

Report of Findings
***Relevance* Research Project**

Women of the Church of God

June 2008

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Executive Summary
Relevance Research Project

Women of the Church of God
June 2008

Presented by Michael D. Wiese, Ph.D.
1303 East Fifth Street
Anderson, IN 46012
765-641-4365
mdwiese@anderson.edu

While celebrating what has been and continues to be very good about *Women of the Church of God*, compelling evidence suggests that securing the future for WCG will require a new paradigm for women's ministry. This comprehensive study, including the perspective of over 1000 persons in the Church of God movement, finds that a renewal of vision for *Women of the Church of God* is needed. Without a vision that makes WCG relevant to the mainstream need for women's ministry, coupled with vision-linking communication and program development, membership is likely to continue to decline. Even with these efforts, the challenge is formidable.

At the same time, this study documents a significant need for women's ministry and a call for a continued national resource to enable local women's ministries that are centered on the Lordship of Jesus and in service to His mission. Yes, there is a challenge. But, there is also a real opportunity.

The data suggests an important shift in the focus of women's ministry. Not recognizing this shift and responding appropriately will make it difficult to transition WCG to serve the generations of women to come. The beginning premise for the traditional WCG model of ministry was to give women a meaningful ministry opportunity by connecting them with world mission needs. These needs are still present, and a commitment to serve mission needs is still, or should be, valued. But, the locus of need for women's ministry has shifted from "serving missions" to "personal spiritual and relational development," and then "finding a meaningful local ministry." There has been a paradigm shift, and WCG finds itself being perceived by a growing proportion of the women population as "the past."

Women of the Church of God must demonstrate that it is relevant to current cultural realities of women, especially younger women. The future programming is likely to put greater focus on spiritual formation and relational needs of women. It appears that the bridge to a service mentality may be to focus first on developing personal and community health. Pastors affirm that WCG has been effective at serving the movement but raise doubt as to whether its activities are effective at meeting the needs of women in the local congregation.

A generation gap is apparent. Current members, especially older ones, are very pleased with WCG and likely to continue being members. But, younger women (<50), often in larger congregations, are very unlikely to be engaged in WCG under the current model. Women in very small congregations often simply feel left out. There are exceptions, but the evidence is compelling that current perceptions of WCG is an inherent barrier to participation for many women within many congregations. This conclusion also reflects the perspective shared by pastors in the Church of God movement.

The study intentionally included voices from three perspectives, members of WCG, non-members and pastors. Additionally, it included four data methods, statistical analysis, open-end comment analysis, focus groups and interviews. All perspectives and methods reinforce the conclusions offered at the end of each section of the report.

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1300 East Fifth Street
Anderson, IN 46012
765-641-4365
mdwiese@anderson.edu

Situation

The *Women of the Church of God* (WCG) faces three challenges. The first is to continually discover how it can best serve its mission and to create a vision of effective ministry for the future. Secondly, there is a need to stabilize and then grow membership which has experienced a steady decline in membership from a peak at 40,000 members in 1982. Finally, the demographic profile of the approximately 14,000 current members suggests a need to maintain satisfaction levels among current members while attracting a greater number of young adults and women of racial diversity.

Primary Question: How can *The Women of the Church of God* be more effective, relative to the needs and aspirations of women in the movement, and consistent with its mission, to increase the likelihood of numerical growth and sustainable ministry?

Research Objectives

The research was designed to:

1. Determine why women join and others do not join WCG.
2. Measure satisfaction levels among current members of the WCG.
3. Define how the WCG is viewed by pastors in the Church of God.
4. Explore the programming/ministry needs of women in the Church of God to determine if current services of the WCG match needs of women.
5. Generate new ideas for how WCG can serve the women of the Church of God, aligned to the various segments of women.

Summary of Research Methodology:

Perspectives gained and key questions asked:

1. Pastors of Church of God congregations
 - How effectively does WCG support the ministry of the local church?
 - What can WCG do to better support congregational ministry?
 - What are the observed needs of women within the congregation and how are they currently being fulfilled?
 - What is the role of the WCG in the future?
 - What ideas may be considered to make WCG more effective in supporting congregational ministry?

2. Women in membership with WCG
 - Why are women members?
 - Are members satisfied and likely to stay members?
 - What are their likes and dislikes regarding WCG?
 - What is the current demographic profile of the members of the WCG?
 - What are their suggestions for improvement?
 - Do they think WCG will be relevant in the future? What will increase relevancy?
 - What are their theories as to why other women in their congregation do not join the WCG?

3. Women attending Church of God congregations who are not WCG members (with appropriate voice of women younger than 55 years of age, African Americans and Hispanic)
 - Why are women not joining the WCG?
 - What types of women's ministry programs/activities interest non-members?
 - What, if any women's programs, are non-members currently participating in?
 - What segments of women are most likely to join? Why and what is likely to attract them?

Data Collection Steps:

1. Three complementary survey instruments were developed. One survey was created for each of the following audiences; 1) pastors, 2) WCG members and 3) non-members. Each contained common questions but will also be designed to reflect the audience.

2. The three surveys were distributed via email to the respective group. Three lists were used. The first was for all the pastors with emails on file who are associated with the Church of God movement. The second was a list (called “The Razor’s Edge”) of influential women active in the movement. Finally, members of the *Women of the Church of God* who have an email on file (this was less than 700 members) received the on-line version of the survey.
3. Because a small proportion of the members of WCG had emails on-file, it became important to send a mail survey. A random sample of the members (without emails) was taken. A sample of 600 members received the mail survey.
4. The survey instruments included both closed-end questions allowing for measurement and open-ended responses allowing for the respondent to tell us what they think in their own words. The open-ended responses were read and categorized by at least two persons and summaries compared to increase the likelihood of drawing appropriate conclusions. A final summary, capturing the essence of what was learned in the open-end responses was created. Both statistical and qualitative analysis was conducted to give a more comprehensive understanding of findings relative to research objectives.
5. Three focus groups were conducted at different geographic locations (Portland, OR, Columbus, OH and St. Louis, MO). A total of 39 persons participated in the focus groups. This number included pastors, women who are WCG members and women who are not WCG members.
6. Ten interviews with opinion-leaders in the Church of God were conducted by phone. These persons were selected to represent a cross-section of people in lay, pastoral or state/national leadership roles. The women selected intentionally include voices from a younger demographic and from minority groups.

Data Collection Results

The goal of this effort was to hear the voice of a representative sample of the various subgroups producing a satisfactory level of reliability and validity. The proposal accepted for this study called on a response of approximately 200 persons from each of the subgroups (pastors, members and non-members). To add to the credibility of findings, the open-end responses, focus groups and interviews provided a full perspective.

As stated, the data collection goal was for a total of 600 responses (200 per subgroup). The method produced almost double the number required for this study. **A total of 989 responses were collected from the process.**

- Pastors- 467 responses
- Members of WCG- 297 responses
- Non-Members- 225 responses

Profile of Respondents

In order to generalize findings to the entire population, it is important to know whether or not the profile of the respondents' appropriately reflects the characteristics of the entire population. The following profiles are provided as a means by which this determination can be made. An assessment from the researcher's perspective is that the profile of respondents tends to match the profile of the population as a whole and is therefore likely to be generalizable.

Pastors:

- Pastors responding to the study request are from every state and province where the Church of God is active, and the distribution mirrors the geographic dispersion found in the movement as a whole.
- The average age of pastoral respondents is between 46-55 years of age. Twenty-eight percent of the pastors are younger than this category and 36% are older.
- Seventy percent of those in a ministry role are senior pastors (representing 235 different congregations). Of these, 17 of the senior pastors are women. The other 30% are in an associate pastor role and fifty of these pastors are women. There remains another group of people who put 'other' as their ministry role and these are predominately women. Some of these are the wife of a senior pastor.
- The size of the congregations follows the pattern of the church in general. Fifty-six percent of the pastoral respondents come from congregations of fewer than 100 for Sunday morning worship. Eighteen percent are from congregations larger than 250 with 12% in a congregation with attendance greater than 500 persons.
- The distribution by the type of community the church is located in is very broad and matches what is known about the movement. The largest single group is found in communities between 25,000 and 50,000 (18%). Twenty-five percent of the congregations are located in communities less than 10,000 people. On the other end of the spectrum, 27% of the congregations are located in communities with populations larger than 100,000.

Members of the *Women of the Church of God*:

- The average age of respondents is between 56-65 years of age, with 35% being older than 65 years. Twelve percent of the respondents are younger than 35 years of age. Interestingly, the WCG members responding to the survey from “The Razor’s Edge” list tend to reflect a younger group with more women in the 46-55 years category.
- Educationally, WCG respondents are found at every level. For 17% a high school degree is their highest level of schooling. Another 41% have some college, 22% have completed college and 18% gave degrees beyond the bachelor’s degree. The women who are on “The Razor’s Edge” have a higher level of educational accomplishment, with 27% having degrees after the bachelor’s and 25% being ordained ministers themselves.
- Very few of these women are “stay at home mom’s” (7%). Most of the respondents are working full-time (35%), working part-time (13%) or retired (44%).
- Fifty-one percent of the WCG members are from congregations with fewer than 100 persons on average in morning worship. Another 26% are in congregations between 101-175 persons. Eighteen-percent attend congregations that average over 251 people (6% over 500).
- The overwhelming majority of the WCG members responding to this study have been attending a congregation of the Church of God for over 30 years (70%). Only 10% have been connected to the Church of God for less than 10 years.
- Respondents who are members of the WCG come from communities that match those found from the pastors’ responses. The geographic distribution of respondents seems to replicate what is known about the general location of congregations in the Church of God.
- Seventy-five percent of the respondents to the study are Caucasian. Another 22% are African-American with the remaining persons being from either the Hispanic or Native American group.

Non-Members of *Women of the Church of God*: (A caution must be raised. It is possible that the following findings are a function of using “The Razor’s Edge” list.)

- The non-member women from “The Razor’s Edge” list that responded to the survey are decidedly younger than the profile of members of the WCG. Twenty-three percent are younger than 36. Fifty-one percent

are between 36 and 55 years of age. Only 11% are 66 years of age or older.

If this finding reflects the population it strongly suggests that younger women, even those active in the Church of God movement, are less likely to be members of WCG.

- There is evidence that the women responding to this study, who are not members of WCG, have a higher educational level than those WCG members participating. Nine percent of the non-members have only a high school education with another 20% completing some college. Forty-one percent of the women in this group have earned a bachelor's degree. Another 28% have either a master's or a doctorate degree.
- Fifty-three percent of the women who are not members are working full-time. This is a significantly higher percentage than that found among the members. Furthermore, 10% are stay-at-home moms (compared to 7% of the members) and only 7% are retired (compared to 44% for the WCG member group).
- Twenty percent of the women who are not members (on "The Razor's Edge" list) say that they are in a pastoral role (at least part-time). It is clear that a strong proportion of the female pastors in the movement are not members of the WCG.
- While respondents who are not members of WCG are found in every size of congregation, there is evidence (at least from "The Razor's Edge" list) that they are more likely to be found in larger congregations in contrast to what was found among the members. Thirty-four percent of the non-member respondents are found in congregations with fewer than 100 average attenders (compared to 51% for the members). Thirty-seven percent of the women who are not members of WCG attend congregations with average attendance above 251. Of these, 25% are from a congregation larger than 500 persons.

This finding is likely to suggest that women who choose to not participate in *Women of the Church of God* are more likely to attend larger congregations.

- Women who are not members of WCG are found in every size of community. Sixteen percent attend congregations in communities of less than 10,000. On the other end of the continuum, 41% of the respondents within this group attend congregations located in communities of at least 100,000.

Comparing the community profile of the non-members to that of the members, there is statistical evidence that the non-member is more likely to attend congregations in a larger community.

- Twenty-seven percent of the women participating in this study who are not members of WCG have been attending a Church of God congregation less than 10 years (compared to 10% for members). Twenty-seven percent have been a part of the Church of God for at least 31 years (compared to 70% for WCG members).
- Ninety-one percent of the responding non-members are Caucasian. Another 7% are African American.

Conclusion: Data collection goals were exceeded for the study and the profile of the WCG members and pastors is likely to reflect what is known about the population as a whole. Women who are not members are also satisfactorily represented in the study and are likely to reflect the general characteristics of persons on “The Razor’s Edge” list. There is evidence that younger women, more likely involved in larger congregations located in larger communities are most unlikely to be members of WCG.

Findings by Research Objective

In this section, findings related directly to the research objectives will be reported. You are encouraged to go directly to the on-line reports for the three different sub-groups. The on-line reports will provide you with the frequency distributions for each question and open-end comments. Please note that not all respondents are included in these on-line reports. Persons who responded to the survey request by mail are not included in the on-line reports. The findings reported, however, do reflect analysis of all the respondents.

