chosen to have Sabbath services with their regular congregation, then begin the women-only section afterwards, ending Sunday at noon or mid afternoon. The latter option often requires only one night's lodging.

Sabbath services during the Weekend should be conducted by an elder, but can be an abbreviated format with a sermon related to the selected theme. Many areas also enhance the Sabbath service with extra hymns or special music selections.

Music

Inspiring and uplifting music presented by attendees is a special part of many of the Women's Enrichment Weekends. This might be in the form of several special music selections in place of the sermonette time during the Sabbath service, extra hymns sung by the entire group as part of the Sabbath service, a separate hymn-along on Sabbath morning, and/or having music interspersed throughout the entire weekend

Recordings

In order to help support a warm and intimate atmosphere at Women’s weekends audio and video recordings of speeches and presentations are highly discouraged. This allows for ladies to feel free to speak openly and share their experiences framed with that particular audience in mind.

Speaking Guidelines

Speaking guidelines are given at the end of this document so they can be printed and given as a separate document to each speaker. These guidelines have also been developed with input of many people with years of Women’s Weekend experience and will help make the event enriching and successful for *all* attendees.

Sample Schedule*

	A. Friday evening through Sunday noon format	B. Friday evening or Sabbath morning through Sunday mid-afternoon format	C. Sabbath afternoon through Sunday mid-afternoon format
Friday	Arrival/Registration Dinner Welcome Get-acquainted activities or two or three shorter presentations	Arrival/Registration Optional dinner together for those who have arrived. Free evening to get settled in or optional get- acquainted activities	n/a
Saturday	Morning: church services (generally no sermonette, perhaps extra special music selections or “hymn-along”) Lunch Afternoon: presentations (generally two to three @ 30-45 min. each unless interactive) Dinner Presentations, free time, service project, or special activities/crafts	Morning: church services (generally no sermonette, perhaps extra special music selections or “hymn-along”) Lunch Afternoon: presentations (generally two to three @ 30-45 min. each unless interactive) Dinner Presentations, free time, service project, or special activities / crafts	Afternoon: church services (can be with the local congregation, but with Weekend theme-related messages) Dinner Presentations and/or get-acquainted activities
Sunday	Breakfast Morning: presentations, workshops or service project Lunch/ Departure	Breakfast Morning: presentations and/ or workshops Lunch Afternoon: presentations, workshops or service project Departure mid-afternoon	Breakfast Morning: presentations and/or workshops Lunch Afternoon: presentations and/or workshops Departure mid-afternoon

*To see examples of actual schedules, registration forms, brochures and presentations you can visit www.womenofvalor.org.

Summary

These Weekends provide time away from normal routines to focus on godly principles. Bonds of friendship have the time and opportunity to develop in a stronger way, enabling women to give and receive the help, support and encouragement they need as they move forward in life. Organizers should try to achieve a balance between structured presentations and time for fellowship, relaxing and enjoying one another's company

The guidelines (and attachments) provide a range of suggestions with information crafted by experience. They are intended to foster a more unified approach and consistency while still allowing flexibility for each area's unique needs, desires, and capacity.

The attached appendix provides more information and suggestions for new or ongoing Women's Enrichment Weekends.

Women's Enrichment Weekend

Speakers Guidelines

General Overview

Presentations should be encouraging and uplifting. They give speakers the opportunity to be teachers of good things through:

- Sharing spiritual lessons learned through personal experience
- Sharing practical guidelines on how to implement important spiritual principles in our lives.

What to avoid:

Presentations are not sermons, sermonettes, or bible studies and should avoid becoming doctrinal or corrective in nature. To create an environment as uplifting, inclusive, and spiritually focused as possible, some other areas that should be avoided include:

- Topics that are primarily applicable to only a particular segment of the audience such as singles, wives, or mothers.
- Topics that elicit strongly diverse points of view, such as advice on diet or health regimens.
- Topics that are primarily secular in nature and where abundant external resources are readily available to those interested.

Primary Presentations (30-45 minutes)

The format of primary presentations can vary widely depending on the topic being covered. They can be straight lecture, a combination of lecture and open discussion, or a workshop format breaking the audience out into smaller discussion groups.

Secondary Presentations (10-15 minutes)

Because of their shorter length, secondary presentations should focus on a single spiritual lesson learned through personal experience as it relates to the theme for the weekend. It is not necessary to reference scriptures, although it is okay to do so if they are integral to the lesson learned.