

10 Ways to Build Sisters for Real



at your church

SISTERS
for real



Building a close community of committed Sisters for Real isn't easy. It takes time and patience. It takes tears and risk. It takes vulnerability and grace. But it is worth it. The rewards of relationships that are free from fear, comparison, and competition are life changing.



When surrounded by Sisters for Real who love you and love God with you, you can face any heart break, overcome every addiction, break free from every besetting sin. Life is richer. Church attendance is more enjoyable. Bible studies and women's meeting are transformative in a new way.



So how do you do it? How do you build deep, meaningful relationships with the women in your church? Here are 10 things that worked for us at our little church. Pick one and give it a try. You have nothing to lose. And you only have Sisters to gain.

I. INSTEAD OF ANOTHER TRADITIONAL CHURCH-Y TYPE EVENT, HOST A FUN NIGHT JUST FOR WOMEN.

While bible studies and women's prayer groups are wonderful, they often encourage women to put on their "holy" self. Fun nights allow women to come as they are. Host these events at someone's house - and NOT at the Pastor's house. Women act differently at the Pastor's house. Have someone who is not in leadership at the church host the event. And make it FUN only. No opening and closing prayers. No Bible Trivia games. Play a group board game. Pictionary or charades. Laugh a lot. Serve yummy food. Do this often. You'll be shocked at how close you'll grow as you play alongside each other.



2. SEND OUT EVENT INVITES BY MAIL OR SOCIAL MEDIA, AND DON'T ANNOUNCE THEM AT CHURCH.

When you invite women to an event via an announcement in the church's bulletin or on the church's web presence, the event takes on a different feeling - it becomes a "church" thing. Create fun, whimsical invitations and send them in the mail - using an actual STAMP! Or use an online event site like evite.com to create digital invitations and send them to as many of the women in the church as you possibly can. Try to include everyone, but don't hand out the invitations at church or announce it from the pulpit. Invitations are special and get a better response when they feel personal.



3. HOST A CRAFT NIGHT AND SUPPLY ALL THE NEEDED MATERIALS.



Have a jewelry making party, or a paint and sip, or a crocheting group, or a spa night, or a pottery night, but don't require your guests to pay a fee or to supply any of the materials. You want the women who are attending to feel like their attendance doesn't have a requirement or a cost. Ask your Pastor or the head of your church's women's ministry if there could be a small budget for the event - or buy all the materials yourself and just consider it an act of love. Some of the greatest Sisters for Real I've ever had I met while sitting side by side at a jewelry making party at my house.

4. START BEING VULNERABLE.



Becoming Sisters for Real is a risk. Someone has to start off being vulnerable, open, and real. It only takes a few women to start - but together, two or three of you have to decide that all the pretense and pretending will no longer be welcome. Share what you are struggling with. Are you losing your temper at home? Are you spending too much money? Are you struggling to give up smoking? Are you imagining your life with someone other than your spouse? Make a decision to be honest. Once one person starts, it spreads like a sigh of relief throughout the group.

5. HOST AN ANNUAL WOMEN'S RETREAT.



Once a year, arrange an opportunity for ALL the women in your church to go away together for a full weekend. Chose a conference center or a hotel that will provide all the food and give you a room that you can meet in throughout the day. You want the women to come ready to relax. No cooking or cleaning. No worries about laundry or children. Just women and a weekend together. In order to really let your "hair down", you have to be free from responsibilities.

Try to keep this as affordable as possible, and within an hours' drive from your town. This way, ladies who can't attend the whole weekend can still come to part of the event.

It helps to pick a place that is beautiful, and if the weather is nice - that's even better. Spring and Fall are perfect times. And make sure there is scheduled "free time" during the weekend. We don't want to send the women home exhausted. They'll need time to relax, nap, or take a walk.

Don't expect the retreat attendance to stay the same from year to year. It will fluctuate. Don't be discouraged by that. You might want to have response cards prepared for the women to write down ideas for the next retreat. You'll learn what the women liked and didn't like. You can make adjustments as the years go on.



6. PLAY GAMES TOGETHER THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE RETREAT.



I can not emphasize this enough. On the first night of your annual get together - do nothing serious. Google silly group games and bring supplies to play the games you've chosen. Don't be afraid to dress up, get messy, and look foolish. In fact, looking foolish may be the most important part. When we are free to be silly with each other, we establish ourselves as safe places. Only when women feel safe, will they start being real.

7. USE YOUR OWN CHURCH'S WOMEN AS SPEAKERS FOR YOUR RETREAT.

There are MANY times throughout the year when it is an awesome idea to bring in a special outside speaker for an event. But your annual women's retreat should consist of you women getting to know each other. You all have a story. You all have a struggle.

Chose a few women in advance and ask them to share during the weekend. If they are hesitant, help them by providing a theme for the event or by suggesting a topic. But be sure to ask them to tell their personal story as part of their sharing time. This is a weekend to get to know each other better. You can't do that if you are listening to an outsider all weekend long.

To help the women who aren't comfortable with public speaking, don't set up the room like a conference room. Have everyone sit in a circle, facing each other, and let the speaker stay sitting down. It eases the tension and makes it feel less formal.



8. IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE RETREAT, START A WEEKLY LADIES GROUP.



Follow up the annual retreat with a ladies meeting that takes place on a regular basis. This is when it works well to pursue a more in depth look at the retreat's theme, and it can be a "churchy" type event.

Sometimes during a retreat a certain topic will come up over and over again - things like insecurity or body image or anxiety. Chose a book or a bible study that deals with one of these topical issues and invite all the women from the retreat to attend. Or, if you discover that a large number of women like to do the same thing - run

marathons, go bowling, watch movies - set up a group to do those things on a regular basis.

It's important that these meetings have a set length of time - perhaps 6 or 8 weeks. Women who know that there are only a handful of meetings are more likely to make it a priority to attend each one. When weekly meetings are never ending, commitment drops drastically over time.

Don't wait too long to start the first meeting! You'll want to build on the relationship momentum from the retreat weekend. Announce the group on the very next Sunday or via social media during the week following the retreat.

9. SET A TIME LIMIT ON ALL WOMEN'S MEETINGS.

This one little point may be the most important one. Most women today are busy and tired. They WANT to attend a meeting, but their time is precious. Respect that. Set a start time and an end time for all your women's gatherings - and then STICK TO THEM.

This can be extremely difficult. When women get talking, time goes flying by and no one wants to stop the flow. Unfortunately, the end result is that the women who stayed out too late are exhausted the next day, and they will SKIP THE NEXT MEETING. If you say the meeting starts at 6:30 - then start it at 6:30. Don't wait

until 6:45 or 7:00 when the women are done getting their coffee and chatting. If you say the meeting ends at 8:30, then someone must be responsible to close out the meeting at 8:30. In the long run, this means more women will attend more regularly, and you'll have a chance at building relationship more frequently.

10. PRAY FOR EACH OTHER OFTEN.

During any of these events - whether they be game nights, or craft evenings, or bible studies, or conferences - if a woman expresses a deep need, take a moment and pray together. Prayer changes the atmosphere and draws women together. Prayer assures a hurting woman that she has friends who will stand beside her in the battle. When you intercede for each other, you are "sistering" - providing strength where a woman is weak.



I hope these ideas help you start building Sisters for Real at your church. Pray for God to give you wisdom on how to break down walls that divide the women in your church, be willing to take a few risks, and start watching the incredible miracle of Sisterhood transform your life.

With love,

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