SurveyMonkey Report for respondents from “The Razor’s Edge” list:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=MqvdA9pnwehjwUww1z9Nx5Fx6sT_2brnRQp_2bsoXY_2fnCPE_3d

SurveyMonkey Report for respondents from the on-line survey of members:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=fvx92PYWzqixPsOIQwTmhARj4X1Dt9jkAUOWmTg9FYw_3d

SurveyMonkey Report for respondents from the on-line survey of pastors:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=9nKxd0vaPdKzpbDopSMIsWUmIGrBOiV1datubK9pwfo_3d

Objective One: To determine why women join and others do not join WCG.

Why do women join WCG?

Women who are members of WCG cite the following primary reasons for why they are involved.

- Support world mission efforts (80%)
- Use gifts/abilities in ministry (79%)
- Support a ministry that benefits the Church of God movement (76%)
- Get to know other women in the movement (70%)
- Do something small to help change the world (70%)
- Make friends (68%)

When reading the comments or talking with the women, it is clear that there is a distinct WCG culture that strongly influences many women. For these persons, involvement in WCG is a very important part of their lives. Members speak of a long-term relationship with WCG, many times spanning multiple generations within the family. For some, a move to a congregation that does not have an active WCG group is painful. They often try to start a WCG group or become engaged at a state level. These women talk about the spirit of Nora Hunter and yearn for the day when WCG was more widely acknowledged and appreciated.

What is striking is that, while spiritual formation and friendship is often a result of involvement, the core reason to be involved in WCG seems to be linked to 1) world missions and 2) participation in the Church of God movement. It appears that the membership is much more likely to be involved in WCG as a result of a traditional role of WCG, which is to provide for world mission support and to be a mechanism by which women can relate to the greater ministry of the Church of God.

The issue is that this central purpose is most widely held among women who have been active in the movement for many years and see the priority of WCG to be in the world mission effort. The average age of the membership is a stark warning for the future. It is clear that the primary reasons why most women say there is a need for a “women’s ministry” is not the reason why women are currently joining WCG.

This can be further seen when the member respondents are asked what they believe are the top three contributions that WCG has made to the Church of God movement. The responses center on the contribution to world missions and to the movement as a whole. Sixty-four percent of the members say that the top contribution is “create opportunities to support world mission efforts.” The next most cited contribution is “build relationships across the movement,” and the third is to “create service projects on the national and local level to assist people in need.” The next important contribution (38%) is to raise money for the Church of God.

The findings suggest that the reasons why women join WCG are closely related to 1) greater loyalty/connection historically with the WCG and its traditional mission, 2) affiliation with the Church of God and 3) strong relationships that have developed over time with people beyond those in the local community. Ironically, these women seem to be very “outward oriented” with outward meaning an affinity to be connected to the ministry of the greater Church of God.

How do members describe the WCG?

Members were asked to share the words or phrase that comes to mind when they think of *Women of the Church of God*. The following list is the result of their sharing, in rank order. The list shared by members of WCG is very positive and is quite different than the list found for non-members and pastors.

- Missions
- Women helping others
- Fellowship
- Sisterhood
- Mentoring
- God’s Women
- Old Women
- Unity
- Women’s leadership

Why do women not join WCG?

The practical reason why women in the movement do not join WCG is because “our congregation does not have a WCG group.” Sixty-one percent of the respondents say this is a contributing reason for not joining. A complementary reason is “we are not encouraged to join WCG.” It is clear that a primary reason why women do not join is the perception of a lack of availability of WCG to them in their congregation.

Part of the issue is simply the lack of information about WCG. Twenty-nine percent of the women who have never been a member of WCG say that they “do not know anything about it.” These women are more likely to be newer to the movement and younger in age. But, the greatest reason women are not aware of WCG is because it is not present or promoted within the local congregation.

But, there is evidence that “not joining” goes beyond an issue of availability. A significant number of women say that they choose to not be members because they 1) are involved with other forms of women’s ministry, 2) are already linked with other women and 3) do not believe that the activities sponsored by the WCG fit what they are looking for. Many comments, interview findings and focus group comments suggest that, for a significant number of women, WCG is not appealing. The reasons follow a similar pattern. In their eyes WCG is for 1) older women, 2) is only about world missions, 3) is boring and rigid and 4) is not worth the time commitment. While there are examples of positive impressions, the over-riding words used to describe WCG among the non-member population is consistent with these themes.

What are the theories for why membership in WCG has declined?

In open-end comment fashion, the women were confronted with the reality that, in the last decade, the number of women in the Church of God movement who are members in *Women in the Church of God* has declined. They are then asked about theories as to why other women in the congregation do not join *Women of the Church of God*. The pattern of evidence continues to point to the common themes. Theories shared by the women include the following:

- WCG is perceived as a group for older women.
- WCG is not relevant to younger women.
- Women are too busy with work and family.
- Lack of pastoral support.
- Lack of promotion and information.
- WCG competes with other special groups and committees inside and outside the church.
- People view it as an organization, rather than a ministry.

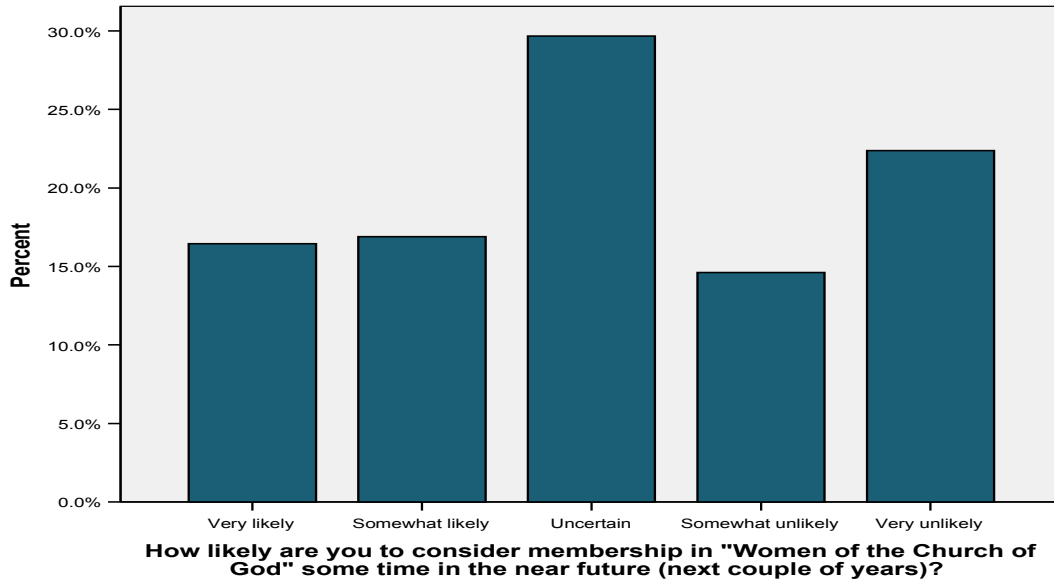
What should be done? Women offered suggestions for how WCG can better support women, fulfill its mission and increase membership. Here is a listing of the suggestions.

- Reach out to younger women with relevant programs and material.
- Create programs that support needs on a local level.
- Change the name.
- Distribute information regarding what we are doing and what it takes to get it done.
- Encourage pastors to promote WCG within their congregations.
- Focus on fellowship and building relationships rather than missions.
- Update and develop media materials that are more relevant to today and will entice more women to get involved.
- Provide strong leadership from the state and national level.

Can WCG win the membership of those currently not involved?

Some non-members are willing to consider future membership in WCG. Thirty-two percent of the non-members say that they are willing to consider it in the future. Fourteen percent say that they are “very likely.” Some current non-members say that they would like to join if they 1) had an opportunity through the local church and/or 2) had more information about WCG.

On the other hand, 36% say that they are not likely to consider joining. Another 32% are uncertain. For the women who say they will not join or are uncertain, the issue tends to be 1) a need to know more about WCG, 2) doubt as to whether or not WCG will make changes to be more relevant to their needs and 3) a need for WCG to become more inclusive. The “inclusive” issue come from a criticism that local WCG groups are clique-ish and can give the impression that current members do not want to younger women to join.



When asked what would increase the possibility of the women being interested in WCG, several patterns consistent with the findings emerge.

- Provide a local group.
- Create a clear and compelling vision that fits the needs of women in these times.
- Explicitly reach out, in attitude and program, to younger women.
- Promote WCG so that there is greater awareness.
- Provide services and support for women in ministry.

The probability of becoming a member is significantly enhanced if these steps are taken. Twenty-eight percent of the non-member respondents say that implementation of the suggestions will “definitely yes” increase the likelihood of joining. An additional 44% say “possibly yes.” Findings suggest that there is some hope of drawing these women into WCG if action is taken.

There is, however, a larger issue that will be addressed in Objective Three. There is compelling evidence that the focus of need for women’s ministry has shifted. The result is a current WCG program, or perception of program, that is not in line with the core reasons why the emerging populations of women want to be involved in women’s ministry.

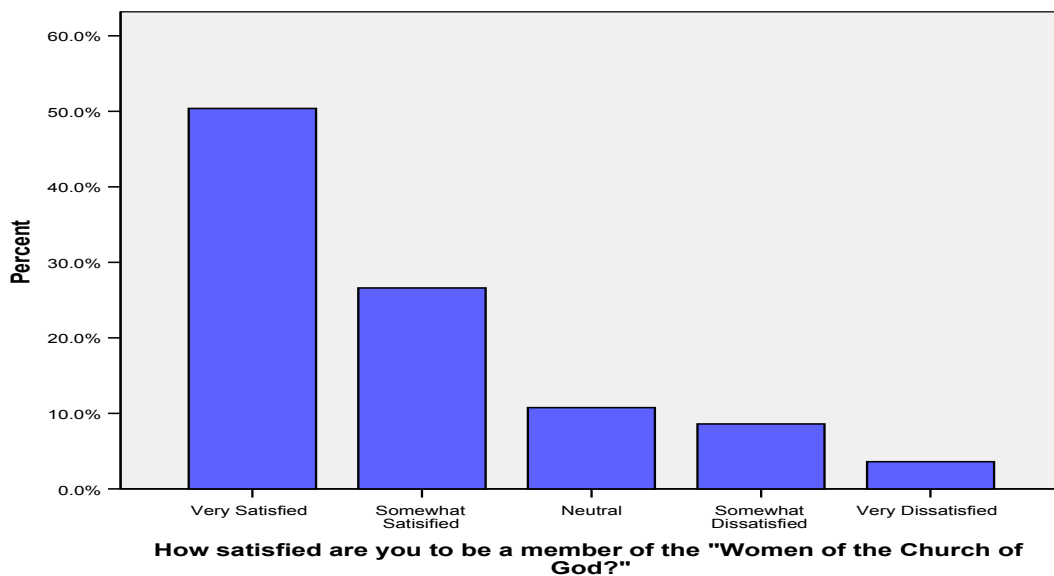
Conclusion: Women who are members of WCG tend to join because it is part of their cultural norm to be a part of this organization, and they have an affinity to the purpose of world mission support and relationships with the greater Church of God movement. There is a marked difference in motivations between those who join WCG and those that do not. While the primary reason why women do not join WCG is because of a lack of local access and encouragement, there is also evidence that non-joiners, especially younger women have a different compelling reason to

participate in women’s ministry. This difference will be developed in the Objective Three conversation.

Objective Two: To measure satisfaction levels among current members of the WCG.

Are members satisfied with the WCG?

The general answer is YES. Fifty percent of the respondents say that they are “very satisfied” and another 27% are “somewhat satisfied.” But, there is a group that is either not certain (11% “uncertain”) or not satisfied (13%).



The people who express lower levels of satisfaction with WCG are least likely to be retained. On the other hand, women who are “very satisfied” with the WCG are likely to continue being members for the indefinite future.

There is statistical evidence that older women, who have been involved in WCG for a long period of time, are most likely to be “very satisfied.” The women most likely to be “dissatisfied” are younger women who are working full-time. Satisfaction levels do not appear to be associated with the size of the congregation, racial group, or size of community in which the congregation is located.

What do members like about being members of WCG?

There is much to like about being a member of *Women of the Church of God*. Respondents were asked to share what they like. The following list, in rank order, was created from the many responses.

- Fellowship and close friendships with other women
- Supporting missions; opportunity to raise funds to help missions
- Opportunity to serve and lead
- Commitment, love, and devotion for the ministry by the national leaders; joining with women at national and state meetings
- The studies; studying about women of other countries and their needs; learning about work and conditions in various countries
- History and heritage; what WCG stands for
- Diversity; Being with women of all colors, ages, experience at NAC, state meetings, and national meetings

What do members not like about the WCG?

On the other hand, there are some things that members do not like. The list of items is shared. What is noted is that “what they do not like” really is rooted in a concern about the future of WCG.

