



# *Women Ministries*

The Evangelical Covenant Church

## **From ORGANIZATION To MINISTRY**

Questions and  
Answers on Changes



# INDEX of Q&A TOPICS

	Page
1. Why Changes were Needed	3
2. Why the Name was Changed	3
3. How to Make the Transition	4
4. Questions on Leadership Team Model	6
5. Questions in Management by the Board	7
6. Questions on Funds	8
7. Questions on Financial Support of Denominational Ministries	9



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## **I. Why Changes were Needed**

**Q: *Could you explain WHY changes were needed?***

**A:** The future of coordinated women ministries was in jeopardy. The main concern was that the mindset of membership in an organization was dying. The number of “active members” peaked in 1965, but it had been declining for the last 40 years. In 1999 it was down to the same number as in 1940.

I believe this was true on the local level, as well. A woman wrote me recently saying, “We only have six women left in Covenant Women.” Yet her church has probably a hundred women! However, the desire for coordinated women ministries is still strong!

## **2. Why the Name was Changed**

**Q: *Why did the name need to be changed when it was changed in 1990?***

**A:** Though the name was officially changed in 1990, it seemed most churches were still using the previous name, Covenant Women, which carried an even stronger suggestion of a separate, parallel organization. The desire was to identify the ministry, not rename an organization. Which ministries of the church? Women Ministries.

**Q: *Do you expect local churches to adopt the same name?***

**A:** No. Just as the denomination does not prescribe names for local churches, neither will we for your local ministries. As you consider your church culture, we do encourage you, however, to determine the most appropriate name for your ministry that will minister to and embrace all women.

**Q: *Did you intentionally leave off an apostrophe ‘s’ after Women?***

**A:** As a matter of fact, we did! What a long discussion that was! We concluded that the word women was not a possessive noun (as if women owned the ministry) but a descriptive adjective (as in what kind of ministry).

**Q: *Will the name change really make that much difference?***

**A:** We believe it will. We see women ministries as one of the church’s tools to advance God’s kingdom. Its name needs to communicate a ministry working in harmony with the church’s vision. As long as it has an organizational name, it will be perceived as a separate organization with its own agenda.

**Q: *Is the name official now?***

**A:** We have started using our new name but it will be official once the new constitution has been approved by the delegates to the next ECC Annual Meeting.

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## 3. How to Make the Transition

### **Q: How do we make the transition from an organization to a ministry?**

**A: The answer will depend on your starting point.** The first answer is for churches whose current leadership wants to work with new leadership; the second is for those whose new leadership wants to work with current leadership. Finally, I conclude with a question for you.

Let's go over what we mean by an organization and a ministry. An organization, even a service one, supports the goals of the organizing body. The local chapter exists as a branch of and in the parameters of the "mother" organizations, (e.g., PTA, Girl Scouts) and replicates its structure. A ministry ministers to the unique spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of the person and the community. Rather than prescribe what local women ministries do (e.g., necessary committees, board structure, groups, meetings), denominational Women Ministries equip local leaders to minister in their unique context as led by the Spirit. Emphasis is on ministry that changes lives – which is the essence of “advancing God’s kingdom through women.”

### **I. WHEN CURRENT LEADERSHIP WANTS TO WORK WITH NEW LEADERSHIP**

1. Arrange for concentrated prayer for the future of women ministries.
2. Do a comprehensive analysis of all existing programs, using the Women Ministries Evaluation Form (in the Coordinators Summit manual or available from the Women Ministries Office). Wait to discuss how to enhance programs you want to continue (the last column) until Step 4.
3. Prayerfully determine what new interests and needs have emerged amongst women in the church and its community.
4. With the right balance of faith and reason, prayerfully study the list of existing programs you'd like to continue and the list of new ministries you'd like to start. What do you want to see happen in the lives of women? Which ministries do you value the most?
5. Answers to questions in Step 4 identify the essence of your vision and mission for women ministries. Hopefully, the results of your ministries are in harmony with your vision. If not, this is the time to bring harmony between what you want to see happen in the lives of women and your ministry priorities.
6. Now you are ready to determine your leadership team! In this process, women's gifts and passions will have emerged. We recommend naming two coordinators. Women passionate about a particular ministry make good chairs of that ministry.

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## II. WHEN NEW LEADERSHIP WANTS TO WORK WITH CURRENT LEADERSHIP

Occasionally, new leadership and current leadership find it difficult to determine how to blend their visions of women ministries. A sincere effort to respond to the following questions can lead to acceptance of each other's passions and open the way to determining a successful course of action.

1. Do we sincerely desire that women ministries thrive in our church?
2. Are we seeing a decline in ministry right now? If we continue doing what we have been doing, will women ministries continue?
3. To whom are we ministering right now? To whom would we like to be ministering?
4. Are we willing to find the physical and financial resources to enable the ministries that are most important to us thrive?

When existing and new leaders are united in their answers to these questions, you are ready to walk through the steps listed above.

## III. ONE LAST QUESTION: FOR WHOM DO WOMEN MINISTRIES EXIST?

This question is directed to you rather than from you. I believe it will help you distinguish between an organization and a ministry.

Your instinctive answer might be, For women! I hope you will begin to see that as a *ministry* they exist for the church which in turn exists for God's kingdom. They are part of a larger whole and work in harmony with the church's vision. They do not exist for their own agenda as a separate organization within the church.

Therefore, I encourage you to work closely with the church's Leadership Team, Council, or Board and to see women ministries as one of the church's ministries or tools to advance God's kingdom. When ministries to and through women are *coordinated*, they are far more effective than when they are diffused throughout the church's various ministries. Each of the church's ministries has a focal point. That of women ministries is to advance God's kingdom through women.