- Absence of younger women; WCG does not seem to relate to younger women; perceived as an “old ladies” organization
- WCG always wanting money; primary goal is raising funds, not the spiritual needs of women
- Declining membership
- Lack of support from local pastors
- Politics of the organization get in the way of serving; business meetings
- The name (needs to be changed to not be so exclusive)
- Disconnect from local, regional, and the national level
- Unwilling to change; no fresh ideas; new ideas are not embraced by older members

A group of dissatisfied members can be found in both the small and the large congregation. Younger women (<45) in small congregations are frustrated about the lack of a critical mass of ladies to participate in activities. They are asking for ways to connect with women from other congregations so that they can be more involved. It is interesting to watch these women warm to WCG as they hear more about the types of activities that some congregations offer (This is through observation at the focus groups.).

On the other hand, there is a group of women in the larger congregations who are dissatisfied and at risk of dropping out. These ladies tend to be younger and, for this group of women, WCG seems to be in competition with other forms of ministry (and the busy lives of women). It is this group that is least likely to currently be willing to become a member of WCG.

Can younger women be attracted to WCG?

It will be a challenge to attract a large proportion of younger women to membership in WCG. The perception is that the program of WCG is not compatible with what is likely

to motivate participation. But, observation from the focus groups suggests that younger women can be successfully engaged in WCG. There were several occasions when women who have been recruited by local leaders to join WCG but have not, were encouraged by the dialogue in the focus group and made statements suggesting that they intend to get involved. In each case, it was the positive story of how WCG has impacted a woman's life in practical areas. These areas relate to friendship, mentorship, support in times of trouble, spiritual development and in assisting women to find purpose in ministry/service.

There are also moments when the younger women are "turned off" by what they hear. In the focus groups, younger women also heard conversations suggesting that WCG is a "club, with meetings, assignments and rules that often becomes a clique". When this is heard, the younger women make it clear that they want to have nothing to do with the WCG.

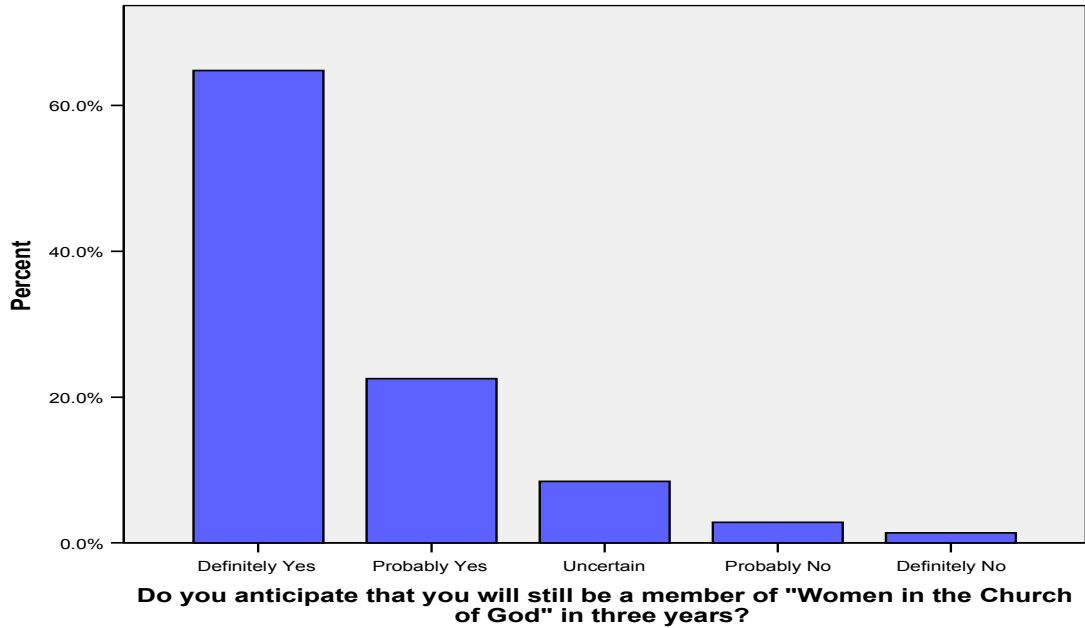
At the same time, there is a clear frustration among members, especially older ones, with the younger generation. Many comments make this obvious. Members often describe younger women as "uncommitted," "self-oriented" and "lacking in spiritual maturity." The "generation gap" and a bit of an attitude toward "the other generation" are evident in the dialogue. Younger women are sensitive to an attitude they view as condescending. Older women are sensitive when they perceive that "the way we do it" is not respected.

Data from interviews, open-end comments and the focus group all make it clear that members are aware of dynamics that may undermine the future of WCG. The concerns are as follows.

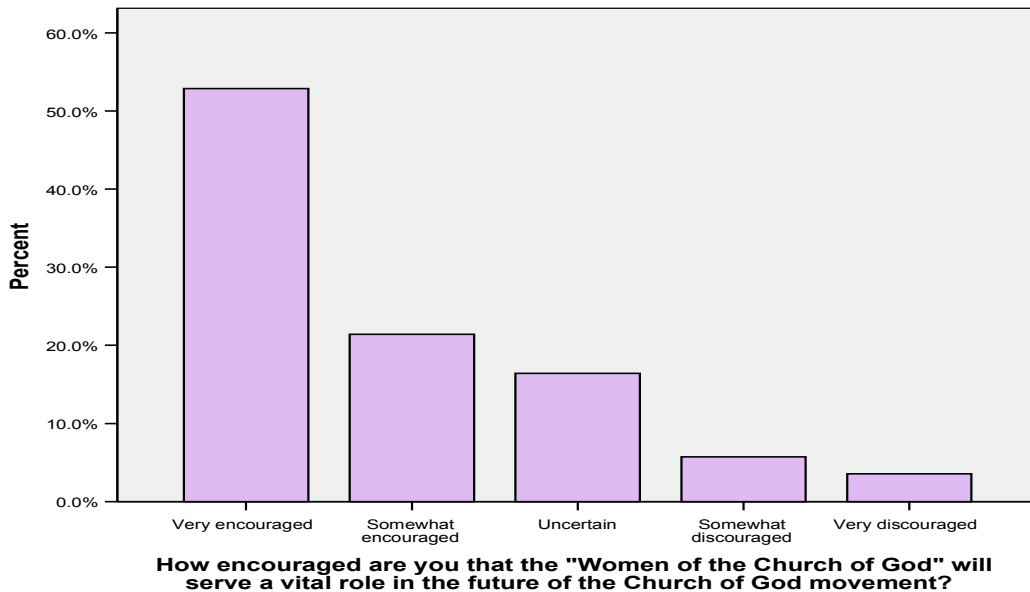
1. Decreasing involvement in activities
2. A generation gap between those who join and those that do not
3. Competition from other "women's groups"
4. Awareness that the success of a local group is partly dependent on the level of support they get from the senior pastor
5. A frustration that non-members are not willing to commit to the program

Are current members likely to continue being members?

One measurement of satisfaction is whether or not women anticipate continued membership in WCG into the future. Sixty-six percent say that they will "definitely yes" be a member of WCG in three years and another 25% say "probably yes." This means that 91% of the respondents to this study who are members anticipate staying members of WCG. Only 4% say that they do not anticipate remaining a member into the future. The others are "uncertain."



The membership of the WCG is also cautiously optimistic that WCG will continue to serve a vital role in the future of the movement. Fifty-three percent say that they are “very encouraged” and another 21% are “somewhat encouraged” about the future of WCG.



Conclusion: There is a strong majority of WCG members who are very satisfied and extremely loyal. Being part of the WCG is an important aspect of their lives. These women appreciate being part of something that is bigger than themselves and the opportunities provided to connect to their passions, mission, the Church of God

and strong relationships with women. Younger women, however, are less likely to be satisfied and more likely to consider terminating their membership. This is especially true in the larger congregations. There is a concern among members as they acknowledge that there is a downward trend in commitment and involvement.

Objective Three: To define how the WCG is viewed by pastors in the Church of God.

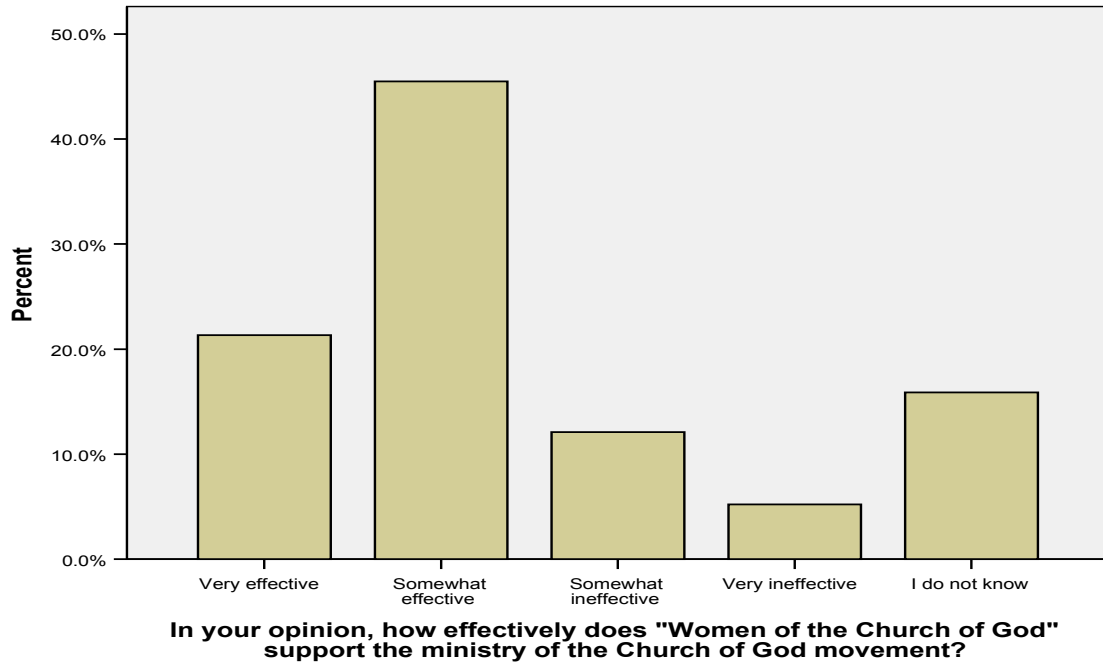
The important role of the congregational pastors in facilitating, encouraging, initiating and supporting women's ministry is underscored by this study. In the absence of congregational support, WCG is likely to fail at the local level. When there is pastoral support, and when there is a capable female champion to lead women's ministry, WCG is much more likely to succeed. As has been established, pastors see a need for women's ministry. But, that does not necessarily translate into endorsement of WCG. In this section, the view of the pastors will be developed.

From the perspective of pastors, what is the contribution of WCG?

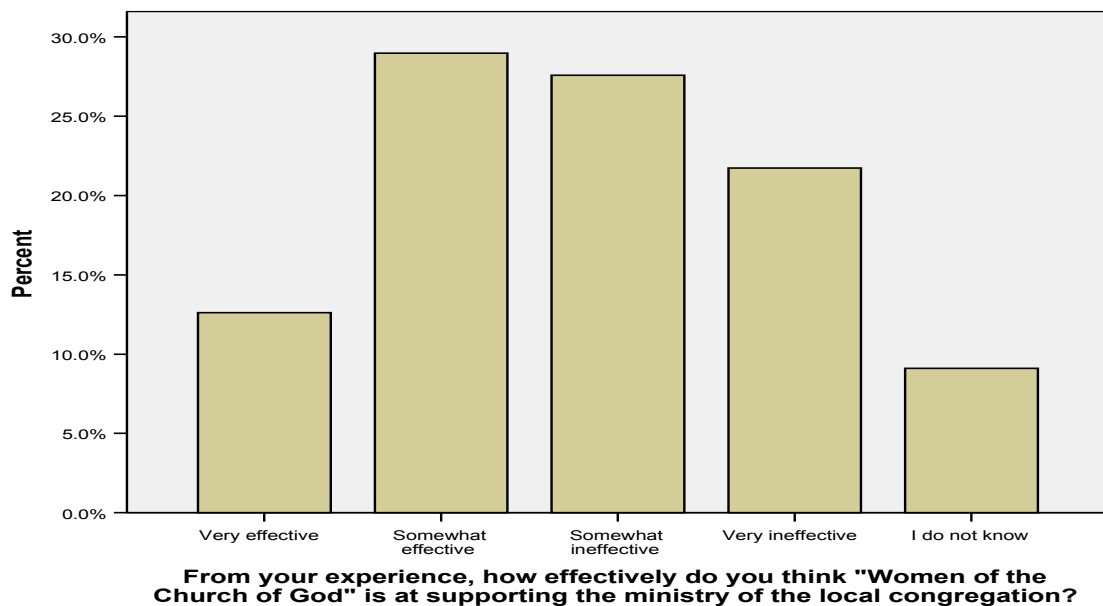
When asked specifically about the contribution that WCG has made to the Church of God movement, one outcome is at the top of their thinking. Pastors believe that the greatest contribution of WCG is “creating opportunities to support world mission efforts.” This is the top contribution cited by 63% of the pastors.

Beyond this outcome, two other contributions are cited by more than 35% of the pastors. The second most often noted contribution, after “world mission efforts” is “raising money to support the ministry in the Church of God” (50%). The third most often positive contribution of WCG to the church is “building relationships between women across the movement.” This finding continues a pattern suggesting that the primary role of WCG is seen in the “macro” Church of God world, not in the “micro” lives of the women. This means that pastors extend the finding that the greatest perceived benefit of WCG is found outside the local congregation.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that pastors are more likely to believe that WCG effectively supports ministry in the Church of God movement than they are to believe that it is effective in supporting local church ministry. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents to the pastor survey believe that WCG is at least “somewhat effective” in supporting the ministry of the movement. Of these, 22% say “very effective.



But, a smaller proportion of the respondents believe that the *Women of the Church of God* has been effective at supporting the ministry of the local congregation. In the case of this question, nearly a majority of pastors do not think WCG has been effective (49%). Twenty-two percent say the WCG is “very ineffective.” Nine percent “do not know.” On the positive side, 42% have an affirmative view of the effectiveness of WCG at the congregational level.



Analysis of the data suggests an important difference between those with a positive view and those that do not think WCG has been effective. A difference in opinion is not a function of the pastoral role or gender. Senior pastors are no more likely to think that WCG is effective than associate pastors. Also, female pastors are not more likely to think that WCG is effective than male pastors. What is clear is that it is the pastors who are older who are most likely to say that WCG is effective, both from a Church of God and congregational perspective. Again, there is evidence that the differing view of the effectiveness of WCG is related to the age of the respondent.

Are pastors encouraged about the future role of WCG?

As pastors consider whether or not they are encouraged that *Women of the Church of God* will serve a vital role in the future of the movement, just under half are encouraged (48%). Twenty-five percent are “very encouraged.” These pastors are those ministers who believe that WCG has been effective in supporting ministry at both the local and national/international level. But, 38% of the pastors are “uncertain” about the future role of WCG in the church. Only 18% say that they are discouraged. Those pastors expressing discouragement tend to be younger in age.

What words best describe WCG, from the view of pastors?

Pastors were asked to share the words that come to mind when they hear of the ministry *Women of the Church of God*. On the positive side, there is a pattern of pastors including themes such as 1) world mission’s outreach, 2) congregational service and 3) relationship building. On the negative side, the dominate comments relate to the following words/phrases; 1) old, 2) irrelevant and 3) out of touch. Many comments indicated that they felt the WCG was an antiquated organization with positional power. There is an opinion that mission education and fundraising methods are old fashion, irrelevant and need to change. Too many pastors say that groups are “full of old women and not appealing to the younger women of the church.” The suggestion is made that most young women do not want to be involved, because they do not want to add another “meeting” to their daily schedule.

What suggestions do pastors have for WCG?

Pastors were also asked to offer suggestions for how WCG can be more relevant to the needs of women’s ministry into the future. There were 320 comments to this question offered. The respondents are passionate in their answers. Patterns of ideas suggest the following priorities.

1. Pastors suggest a need for a better understanding of the intent, purpose and vision of the WCG. Due to the many cultural and social changes in recent history, there is an expression of a need to re-define the purpose of *Women of the Church of God* from the original "Home Missions" idea to women serving the church

- through congregational, community, home and foreign mission outreach and leadership development.
2. There is a suggestion for leadership development to prepare women to lead local women's groups.
 3. Pastors suggest that more relevant small group Bible studies be offered.
 4. As a general direction, the recommendation of pastors is for greater emphasis to be placed on spiritual growth and for partnerships with the local church to provide spiritual formation assistance within the local church.
 5. Pastors call for WCG to listen to the suggestions of the younger women. Focus on the younger women of the church by being a mentor and helper. WCG must be relevant to the 21st century woman.
 6. There is a need for WCG to become a more outreach focused ministry at the local level. Place WCG in line with the Christian mission, not just world-missions.
 7. Continue *Christ's Birthday* and some of the other historical programs to connect to the past and to retain the engagement of the loyal WCG members.
 8. Become a clearinghouse of ideas for women's ministry. Compile a booklet of ideas gleaned from churches around the world about how women's ministry can be successful.

Conclusion: Pastors respect the historical role that WCG has played in the Church of God. Its contribution to world mission efforts, as a fund-raising entity in the church and the function it plays to connect women from across the movement is highly valued. Whether WCG serves the needs of women at the local church level is in doubt. Pastors, especially younger ones, believe that the focus of WCG will need to shift to serving women in the congregation in order to be sustainable. There are serious doubts as to whether WCG is positioned to meet the needs of women at the local level. Ideas offered suggest that a paradigm shift is called for that will align WCG as a facilitator of the goal to empower women for personal and spiritual development which is required if they are prepared to accept outreach and mission-oriented roles.

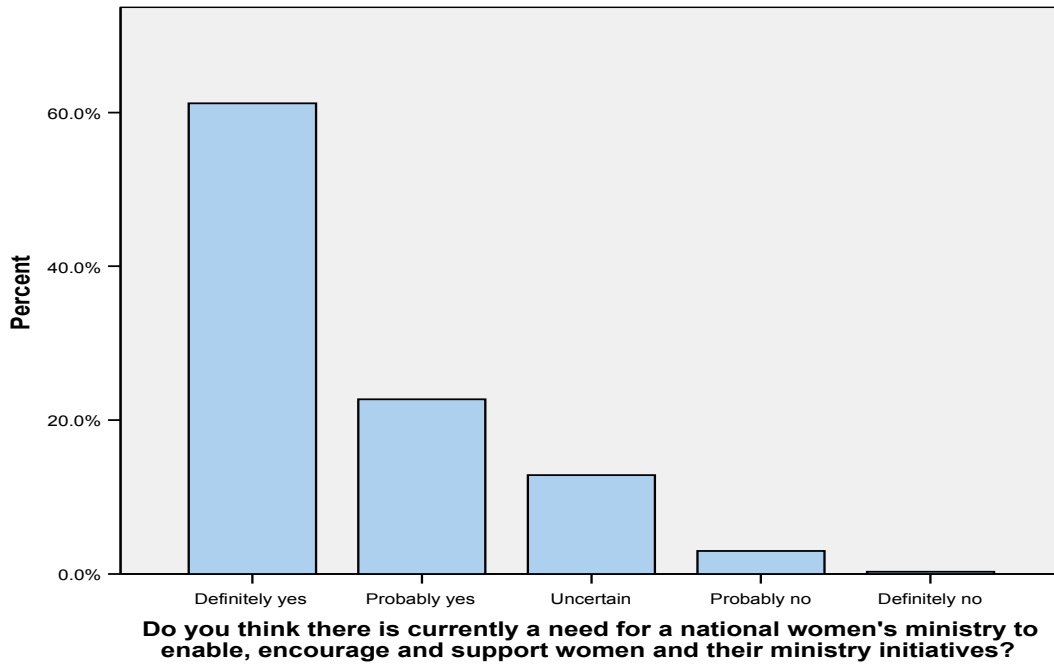
Objective Four: To explore the programming/ministry needs of women in the Church of God to determine if current services of the WCG match needs.

Is there a need for an organized Women's Ministry?

The overwhelming majority of women, whether they are currently members of WCG or not, believe that there is a current need for an organized women's ministry at the national level.

Non-WCG Members: Eighty-three percent of the women, who are NOT currently members of WCG, say that there is a "current need for a national women's ministry to enable, encourage and support women and their ministry initiatives." Of this

group, 57% say “definitely yes.” Women who were members of WCG in the past, but are not now, are slightly less certain of the need. Among this group, 78% say that there is a need for a national women’s ministry. But, the percentage of women who say “definitely yes” is still at 57%.



Among non-WCG members, comments suggest three potential concerns with the notion of a “national ministry.”

- Many women are already connected or aware of ministry beyond the Church of God that they view as more relevant or of higher quality.
- There is a view that “national” is not what is needed. In their view the ministry should come out of the local congregation.
- A common voice among non-WCG members is that the need is present but that the WCG is too “stuck in the past” to be the force that provides the ministry to the next generation of women.

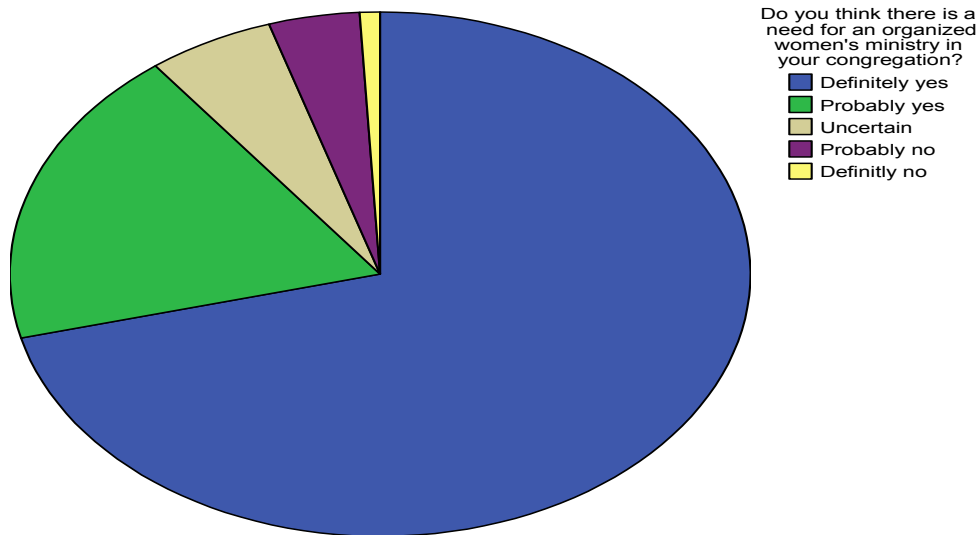
WCG Members:

The belief that there is a need for a national women’s ministry is strongly held by women who are WCG members. Ninety-two percent say that there is a need (70% saying “definitely yes”). Observations from the open-end comments suggest that these women highly value their experience in the WCG and appreciate the organizational structure that is provided.

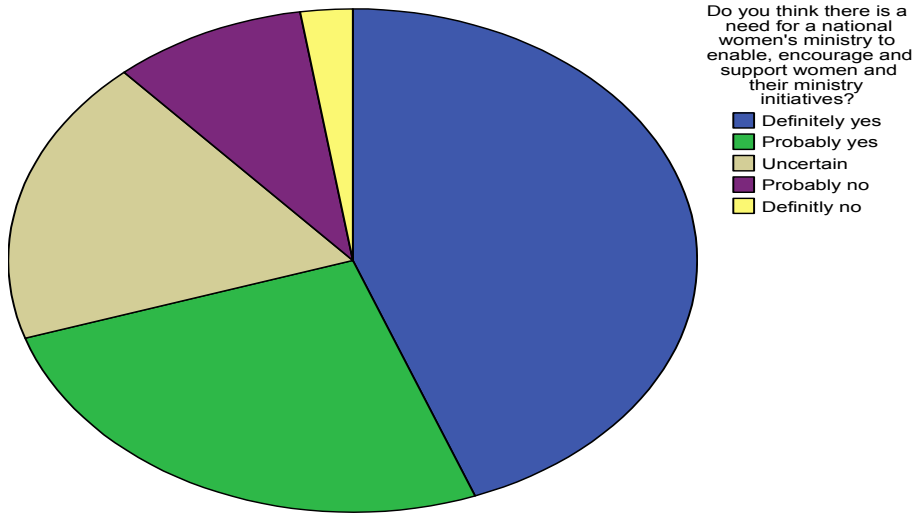
There is some sentiment that the national office should allow for creativity and flexibility at the local/state level. The women are also aware that “what they are doing” is not working for a growing proportion of the women in the congregation. A concern for the future of WCG is expressed.

Pastors:

Pastors were asked, “Do you think there is a need for an organized women’s ministry in your congregation?” The answer is a strong affirmative. Eighty-nine percent of the pastors say that there is a need within the congregation. Seventy-one percent say “definitely yes.” The expression of a need for a local women’s ministry is found across the sample, regardless of the size of congregation, location of the congregation, sex of the respondent or the type of pastoral role the respondent is in. It can be said that the awareness of a need to support women in the local congregation is found across the group of ministers in this study.



The pastors were also asked if there was a need for a national women’s ministry. Again, the answer is positive. Seventy-one percent say that there is a need for a national ministry. But, this level of affirmation is less than that expressed for the need for women’s ministry at the congregational level. Forty-four percent say that there is “definitely yes” a need for a national ministry. Nineteen percent are “uncertain” and twelve percent do not agree that there is a need for a national women’s ministry. There is some evidence that men are less likely to say that there is a need for a national ministry than are the women pastors. Also, it appears that pastors in the largest congregations are more likely to say that there is not a need for an organized women’s ministry at the national level.