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## 4. Questions on Leadership Team Model

***Q: How did the Board function under the previous constitution?***

**A:** The Board referred to the elected and ex-officio members who had the power to vote. The conference presidents were invited for a brief session to one of the Board's biannual meetings. They had neither voice nor vote in the Board's decisions, but elected one of their members to represent them as an ex-officio member with both voice and vote.

***Q: What's changed?***

**A:** Conference presidents are now integrated into the Leadership Team as advisors. This enables the team to make well-advised decisions and gives advisors ownership in their decisions.

***Q: Is the Board now called a Leadership Team?***

**A:** Yes. For our ministry to be effective, we need everyone to be both a policy maker as in Boards but also a working member. Each leader, elected and advisory, has gifts and passions to lead one of the ministries. We work together as a team to accomplish our goals. It is a team of leaders; therefore it is more appropriate to call it a Leadership Team.

***Q: Aren't they all elected? Why call some elected and some advisors?***

**A:** Twelve are elected according to the bylaws of the constitution of the Evangelical Covenant Church and by the delegates to the ECC Annual Meeting. These have been entrusted by the denomination with the administration of the ministry. We can, however, include conference leaders with the elected members as advisors.

***Q: Are you recommending local Boards become Leadership Teams?***

**A:** Yes. However, we recommend you determine the form that best enables you to accomplish ministry and to realize your vision.

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## 5. Questions on Management by the Board

**Q: *The annual meeting of Covenant Women Ministries approved your budget and received reports on how support was used. If the Leadership Team “manages the ministry,” who supervises you?***

**A:** First, the treasurer of the Evangelical Covenant Church is now officially involved in our budget process and serves as financial advisor. Second, we are audited each year and this remains unchanged. Third, the ECC Executive Board will monitor our financial management. Last, we will send to each church an annual financial report.

**Q: *Is this different than a ministry like Covenant World Relief?***

**A:** No, it is the same. We both have a Board/Leadership Team that manages the ministry. We both raise funds to realize our ministries. We both are accountable to the ECC Executive Board and the Annual Meeting of the ECC.

**Q: *Can you give us examples of policy changes that will be reserved for the general assembly at Triennials?***

**A:** Change in governance, increase or decrease in size of Leadership Team, approval of major initiatives (e.g., AVA initiative), adding director level staff, creating new Commissions (e.g., Women’s History Commission).

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## 6. Questions on Funds

**Q: What happens to the organization's funds? And how do you recommend financially supporting the operating budget of the ministry?**

**A:** Let's look at the questions separately.

### I. REGARDING THE ORGANIZATION'S FUNDS

1. All funds that are designated for a specific purpose must honor the donors' intent.
2. Undesignated funds collected with certain projects in mind but not specifically named should be used for those projects as soon as reasonably possible. For example, funds collected from a Christmas Bazaar to upgrade the church kitchen or for sending women to Triennial should be reserved accordingly.
3. Undesignated funds finance the ministry's operating budget.

### II. REGARDING SUPPORT OF THE MINISTRY

1. Your leadership team *prayerfully* determines godly fund raising means to finance its ministries. We particularly encourage those that both serve the body and raise funds.
2. It is reasonable to work with the church's leadership Council or Board for funds to support ministries directly related to its growth, (e.g., child care for day time women's Bible studies. Several churches are currently including women ministries in their operating budgets and encouraging women ministry leaders to creatively raise funds to participate in conference and denominational ministries.
3. It is rare to find church cultures that accept the former system of asking women to pay annual dues. Because it has such a strong connection to membership in an organization, we discourage it.
4. However, if you feel it would ease the transition to a ministry by continuing it a bit longer, please modify the language from an obligation to an opportunity. Present the ministries you would like to do and the funds needed to do them, and then invite women to support those ministries. On the denominational level, we have called such donations "ministry support" since 2000.

Like the discussion of programs/ministries, the discussion of funds will also clarify leaders' vision for women ministries. Does the ministry exist to raise funds for worthy causes? Does it exist to unite women of the church through fellowship opportunities? Does it exist as a tool for spiritual formation, evangelism, and social concerns?

Our answer? **ALL OF THE ABOVE!** That's our **AIM:**

- **A** – Accomplish ministry in Jesus' name!
- **I** – Include more women in faith, fellowship and service!
- **M** – Mature disciples of Jesus Christ!

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## 7. Questions on Financial Support of Denominational Ministries

**Q: Help us understand financially partnering with the denominational women ministries. With Ministry Support, Thank Offering, and Friends of Women Ministries, aren't you tapping the same resources three ways?**

**A: I believe comparing it to your church's participation in the Covenant's shared ministry will help.**

Your church raises funds through tithes, offerings, and other efforts for its operating budget and for participation in conference and denominational shared ministries (typically 5% and 10% respectively). The church leadership ensures that their commitment to both is made in a timely way.

Individuals in the same churches will also have opportunities to respond personally to appeals and projects from denominational ministries. One can be a Friend of Kingdom Builders or Friend of World Mission, for example, or participate in the fall Covenant World Relief offering. Because of their own personal interests and in obedience to the Spirit's leading regarding their stewardship, individuals participate in these denominational ministries.

In a similar manner, local church Women Ministries participate in denominational Women Ministries. Because of a decision to participate in its shared ministry, local women ministry leaders ensure that their commitment to Ministry Support of denominational Women Ministries is made in a timely way. We value the partnership of local women ministries in our denominational vision!

We also deeply appreciate the strong commitment of individual women who want to enable us to realize every vision God gives us! Some participate in the Thank Offering; others are faithful donors to Friends of Women Ministries. Many do both!

Our potential for advancing God's kingdom is proportionate to our income. We strongly believe that when God gives the vision, he also gives the provision. To local churches and individuals who share our vision we say, *"Thanks for being part of his provision!"*