What is the nature of congregational women's ministry currently in the Church of God? Fifty-two percent of the pastors report that their congregation has an organized and active ministry that sponsors activities on a regular basis. Another 26% have "some activities," and 17% "rarely have activities." A couple of trends are evident in the open-end comments that should be noted.

- A large number of programs are currently in transition. In some cases, the women's group is being re-established. The lack of leadership (women and pastoral) in the past led to a deterioration of the women's ministry, and the new pastor is trying to rejuvenate the ministry. In multiple cases, the "new ministry" being implemented is WCG.
- Many pastors are observing that the women's ministry is only serving a small part of the women of the congregation. These programs tend to be primarily for the older women and are often using "the old model" of WCG.
- There is an emergence of "non-affiliated" women's ministry. These are either "local" in nature or are connecting with non-Church of God groups. In larger churches, it is not uncommon for there to be both a WCG chapter and other forms of women's ministry. Too often, the WCG chapter is referred to in negative terms such as "small, inactive, old, over-organized and out-of-date."

What is the need that leads to a women's ministry?

When respondents are asked what the primary needs are that should be fulfilled through women's ministry, an interesting pattern emerges. In contrast to the traditional role of WCG, that being a focus on world missions, the primary needs expressed are for 1) spiritual formation, 2) friendship and 3) outreach to the local community.

Perspective of non-members:

Many needs are present. A majority of women who are not currently members of the WCG affirm that there is a need for spiritual formation, relationship building, and service in the congregation, local community and beyond the local community, world mission efforts and leadership development. But the strongest expression of need is for:

- Friendship and relationship building
- Spiritual formation and Bible study
- Opportunities to serve people in the local community

The weakest expression of need is for:

- To serve missionaries and to be active in world mission efforts
- Leadership development opportunities
- Serve persons beyond the local community

The women were asked to explain “what is missing in the lives of women?” Responses suggest that women are seeking a place to fellowship with other women, not only to study scripture, but to share their personal stories, a place for accountability, guidance, and mentoring.

Women today are so busy with family life, their career, being leaders in their church and playing the traditional roles at church that they lack time for themselves and “alone time” with God. Respondents say that they do not have time to commit to other activities in their church, because they are so busy with work and family. Events, when they can get-away” are appealing, because they are entertainment and come with no commitment. Women know that other women are interpreting their non-participation as a lack of commitment and passion for their church and for God.

There is evidence of women who want to take on a pastoral leadership role in their church but feel that they do not receive the support of the church for their ministry. They are seeking the legitimization of their call to ministry. Many voices suggest that this is a role for the WCG going into the future.

Comments also affirm a pattern that what is missing in the lives of many women who are active in the church has shifted from “needs over there” to “needs in my own life.” It is articulated in many different ways. Some of the common expressions suggest that time constraints and the challenges of life are 1) undermining spiritual formation, 2) creating loneliness and disconnection and 3) shifting attention to the needs that are most immediately relevant (personal and local community.)

Women were also asked “what do you like to do?” Women who are not members of WCG were asked what they enjoy to do. The following ten activities come to the top.

1. Casual gathering with friends
2. Activities for both men and women

3. Service projects in the community
4. Women's Bible studies
5. Leadership development activities
6. Materials to support women struggling with life issues
7. Women's small group retreats
8. Cluster groups to develop close relationships
9. Groups connecting women from various Church of God congregations
10. Women's conferences

Least desirable activities include (from least desired):

1. Book clubs
2. Activities to share crafts and hobbies with others
3. Educational programs that lead to certification/degree
4. Opportunities to support world missions efforts with travel

The same pattern is found for the women who were members of WCG at one time but are no longer. The only difference is that these women are more likely to say that they enjoy participating in “experiences that foster unity among the diversity of women in the movement.”

Perspective of WCG members:

The top two needs are the same for the WCG members as for the non-members. They are

- Friendship and relationship building
- Spiritual formation and Bible study

It is clear that the WCG members are more likely to say that “opportunities to serve the local congregation” and “world mission efforts” are important compared to the non-members. Strong affirmation is also found for “opportunities to serve the local community.” The weakest expression was found for “leadership development training (even though 84% say it is a need) and “opportunities to serve needs beyond the local community’ (even though 85% say it is a need).

When WCG members are asked “what type of activities they enjoy participating in” a slightly different list emerges than found for non-members. The top ten activities for members are (from most desired):

1. Women's Bible studies
2. Groups connecting women from various Church of God congregations
3. Casual gatherings with friends
4. Service projects to support my congregation
5. Leadership development
6. Service projects in the community

7. Cluster groups to develop close relationships
8. Opportunities to meet people
9. Experiences that foster unity among the diversity of women in the movement
10. Materials to support women struggling with life issues

The least desired activities are the same for members as they are for non-members (from least desired):

1. Book clubs
2. Activities to share crafts and hobbies with others
3. Educational programs that lead to certification/degree
4. Opportunities to support world missions efforts with travel

Perspective of pastors:

When pastors are asked what they observe to be the greatest needs for women who are active in the church, the priorities of 1) friendship and relationship building and 2) spiritual formation and Bible study are again at the top of the list. Interestingly, Pastors make “serving persons in our local community” as slightly more important than “serving persons in the congregation.” But, they are fast to comment that the work of the church does not get done without the service of the women. The pattern found for women is almost replicated by pastors. While a majority of pastors agree that “outreach beyond the local community” and “serve to missionaries and world mission efforts” are a need, they are the lesser priority.

Conclusions: It is clear that the constituency sees a need for an organized and active women’s ministry at both the congregational and national level. The need for women to be engaged in ministry and to have opportunities to build Christian relationships is strongly affirmed. The absence of an organized women’s ministry is seen as detrimental to the mission of both the local church and the Church of God as a whole.

But, there is a clear difference in “the needs” of women for a women’s ministry. Women most active in WCG are more likely to embrace the view that the focus of the ministry should be on world mission efforts and in building connections for women in the Church of God. In contrast, the focus of need for women in general seems to be in the areas of spiritual formation and relationship building/life support. There is evidence that WCG is not seen as relevant to the life reality of many women, especially for younger women. The primary challenge will be for WCG to be seen as attractive to the mainstream of women in the Church of God. The evidence suggests that the programming, or perception of programming from the WCG, is not in line with the expressed needs of a growing proportion of the women.

Objective Five: Generate new ideas for how WCG can serve the women of the Church of God, aligned to the various segments of women.

One person in a focus group put it this way, “all organizations need to recognize that leaders will have to remake an organization (50 year cycle) in order to stay relevant. It may be time for that to happen for the WCG.”

This section consists of the “words of the respondents.” An attempt has been made to capture the sentiment of the findings as represented by specific comments, ideas and suggestions that came from heart, mind and voice of women and pastors. The section represents actual ideas that seem to speak for the finding as a whole. Therefore, the suggestions reflect recommendations to the ministry, *Women of the Church of God*.

The first section will highlight recommendations representing strategic steps that should be considered by leadership at the Women of the Church of God. The second section will focus on tactical changes that warrant thought and possible implementation.

With respect for the legacy of the past and in honor of all the women who currently find *Women of the Church of God* to be an important part of their lives, the findings of this study suggest that securing the future will necessitate change.

What strategic moves should Women of the Church of God consider?

The vision of WCG dating back to Nora Hunter has served the Church of God well. The focus on serving the church by accepting responsibility to champion world missions is highly valued. But, while WCG remains a partner, the responsibility for world mission efforts extends beyond the WCG. Being known “for missions” is not a sufficient vision for the future.

In recent years, *Women of the Church of God* has branched out beyond the focus on world missions, but that tradition is still driving the perception of WCG. Diversity in programming has occurred, at some level, but a clear and sustaining vision that is consistent with the needs of women in 2008 has not been activated. There is a gap in thinking. One group, in diminishing number, is aligned with the historical vision of WCG. They remain committed. But, the emerging group of women is not likely to be engaged in the same way as the first group or to the same degree. Realities have changed.

A new vision should drive the future. There is a tendency, in a mature organization, to be driven by program and structure. At this point, these should take a backseat first to vision and secondly to relationships. The suggested vision, while not excluding world mission

support, must embrace the primary expression of need being heard from women, especially younger women, within the congregation. Importantly, the direction to be suggested is also recommended by pastors.

Respondents seem to be saying “take a prophet role to educate the congregations of the role of women in ministry” (lay and pastoral leadership). Equip women to find their 1) identity in Christ 2) identity in the Church of God and 3) identity as a people in mission (as in “missional,” not just world missions). Communicate in a dynamic way the purpose and vision of WCG. Respondents suggest that WCG should become an enabler, facilitator and propagator of “best practices” of ways to meet needs of women and to engage women to serve the needs of the local congregation/cause of Christ worldwide.

Pastors and women suggest that the vision shift to a focus on engagement of the spiritual formation and relational needs of women and to ministry in the local community. This shift will be seen by some as self-serving and maybe even a compromise of mission. The reality is that the starting point to engage women in active ministry has shifted from “the world” to “the home.” The theory is that the way to get people engaged beyond “self” is to start with a specific local need.

WCG continues to be a primary means by which women were allowed to step up to serve in ministry and often, in leadership. This study suggests that the realities of life for too many women simply make it difficult or unrealistic to “step up” to serve, even when they want to. The motto for the future may be “health first, service will follow.”

An important role of the WCG should not be lost. A move to perpetuate personal and ministerial health of women at the local level should not lead to “localism.” Connecting women in ministry, across the movement, must continue to be part of the vision. Included in this role is the much appreciated role that WCG continues to play in building relationships between racial groups. Interestingly, opinions did not differ on any points, whether the respondent is African American or Caucasian.

The starting point for the future is likely to include continued development of models for meaningful Bible studies and relational groups. Women should be given opportunities to 1) listen to local needs, 2) pray for each other, 3) connect with friends, 4) and bring new women into the church. The relational aspect is critical. It is the front door to participation. Ironically, it will be a challenge to get women to the “front door,” even though they acknowledge that they want friends and meaningful relationships. Life is in competition with “life.”

According to the emerging vision, a role of the national office can be to train state and regional people to help rethink the vision for women's ministry at the local level. The role is not to "answer the question" or to impose a program. They need to facilitate a process of self-discovery for local women's ministry and then provide a resource to help them be successful. Shift focus from "you conform to our program" to "we help you implement your need-based program." Many respondents ask for creative helps to the practical programming of the local with less focus on "business meeting" and structure.

A marketing reality is that the brand *Women of the Church of God* presents a challenge to change. The name means something and that meaning constructs an attitudinal barrier for too many women. As such, it may be necessary to "start over" to attract an enlarged base of support. This is especially true if the ministry of WCG is going to be attractive to younger women. One idea is to provide a platform of services for many segments of women under the banner of WCG. This may call on creative branding, including new names, for elements reflecting dynamic new directions in ministry.

What tactical moves should Women of the Church of God consider?

Recommendations from respondents call for action in at least three areas. First, *Women of the Church of God* needs to engage a new wave of women and to regain the support of pastors. This is not the time for a "club." In the spirit of a "movement," WCG needs to reach out and connect.

In each section, specific ideas shared by respondents are offered. These ideas align with the general sentiment of the findings.

Connect

1. Invite local representative from lead congregations in each state to connect with state leaders.
2. Send the state leaders out to the congregations to engage with the women where they are.
3. Provide intentional support that will allow women in small congregations to join together and be engaged beyond their own congregation.
4. Organize relational/spiritual retreats for women in regions
5. Do not wait for women to come to WCG. WCG needs to GO to them. Be proactive.

Communicate

1. Call the women to “tell their personal story.” Capture the stories of lives changed. It should not be about WCG. It needs to be about the life of women and how WCG has met their real needs.
2. There is evidence that communication is a problem. Too many pastors just throw away anything that comes from Anderson or the state. Once a new vision is cast, there needs to be a concerted effort to communicate to the pastors and engage them in the development of a successful local ministry. Become the ministry partner of pastors.
3. A contact person within each congregation needs to be identified. Use the natural networks to identify the persons. Reach beyond the “club” to find the most dynamic and enthusiastic women at the local congregation. A “women’s ministry champion” within the congregation needs to be identified and trained.
4. Expand the database and make sure information is current.
5. Use emails, especially for younger people. Explore pod-casts, blogs and other forms of communication that engage the younger generation.
6. WCG needs to be visible at state general assemblies and NAC. The vision of the “new WCG” needs to be seen as the mainstream and core ministry within the Movement.

Construct

1. Reinvent how to fund the WCG. Are “dues” for “membership” the best way?
2. Make it clear how to join. There can be a language barrier. Make it simple.
3. To get younger women, think about how to serve their kids. In some cases it may mean inviting kids to come to activities, as long as it is really for them. In other cases, activities should be “time away.” Consider the idea of WCG being about “family.”
4. Be flexible. Do a “local focus group.” Help locals evaluate local needs and then the program needs to be adaptive. Listen and act.
5. Help several small congregations in an area come together to form a group. There is lost potential in small congregations, and they like to be invited and joined together.
6. Start support groups to help young women to balance work, family, ministry and personal holistic health.
7. Provide support and training for local leaders. Help them be successful.
8. Each woman in WCG should become personal recruiters and try to invite two other women into membership.
9. Continue to build the curriculum for women’s Bible studies and relational ministries. Materials such as “Sister to Sister” and “Women of Purpose” reflect action in this direction. Learn from those that are doing it the best. The Beth Moore material is very popular currently. It is acknowledged that it will be difficult to replicate the professional quality of some series. Instead of seeing other resources as competition, incorporate its use in the WCG program.

10. Do not see other women's ministry as competition. Use activities, like *Women of Faith*, as part of the program. It is not wise to have an exclusively WCG program that is not seen as the mainstream of women's ministry at the congregational ministry. WCG should be the facilitator of women's ministry across the movement. Bring women together and be willing to use all resources that are available.

Appendix One Summary of Open-end Responses

Pastor Survey

1. To what degree does your congregation have an organized “women’s ministry” program currently in place?

Of 446 pastors who responded to this question, 62 comments were noted. Most pastors replied that they currently have a ministry in place or want to start one but it is not effective because of the age of the women (elderly or young, working moms). Also commented were that the young women are not interested in forming an organized program because of time restraints already with their lives. Pastors seem frustrated that the WCG is “spiritually dead”.

2. Do you think there is a need for an organized women’s ministry in your congregation?

Seventy-one percent of the respondents feel an overwhelming YES that there is a need.

3. If you think there is a need, what do you see as the benefits of having an organized women’s ministry in your congregation? If you do not think there is this need, what are your reasons for this position?

There were 383 responses to this question and 383 comments noted! Overwhelmingly mentioned was that there is a need to study, share, minister, provide support and encouragement and participate with other Christian women and that women need their own peer group. Gender based groups allow for freedom of sharing and caring and carrying each other’s burdens. Not a need for the old traditional pattern of missions only. That is still a part of women's ministries. In some groups noted, the elder women have wanted to maintain it as the old model, which did not include many of contemporary needs of women. The elder women at times felt threatened by the younger ones who tried some new methods and studies and activities. It is being worked through for both to continue some activities and some cooperatively. Targeting specific needs of women i.e. mom, wife, grandma – how they are different from men. Most WCG do not address this and meet these needs. This is not in touch with today’s woman.

4. Do you think there is a need for a national women’s ministry to enable, encourage and support women and their ministry initiatives?

Forty four percent of the respondents said definitely yes. Many of the 131 responses did not want the “national” telling them how to run the ministry. A national level of

leadership helps with continuity, giving ideas that can become a common goal. Many comments suggested not national without first being focused locally or regionally. National ministry doesn't really impact the local church or community. A better solution might be to develop a national training program to assist implementation on a local level.

5. As you interact with the women in your congregation, what are the greatest needs that should be addressed within the life of the congregation? (Please list "others" and share ideas.)

Of the 457 people who responded to this question, 368 of them or 82.3% felt that development of friendships and relationship building was the greatest need with 345 of them or 76.5% saying that spiritual formation or bible study was the second greatest need. Serving people in the local community and the congregation came in third and fourth respectively. Comments saying that you need to minister at home first before serving abroad were mentioned. Women need to be healthy first. Servanthood will follow. Opportunities to serve people in the local community and the congregation were important. Comments noted were that many women are in the "sandwich" between caring for their own children and caring for aging parents/relatives, and dealing with serious health issues. Support systems need to be in place for these issues but many respondents don't see a whole lot of help coming from any WCG organization concerning these issues.

6. When you hear of the ministry "Women of the Church of God," what phrase or words come to your mind?

Missions outreach and community involvement were the number one comment with the words "old, crusty, out of touch ladies" added many of the comments. Sad to say, most comments indicated that they felt the WCG was an antiquated organization with positional power over service and sacrifice that the missions education and fundraising were old, irrelevant and in need of change, full of old women and not appealing to the younger women of the church. Most young women do not want to add another "meeting" to their daily schedule.

7. As you consider the role of the "Women of the Church of God" in the movement, what stands out as the top three contributions of the ministry? (Please check THREE of the following.)

The top three are creating opportunities to support world mission efforts, raising funds to support ministry in the Church of God, and building relationships between women across the movement. However, other comments were made that they should move away from the old format. Younger women can't identify with the far, away places and want to see more local missions work. WCG does provide opportunities for women to serve, but the focus of the service is not to the local church ministry, but

organizing local church women to support its vision and mission objectives which are profoundly, world missions and missionaries.

8. From your experience, how effectively do you think “Women of the Church of God” is at supporting the ministry of the local congregation? Please share comments explaining your assessment.

About half of the respondents thought it was somewhat effective and half thought it was somewhat ineffective. Some of the comments that were made reiterated comments made in previous questions that younger women are not interested in joining WCG and that the older women who are involved have limited ability to help with local ministries and most of their involvement includes raising money for missions through bake sales, etc. Other comments made were that these WCG groups are “exclusive” and these older ladies are good at organizing themselves and become “clique-ish” and do not want younger women to join in. Some of the COG do not know where WCG came from or what it is exactly. They say that women work individually in local church work or total church but not as WCG.

9. In your opinion, how effectively does “Women of the Church of God” support the ministry of the Church of God movement? Please share comments or examples to support your opinion.

Almost half of the respondents, 45.5%, said that they felt that the Women of the Church of God were somewhat effective in supporting the ministry of the Church of God movement. It seems most of their support is through the missions projects. I don't hear much about the women and what they are doing that impacts the national church. They raise thousands of dollars to support our missionaries at home and abroad. Fantastic ministry, but that's not really just a "women's ministry" is it? That's everyone's responsibility.

10. What are your suggestions for what “Women of the Church of God” can and should do to better support your congregation’s ministry?

There are 320 comments to this question and all 320 are good and relevant. The respondents are passionate in their answers. First and foremost, there needs to be a better understanding of the intent and purpose of the WCG. Better leadership development, more relevant small group bible studies. More emphasis is needed on spiritual growth and mutual support within the local church. Listen to the suggestions of the younger women. Focus on the younger women of the church by being a mentor and helper. It must be relevant to the 21st century woman. Turn over the reigns of leadership to the ones that will need to lead the church for the next 20 years or more. Become a more outreach focused ministry on the local level. Continue the Christ Birthday and some of the other projects historically and develop some new ones. Compile a booklet of ideas gleaned from churches around the world about how women's ministry is taking place (sort of show and tell) Due to the many

cultural and social changes in recent history, somehow we need to re-define the purpose of Women of the Church of God from the original "Home Missions" idea to women serving the church through community, home and foreign mission concepts and leadership development.

11. How encouraged are you that the “Women of the Church of God” will serve a vital role in the future of the Church of God movement? Please share your reasoning why or why not.

38.2% replied that they were uncertain followed closely at 24.7% very encouraged and 23% somewhat encouraged. The fact that the WCG is doing an evaluation is an encouraging step because you are sensing a need to change direction and are seeking input from others. This is creating much optimism with the people responding. Many feel that without a change, the WCG will be extinct within a short period of time. There is a concern that we have a committed group of ladies who are older but are not drawing younger generation women into the ministry. Pastors believe to reach younger women they must address the way things have always been done and pay attention to the spiritual and emotional needs of younger women. Respondents replied that they would be excited if they knew the WCG is going to serve a vital role in the future of the COG. They feel it's more than just missionary stuff - it is being a viable ministry within itself - supporting women and encouraging them. Some feel that we cannot keep trying to improve what no longer works. We need to start over with a passion for servant-leaders answering a call, pursuing a quest, and fulfilling a mission.

12. In what state (or province if Canada) is your congregation located?

Of 413 people who responded, the heaviest concentration of people responding came from the Midwest states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Illinois in that order. Florida, California, Pennsylvania, Oregon and Washington were next high on the list. Thirty nine states, 5 Canadian provinces and two locations overseas were represented in the tally.

Open-end Summaries Membership Survey

2. What do you observe is missing in the lives of many women in your church?

Relationships with Other Women (*Most prominent*)

- Develop meaningful relationships with other women
- Connections to each other to support and encourage each other in the faith and in just living in this day and age.
- Friendships beyond acquaintance.

Lack of Time & Commitment

- With the busy lives we lead, women are too busy raising families and working outside the home to be able to develop their spiritual lives and interact with other Christian women
- No time for "quiet time" with the Lord.

Relevant Discussions

- Place where women can go to get help for a variety of needs. ie., parenting issues, marital issues, job related issues: career management, time management and balancing church in the midst of it all.
- Studying issues important to women in a biblical manner.

For the Younger Women

- Programs/activities appealing to younger women (20-45).
- Bringing the younger women and older women together with the older reaching out in many different ways to let the younger know the sincerity and love of the older for the younger.

Strong Relationship with God

- Strong prayer life
- Spiritual growth & commitment to serve the Lord
- Spiritual Maturity
- Too busy for time spent with God and in the Scriptures
- The desire for Bible Study
- An intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and wanting the call on their lives for ministry

Service-Oriented

- Many younger women lack commitment to the cause of missions, to service to others, to nurturing anyone other than the few that are closest to them or to working for a cause or a purpose.
- The compassion to move beyond the church walls.
- Commitment and the willingness to serve.

- Not taking the time to serve God and taking part in WCG activities.
- A heart for missions

Training

- Leadership training
- Training of how to be future Mothers and Leaders in the Church

Others

- A supportive, Christian spouse
- Commitment

4. When you hear of the ministry, "Women of the Church of God," what phrase or words come to your mind?

(In rank order)

- Missions
- Women helping others
- Fellowship
- Sisterhood
- Mentoring
- God's Women
- Old Women
- Unity
- Women's leadership

9. What are the three things that you appreciate, or like, about the "Women of the Church of God?"

(In rank order)

- Fellowship and close friendships with other women
- Supporting missions; opportunity to raise funds to help missions
- Opportunity to serve and lead
- Commitment, love, and devotion for the ministry by the national leaders; joining with women at national and state meetings
- The studies; studying about women of other countries and their needs; learning about work and conditions in various countries
- History and heritage; what WCG stands for
- Diversity; Being with women of all colors, ages, experience at NAC, state meetings, and national meetings

10. What don't you like about the "Women of the Church of God?"

(In rank order)

- No younger women; does not seem to relate to younger women; perceived as an "old ladies" organization
- Always wanting money; primary goal is raising funds, not the spiritual needs of women

- Declining membership
- Lack of support from local pastors
- Politics of the organization get in the way of serving; business meetings
- The name (needs to be changed to not be so exclusive)
- Disconnect from local, regional, and the national level
- Unwilling to change; no fresh ideas; new ideas are not embraced by older members

Open-End Summaries **“The Razor’s Edge” List Survey**

1. What do you observe is missing in the lives of many women who are active in church?

Women are seeking a place to fellowship with other women to not only study scripture but to share their personal stories—a place for accountability, guidance, and mentoring.

Women today are so busy with family life (taking their kids to school and practice), their career, as well as being leaders in their church and playing the traditional roles at church of supporting and nurturing that they lack time for themselves and alone time with God.

Women often do not have time to commit to other activities in their church because they are so busy with work and family. Some people may even interpret their non-participation as a lack of commitment and passion for their church and for God.

Many women want to take on leadership roles in their church but feel that they do not receive the support of the church for their ministry. They are seeking their call to ministry.

Fellowship, Accountability, Relationships

- Not much fellowship between younger and older
- Authentic Relationships
- Finding time with family/career obligations to center on their own needs and ways to interact with other women
- Personal connections outside of church services with other members
- Mentorships
- Deep friendships where vulnerability is evident and truth can be spoken without judgment
- Cross generational relationships—especially in larger churches where it's easy to segregate
- Guidance in seeking a balance between service and personal & family priorities
- Purpose and training, mentoring, someone who is further ahead of them pointing the way to a vibrant relationship with Christ
- Loneliness and lack of close friendships---too busy serving and don't have time to be friends--call each other, spend some time with each other
- See the need for more interaction on a heart level. We are too busy with taking care of everyone else. We don't take care of ourselves.
- Need true fellowship. Times of laughter and tears and of sharing things in our lives. A group at our church had a study group.
- A chance or way to disconnect from their busy lives and spend quality time with one another. It seems that today to spend time with each other is viewed more as another busy thing to do rather than a chance to grow and learn from each other.

Deep personal relationships with other Women. The WCG in our state is full of old ladies. I dread going, it doesn't minister to me. After giving all week, month, year....I hunger for a place to be filled and feed.

- Opportunity to talk about personal issues

Women in Leadership

- For churches to embrace women as pastors and ministry leaders
- Women are waiting to get permission from our generally male dominated (historically) led churches to be given the okay to be a leader within the church, to have a voice and the freedom to express their opinions and for their contributions to be recognized by the body, as a whole.
- Many pastors are not moving into the change of women in ministry and leadership.
- Within my church, there are no women in key roles of our church council or on our trustee board.
- Full support from the churches. Many people don't wish to see women in leadership/ministry positions still today.
- More training in leadership and evangelism.
- Leadership development in teaching and mentor women to be pastors.
- Leadership training and opportunity within the church structure to grow and develop.

Seeking Their Ministry

- A true feeling of what their role in the church is.
- A sense of ministry.
- Women not using their gifts or being overlooked.
- The motivation to get involved in their opportunities in the church.
- A sense of calling to serve beyond their own household or circle of familiarity
- A sense of themselves.
- Self-confidence
- Sense of value
- Many women don't seem to have the confidence to become active.
- The ability to look beyond themselves and their immediate family/friends.

Need Rest & Time

- Leave little time for just being with God one on one
- People schedule so many outside activities that they seem unwilling to commit to God's work.
- We as a nation have become so involved in our families and our children's activities that we often have no time left to serve Jesus as He calls us to. Our ladies have a priority problem.
- Time & Stress Management
- Many of them overextend themselves.

- They don't have the time to be together as much as they used to, with work and family and everything. Usually don't have as close of relationships as they used to.
- Balancing personal, family and church life and emotional healthiness.
- Many older women are lonely and want relationships with others. Many of the younger women are so busy with church activities and family activities, they do not have time for themselves.
- I think many women think that running many program choices will bring to a closer walk with the Lord and others. I think all the programming distracts the real mission and focus of women in the local church.

Lack of Commitment

- What is needed is greater commitment to follow Godly principles and standards in their every day lives.
- An understanding of the need to and commitment to knowing the Word of God and applying it to their everyday lives.
- A strong commitment to living a godly lifestyle.
- True Commitment to God.
- Commitment/passion
- The passion to grow deeper in their faith.

Relationship with Christ

- A true relationship with Jesus in which they are using their gifts for spiritual growth and service for His Kingdom.
- A close personal relationship with Christ - many are busy, but don't have a deep understanding of who Christ is
- A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST WHICH COMES FROM STUDYING HIS WORD AND APPLYING IT TO THEIR LIVES.
- Radical intimacy with God

Other Responses

- Biblical knowledge
- Active Men by their sides.
- Courage to speak out on contemporary issues.
- The opportunity to reach out to people in the local community.
- Acceptance of individuality and political views.

4. When you hear of the ministry, "Women of the Church of God," what phrase or words come to your mind?

Top Results (In Rank Order)

1. Old women
2. Missions
3. Not knowledgeable about WCG

4. Unity
5. Fund Raisers
6. Old Fashioned
7. Boring
8. Exclusive; separate
9. Women called by God; an honor
10. Irrelevant

8. How likely are you to consider membership in "Women of the Church of God" some time in the near future (next couple of years)?

Member but not Involved

- I'm a lifetime member, but don't attend WCG meetings.
- I am a member, but don't participate.
- I am a pastor's wife, a speaker, and I love working with ladies. I love my church and it's women, therefore I am a part of the WCG by default.

Member

- I am a lifetime member and I rejoin every year anyway just to show support.
- I have been a member for a long time and have enjoyed learning about the missionaries and also the other studies provided.
- I have been active in the WCG for more than 60 years

Not For Younger Women

- It would depend on what their mission is and how many younger women are included.
- I would love to be able to participate but the functions seem to be geared towards the 60 and over group.
- There seems to be little interest in "livening things up" to draw and retain younger women. I was one of the youngest (at age 45) in the group. Studies used are not attractive to our younger women and they do not feel like they fit.
- It would depend on whether or not they can get into the 21st century. I would LOVE to see these women mentor us younger ones, but they push us away.
- Some members are hesitant to think outside the box and are attached to tradition.

No Time

- Time is also an issue.
- WCG meetings in our church in the past were limited to daytimes. Since I worked during the day, it was not possible to be a part

Not Aware of WCG

- If we had a WCG, I would join.
- We do not have the organization in our local congregation.
- I don't believe it's ever been offered in our church. If it has, I have not heard of it.
- Never knew it existed but want to learn more about
- If I had any info on it, what it does, how it began, how much it cost, etc.

9. What are the THREE things that "Women of the Church of God" can do that might increase the potential of you becoming part of the organization?

KEY POINTS:

- Make it easier for women who work outside the home to attend; meetings that are not during the weekday during work hours.
- Make it affordable to attend and at places closer to the members. Provide child care during meetings.
- Support women pastors and their needs; active in encouraging ordination of women; train women to be pastors (leadership and ministry)
- Less business-oriented and political. Be less self-involved, more community-minded in ways that are not only raising money
- Change in leadership
- Redefine or establish mission
- Have a clear vision
- Change the image
- Less formal
- Reinvent the organization
- Get word out about the organization and make information more accessible. In need of advertising and marketing
- Make it about connecting with women. Study issues that are relevant to the issues of today's living.
- Local opportunities to serve. More focus on local community needs, rather than only raising money for missions.
- Make it more relevant to younger women
- Change the name

KEYWORDS: Relevancy (Relevant to the lives of today's women through the materials, the discussions, the projects, the meetings times and accommodations, and the leadership training)

13. In the last decade, the number of women in the Church of God movement who are members in "Women in the Church of God" has declined. What are your theories as to why other women in your congregation do not join "Women of the Church of God?"

- WCG is perceived as a group for older women
- Not relevant to younger women
- Women are too busy with work and family
- Lack of pastoral support
- Lack of promotion and information
- WCG competes with other special groups and committees inside and outside the church

- People view it as an organization, rather than a ministry
- 14. What are your suggestions for what "Women of the Church of God" can and should do to better support women, fulfill its mission and increase membership?**
- Reach out to younger women with relevant programs and material
 - Create programs that support missions on a local level
 - Change the name
 - Distribute information regarding what we are doing and what it takes to get it done
 - Encourage pastors to promote WCG within their congregations.
 - Focus on fellowship and building relationships rather than missions
 - Update and develop media materials that are more relevant to today and will entice more women to get involved
 - Strong leadership from the state and national level

Appendix II

Focus Group Summaries

Focus Group Summary **April 2008** **Columbus, OH**

Profile of Participants:

- Thirteen women
- Representing four congregations
- A wide age distribution with three estimated to be less than 30 and two older than 55 years of age.
- Two women are recent first-time members of the Women of the Church of God
- Three of the women are not currently members of Women of the Church of God
- A couple women are current or past officers in Women in the Church of God
- Observation: Many of these women know each other between congregations, but there were some that were new to this cross-congregational interaction. The conversation was good for everyone to hear. I was impressed with the level of engagement in the topics. It was also clear that there are some strong relationships among the persons present and a willingness to reach out to “newcomers.” If what I saw was the norm, it is very appealing.

Is there a need for congregational women’s ministry?

A unanimous voice was heard. The consensus is that there is a need for an “organized” women’s ministry at the congregational level. This conclusion was drawn from various perspectives. One voice represented the person who is new to the church and needs a place for fellowship, acceptance, mentoring and connection. Another voice is from those who have been active in such ministry for their entire lives and cannot imagine not having it. The perspective of the larger church was shared where there are opportunities for various “organized women’s ministry” that take different forms. It was also shared from the view of the small congregation where the women have the same needs but less opportunity to formally organize. The expression of need did not vary depending on age, stage in life or congregational setting.

The nature of the “need” is both uniform and varied. Fellowship is a common theme. “We need to be together.” There seems to be an appreciation for intergenerational fellowship. The women in this session seemed to want to mentor and be mentored by women in other generations. At the same time, there are stories of experiences in women’s groups (including WGG) where there has been a “closed mind-set” that excludes and isolates. “It can be hard to “get-in the

group.” Being inclusive and open in a way that draws in others and adapts to engage the up-coming generations is important.

Fellowship is needed. There is a need for a support system. Many of the traditional support systems have broken down. Women need them and are looking for them and the women’s group is a way to integrate women “back” to the church. There is a need for accountability and a “safe place.” This best happens, for women, in a women’s group if the group is healthy. If it is not, there can be a lot of negative.

One of the opportunities is for women to “learn from each other.” Sharing of experiences and skills has value. Rigid programs do not. There needs to be fluidity in programs. It is more about relationships than it is about “business.”

Why, in light of the expressed need, are more women not joining groups? The obvious answers are real barriers. Time is a big one. Even bigger is the fear of commitment and the desire to not have “one more thing.” Many women are in charge of too much now. They need a place to go where they are not expected to do much. At the same time, if everyone comes with this attitude, nothing gets done. The women must see that it will be “worth their time.” The value of being active must be clearly greater than the 1) time, 2) risk, 3) work. What is clear is that women need help “taking care of themselves.

Some women do not get engaged with groups like *Women of the Church of God* because they do not perceive they are welcome or that they do not know “how to break in.” Some perceive that “those women are so godly” and “I cannot live up to that standard.” Too often, those who are in the women’s ministry have just “failed to share our story in a way that makes it clear that we are no better than them.”

It is easy for women to go to “events” such as *Women of Faith*. It is exciting. You can see “the stars.” Plus, there is no commitment beyond the event. The fellowship is wonderful. But, there is a need for more. Most women know it, but it is challenging to become engaged.

There needs to be “a gate” to involvement. Too many times there are “locks on the gate.” Some of them are formed by the women who need to come in, due to their perceptions or reality. Other times, those “in the club” are locking the gate, again either in perception or reality. Ways to open the gate and invite women in to sincerely fellowship are required. It must be intentionally. Interestingly, I saw examples of it in the room. There were several women present who are now engaged in women’s ministry (even WCG) due to the on-going encouragement (sometimes over a long period of time) of others who were also present. The influence of patient encouragers was very evident.

There are a couple realities on many, if not most, congregations that needs to be understood. Most of the congregations are very small and it is just not feasible to have an “organized women’s ministry.” There are just not very many women and most are already over worked. If the pastor is male, they are likely to be supportive but not proactive to help women’s ministry. If the pastor happens to be female, there is so much expected from her already that this is just “too much” to expect. But, the bottom line is that women in these congregations need to be connected with women in other congregations. Multi-congregational groups are needed. Interestingly, when ladies from larger churches heard this need, invitations to participate in future activities were shared. A new way of thinking will be needed to reach out to women who attend small congregations.

Views of Women of the Church of God?

In the larger congregation, women are likely to have options of women’s groups to participate in. One reason to select the group affiliated with WCG is to be more connected to the Church of God and the national ministry. This is one way for the congregation to feel connected to something bigger than the congregation.

At the same time, there is confusion about the connection of Women in the Church of God and Church of God Ministries. It is observed that WCG is not very visible at the assembly/camp-meeting. There is a perception that “the church likes the Christ’s Birthday Offering, but does not know what to do with WCG.

The “gate-keeper” at the congregational level is the pastor. Most pastors are supportive but not engaged or promoting. Getting materials passed through the office to the women can be challenging. There are examples of times when the women’s group has not helped to build goodwill and some pastors have felt the need to separate the congregation from a club. One woman said, “we (WCG) have poorly represented ourselves.”

The perception of WCG from the past is 1) missionary, 2) Christ’s Birthday and 3) crafts. If this is what other women in the congregation think, then WCG is not very appealing. Some of the younger women/non-members or newer members present where “learning things” that they found alarming. The conversation earlier, regarding 1) connection, 2) learning and 3) relationships was much more appealing.

“WCG is a program with a life-cycle. There is a need for a dream or a new vision.” But, persons with direct and recent experience with WCG believe that there is a “national vision” but that it is not getting to the congregations. Examples of actions that try to adapt to the emerging needs of women and to be more “relevant” include 1) Have it your way, 2) Mary’s Gift, 3) Potato Fund.” Other materials such as “Sister to Sister” and “Women of Purpose” reflect this new attitude.

Vision is needed. But, if the vision is to be “all things to all women” then it is diluted. What is the “value-added” of WCG? There is a need for “fellowship.” But it must have a purpose. Any congregation can start a women’s ministry and have not affiliation with WCG. There has to be a purpose. WCG needs to communicate 1) vision, 2) value and 3) accountability. Competing on curriculum will be difficult. While the curriculum is valuable it is hard to beat materials by others such as Beth Moore. They just have more pizzazz and we do not have the resources to create that same excitement.

Other women believe that there is a “rebranding need.” In their opinion, the name and identity of WCG makes it difficult to transition into the needed future. Others point out the WCG went through a rebranding process six years ago. What is agreed to is that the emerging vision from WCG, one that is more relevant to the needs of women and more appealing to a large group of women, is not getting through to the people in the congregation. It may be due to a lack of effective communication. Or it may be that the change confronts some of the “old guard” that do not want to change at the local level.

Advice to WCG? (This is a listing of ideas.)

1. Take a prophet role to educate the congregations of the role of women in ministry (lay and pastoral leadership).
2. Communicate in a dynamic way the purpose and vision of WCG.
3. Invite local representative to connect with state leaders.
4. Send the state leaders out to the congregations to engage with the women where they are. Sell! Be aggressive about reaching out!
5. Clarify identity. Who are we? Decide what we are supposed to be and do it with excellence.
6. Equip women to find their 1) identity in Christ 2) identity in the Church of God and 3) Identity as a people in mission
7. Provide intentional support that will allow women in small congregations to join together and be engaged beyond their own congregation.
8. Retain a focus on “missions” but do not be defined by it.
9. Provide more helps to the practical programming of the local. Less focus on “business meeting” and structure.
10. Organize retreats for women in regions
11. Reinvent how to fund the WCG. Are “dues” for “membership” the best way?
12. Call the women to “tell the story.”

WCG Focus Group
April 3, 2008
Portland, OR

12 persons present. The group included four pastors, one area administrator and several women who have been/are officers in WCG. This is a group of individuals who are very supportive of WCG and several have been active for many years. One person in the group is a fairly recent member and one was a member in the past but is not now.

The Church of God in the west is also different. It is more independent and less connected. The general culture is also less religious and there is less denominational loyalty.

The group strongly affirms the role the WCG has played in the past. But, there is general agreement that the needs of many women in the movement are not being met currently by the WCG. There was a time when “the need” was for a group to step up to serve a world-mission role. Then there was a time when WCG expanded beyond “missions” to become pertinent to the needs of women of that day. Now, society and the needs of women have changed again and there is an opportunity for a new vision for WCG to serve both women and the emerging needs of the congregation in the Church of God movement.

The majority of women in the congregations today are not involved in WCG unless 1) there is an active group that reaches out to them (tended to be women older in age) or 2) they grew up in a family that was actively involved in WCG. In contrast to the past, more women are single parents or in a family where both adults are working. Time is a real problem. They tend to have a “group mentality” in contrast to an “individual mentality.” Therefore, you must get in their social networks and bring them along as a group. Because they are busy, the activity must be meaningful and well done. There is not an appreciation for “silliness.” Activities must be relationally fulfilling and fun. “Boring” is not good.

As a result, women are more likely to participate in a few “well-done events” annually as opposed to monthly “so so” meetings. The Women of Faith conferences are an example of something that seems to be appreciated.

At the same time, there is a yearning for real relationships and for a faith that works. Women will come for a meaningful Bible study, especially if it facilitates “friend building.” They will also bring other women in their networks who do not attend church if the gathering is meaningful.

There is a continuing need to 1) support world mission efforts, 2) raise funds for world missions, 3) teach the next generation in a way that helps lighten their load, 4) pass on abilities from generation to generation and 5) mentor the next generation.

But, women are asking “what is the point of the whole thing (WCG)?” When asked “what is the WCG,” many will say “what for?” or “what is it?” The average women in the congregation do not know about it and simply do not care. They are trying to survive. From a congregational perspective, we can invite them to an activity or to church on Sunday. We are unlikely to get them for both.

WCG needs to ask the following questions.

- What are the emerging congregational needs that we can come along side with them to meet?
- How do we help women know that “Jesus can change their life?”
- Are we at a point in our life-cycle when it is time for a rebirth?

But, at a local level, when these topics come up there is often conflict between those who want to change and those who want to protect what WCG has been. There is competition between groups for the attention of women. New groups are emerging. Some congregations have multiple women’s groups. WCG is too often “the older group” and perceived as “not willing to change.” At the same time, it is because there is a strong group of women who are satisfied and loyal to WCG and they value what it has been and do not want to give it up.

Suggestions/Ideas and Recommendations:

1. Recognize that most organizations have to remake themselves (50 year cycle) in order to stay relevant. It may be time for that to happen for the WCG.
2. Vision should drive the future. There is a tendency in a mature organization to be driven by program and structure. These should take a backseat first to vision and secondly to relationships.
3. Become an enabler, facilitator and propagator of “best practices” of ways to meet needs of women and to engage women to serve the needs of the local congregation/CHOG worldwide.
4. Provide “diversity” of services for many segments of women under the banner of WCG.
5. Provide models for meaningful Bible studies and relational groups. Use these to a) listen to local needs, 2) pray for each other, 3) connect to key networks, 4) and bring new women into the church.
6. Recognize that younger women are less likely to appreciate structure over relationship.
7. National office can train regional people to help rethink the vision for women’s ministry at the local level. The role is not to “answer the question” or to impose a program. They need to facilitate a process of self-discovery for local women’s ministry and then provide a resource to help them be successful. Shift focus from “you conform to our program” to “we help you implement your need-based program.”

Focus Group Three
St. Louis, MO
May 3, 2008

Participants: Fourteen persons present. Three pastors, state administrator and ten women were present. Three of the women are not currently members of WCG. The group was diverse in terms of age and race.

Is there a need for an organized women’s ministry in the congregation?

The answer is unanimous “yes.” Reasons are many.

- Service to others
- Need for a group who will focus on needs outside the church
- Mentoring relationships
- To follow the focus of the Bible
- Focused teaching
- “Women are great fund-raisers”
- Prayer group
- “Women get things done”

It is important that the ministry be “organized.” The more organized the group, the more outreach and effective ministry. If not organized, it tends to be “self-focused” and too social. There is also a need for accountability. Any one group in the congregation should not become too important.

Where should the leadership for a women’s group come from?

The pastor should take the responsibility to find a strong leader within the congregation for women’s ministry. It should be a priority. The pastor needs to take the lead in encouraging, communicating, facilitating and providing accountability. But, it takes a “champion” who has a sense of calling and the Spirit of the Lord.

There can be a break-down in pastoral leadership. Many pastors have not been given instruction in administration. Too many pastors think that WCG is “just a bunch of old women.” It needs to be clearly a win-win for the women, congregation and pastor. There can be a perception that WCG “takes away from other ministry.” That must be avoided. Young pastors are not likely to support traditional ministry outlets, such as WCG. There has been a paradigm shift and many view this type of ministry as “old school.” The current managerial style that is accepted by many young people is very business-like and focuses on “church-growth.”

Tell me some stories of how women’s ministry has impacted your life?

1. “Through women’s ministry I have been released to “being real.” I have experienced “real life.” There is a transparency that allows me to move beyond the need to “act like we are perfect.”
2. “I am not the only one “going through it.”
3. “We “do everyday life together.” Getting to know each other and having friends is such a blessing. We move beyond “being churchy.”
4. “I have struggled with things from the past. I was never able to measure up and felt like I did not fit. The women disciplined me.”
5. “I learned that women can go “beyond going to church.” We have fun.”

If women’s ministry is so wonderful, why are so many women not getting involved?

- Many women are not willing to commit to being regular
- Scheduling is very difficult due to the complexity of life
- There is an “older women perception” that is hard to overcome
- There is a gap in the reality of life and the church for people under 30 years of age.
- “Membership” commits them to too much.
- There is a “fear of commitment”
- There is a need to “open-up.” Stop working programs and become more outward oriented and inviting.
- The cultural reality for women today makes it very difficult to become part of a group.
- The systems within the Church of God make it difficult. The view of autonomy within the Church of God is a problem.
- One woman, hearing the views of other women, proclaimed “we are missing out.” “How is it that we did not know about WCG?”

What does WCG need to do?

- Need to shift focus from “self” to “others.”
- Communication is a problem. Too many pastors just throw away anything that comes from Anderson or the state.
- Sending materials to the pastor does not work. You need to find one other person in each congregation who will champion women’s ministry and send materials to them.
- Expand the database. Use networks to identify a person in every congregation.
- Use emails, especially for younger people.
- Don’t wait for women to come to WCG. You need to GO to them. Be proactive.
- Keep a focus on evangelism. Engage the local community for the glory of God.
- Focus on the local outcomes. The way to get people engaged beyond “self” is to start with a specific local need.
- Capture the stories of lives changed. Tell the stories.
- Cast a specific vision. Make the mission clear and memorable.

- Get a representative from Anderson to the state general assemblies.
- Make it clear how to join. There can be a language barrier. Make it simple.
- Invite kids to come to activities.
- Be flexible. Do a “local focus group.” Be evaluating and be adaptive. Listen and act.
- Do not “get into a rut.” Do new things.
- Help several small congregations come together to form a group.
- Start support groups to help young women who need to cope with reality
- Provide support and training for local leaders. Help them be successful.
- Do an analysis of local needs and select a specific project to work with over a longer period of time.
- Provide spiritual formation training (Discipleship).
- Be very intentional about programming: Focus on fellowship and evangelism
- Each woman in WCG should find two others not in WCG and bring them in.

Appendix III

Interview Summary

Question Series One:

From your experience and/or perceptions, how relevant is the Women of the Church of God currently to the needs of women in your congregation? What are your evidences that it is or is not relevant? What are the needs of women in the congregation that are currently being served effectively by WCG? What are needs that are not being fulfilled? What other forms of women's ministry are operating to meet the needs of women beyond WCG? What are they doing that is working?

- “WCG” is bake sales, selling dollies, and old women's ministry not meeting the needs of women in my generation. There is an appreciation of the WCG's focus on missions.
- Generational issues. Local congregations have become more ingrown, and tough to reconnect when skipping generations. In local setting, there is a question about the effectiveness of the WCG. There is more confidence that it has been effective in the engagement of missions outreach.
- Needs that have been fulfilled: creating an environment for women and providing space to meet together, and bringing together women to talk about being women and supporting the mission efforts. But, there are very few younger women involved. Youngest is 40 years old.
- Congregations are not educated on what WCG is. No involvement and active engagement by congregation in WCG...very isolated in congregations. Not seen as effective women's ministry, but is seen as effective outside of U.S.
- Missions organization, raising funds, and not and outreach to real women. WCG is more national level to help global issues. WCG is too far removed from local setting.
- Have not had as much interest lately. I think of opportunities to learn a lot about missions and other countries. Some of the women who are active at the local level hinder membership.
- I do not know about WCG, but we have other programs that effectively meet the needs of women. Small groups that meet together and serve the community.

Let's say you are now in a leadership role in Women of the Church of God. If you are now in charge of making sure that the organization is relevant to the needs of women in the movement and in line with your sense of God's leading, what actions would you take? What ideas do you have? What programs/initiatives should be taken? What programs should be deleted? What actions need to be taken in the next year?

- Social justice is what speaks to my generation and love it when they do that. I could definitely get behind something like that. WCG has to be focused outward. Focus more on how we called as God's change agents on earth. There has to be a way to bridge the generational gap. What happens when the older ladies die? How CHOG has been operating in the past is no longer relevant today with all the organizations.
- I like to connect with other women, be involved in mentoring program, bible study, retreats, service projects, and mission trips.
- Problem is not in preparation or strategy, but execution. Still needs to be a redefinition of passions and thoughts on the national level. Needs to be more focused at the local level. Must be for women whatever the needs are, wherever, and whoever. Expansion of program...health, spiritual, etc. for women.
- Expand breadth. Not simply surveying the current membership but finding ways to connect with feelings and thoughts of every major age group whether they are members or not. The actual timing of events is very critical because there are so many working women that cannot make it or do not want to give up their weekend. Very important to emphasize certain segments, culture continues to shift and change and we must maintain connectiveness with each new group.
- Connect women with service projects within their own community along with missions in other countries.
- Need to address why younger women are not involved, what is the congregational perception of WCG, and ways to help sustain WCG. Partnerships with colleges, as well as leadership development. A voice that "we are not the old ladies mission club anymore." Create educational piece to educate congregation and bridge that gap. Look for ways that international partnerships can be tweaked and applied to more US contexts. How can we help women all over the world? Don't be afraid to let something go if it is not working. Less deleting and more focusing on the purpose. Provide a place for

women to talk and get together. Do not know if programs are always the answer. Sometimes we jump to new programs too quickly. Need to think well and think theologically about why we do what we are doing. Less skipping around programs, but more of why...why do we have what we have.

- Provide Bible study materials to get women more acquainted with WCG. I have seen desire from younger ladies to get involved at national level, but it comes down to leadership and how involved they want to get at the local level. Give each state a goal and something to focus on. More organized fundraising in order to accomplish more specific goals. Find new ways to update approach and materials to be more relevant to younger people.
- Provide women leadership training, as well as more support from the pastor and congregation. Women also need more information about the WCG and their mission.
- Must make WCG more relevant to younger women. Update programs and materials. Do not be as rigid and as formal, but change with times and be flexible.

Based on the phone interviews, we have found the following results:

- The lack of younger women within the Women of the Church of God is a huge weakness and an issue that should be addressed.
- Most women associate the WCG with missions, older women, and fund raising. They acknowledge that this perception and image must change, in order for the WCG to continue to be relevant in the future.
- The logistics of WCG must also be adapted, such as hosting meetings at times when working women can attend and providing child care.
- Women are looking for a place to connect and share with other women in a less formal environment. They are seeking support, mentoring, and accountability from other women in regards to their personal, work, and church life.
- At the same time, they are also seeking a group that is outward focused beyond self. They want a group to be more involved in serving their own local community.
- There seems to be an overall lack of knowledge about WCG within the congregation, and many women are unaware of what WCG actually does.