

A WOMEN'S MINISTRY RESOURCE *from*

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Living as a World-
Changing Woman.



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How to Use this Kyria Women's Ministry Resource

Whether you lead a large women's group, a medium-sized Bible study, or a small weekly prayer group, this resource is designed for *you*. First, give every woman in your group a copy of the "For Participants" section that follows. (The price you paid for this download includes permission to make up to 1000 copies of this material for your local church's use.) Encourage everyone to read the articles and journal their thoughts in the "Prepare" spaces provided before your group meets.





Service

How to Use this Kyria Women's Ministry Resource

Following the articles, you'll find an "Explore" section that's meant for you to use as a discussion guide during your meeting time. These questions will help you dive deeper into the topic, but feel free to also create your own questions for your group. In addition, you may want to start each meeting by simply asking participants to share their own thoughts and reactions from the reading and journaling they did ahead of time.

At the end of the "For Participants" section is a series of seven "Live It" suggestions. These daily-life application steps take on a variety of forms, but each one is meant to help women grow closer to God and follow his lead in the context of their everyday life. Challenge all the women in your group to put these seven ideas into practice during the week that follows your meeting time.

Next you'll find a "For the Leader" section that's meant just for you. Here you'll get an extra "Interact" idea you can use with your group when you meet as well as a bonus "Connect" suggestion for how you can follow up on this topic in a way that helps deepen the relationships between the women in your group. Last you'll find a "Go Deeper" list of resources to help you—or the women in your group—explore this topic further on your own.

We hope that this KYRIA.COM resource is used by God as a powerful tool in your women's ministry group.



For Participants

Introduction



Jesus-Style Service

By Kelli B. Trujillo

“I am *not* your servant!”

These are the words I half-grunted, half-spoke to one of my kids yesterday as I got on my hands and knees to pick up the crumpled pieces of dry pasta he'd decided to deposit on the floor rather than the garbage can.

Then a thought struck me: *I sure hope Jesus didn't hear me say that!*



Unfortunately, this attitude toward servanthood extends well beyond my feelings about cleaning the floor. Most of the time, serving others just rubs me the wrong way. Sure, if it's some sort of extra meaningful service project (where you can practically *hear* the soundtrack of inspirational feel-good music in your mind as you work and you experience a rush of good feelings about how great you are for doing this), then it's not too hard. But what about real service? The kind Jesus talked about? The kind that involves getting no credit? The kind that may not be accompanied by any feelings other than a waging battle against your own selfish impulses? The kind that may even involve serious germs or really bad smells?

Serving others Jesus-style is just not easy. And even when we feel excited about serving others in our community, it can be difficult to figure out *how*. The problems in our world—like poverty, illiteracy, school violence, racial strife, crisis pregnancy—can loom very large and seem impossible for the average Christian woman to address. And add to that recipe the normal demands of life for a busy woman: work, volunteering, parenting, homemaking, church activities, and don't forget fun with friends ... how will service ever fit in?

The stories in the following pages provide a few snapshots of women who've each found a unique way to serve their world. You'll be inspired by these examples of all types of women, from moms of young kids to elderly widows, who've courageously answered God's call. These articles from TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN and SmallGroups.com will provide a starting point for your women's ministry group





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Jesus-Style Service

as you consider how God may be calling you to serve your community together. So, before your group meets, read through the articles and take some time to journal your thoughts in the "Prepare" space provided. Then be ready to discuss the "Explore" questions with your group, inviting God to grow and challenge you through the process.

As you read these articles and explore God's Word with your group, my prayer is that you'll hear from God about the avenue of service he has in mind for you.

Grace,

Kelli B. Trujillo

Managing Editor, KYRIA downloads



- ▶ *Grab a pen or highlighter as you read the following articles and be sure to underline the parts that really stand out to you. To ready yourself for a discussion with the other women in your group, jot down notes and journal your thoughts in the "Prepare" section that follows each article.*



Serving in the Suburbs

3 ways to practice compassion in the land of comfort and convenience.

By Margot Starbuck

Rushing out of my local grocery store parking lot, I check my watch. I'm running late; I have 5 minutes to drive a distance that requires 15. While calculating whether I can make it through a yellow light, I spot a thin, weathered man standing on the median. Without enough time to accelerate past or enough space to switch lanes, I reluctantly pull up beside him.



Before I even read his cardboard sign, my pulse quickens with trepidation. Should I look at him? Should I roll down the window? Should I offer him food? No matter what response I choose, I'm uncomfortable with the whole situation. Yet I'm beginning to suspect my discomfort may be a sort of holy invitation.

Like many middle-class, suburban women, I'm often insulated from a world in need. When famine strikes in Africa, my supermarket's shelves remain stocked. When chaos erupts in the Middle East, my neighborhood stays secure. When floodwaters rise in New Orleans, my home keeps dry. Without concerted effort, the closest I may ever get to a needy person is the unsettling intrusion of the man on the median.

Still, I hunger to share Christ's care with those he loves. Jesus challenged his disciples, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (**Luke 6:36**). Because Jesus responded to his Father's voice, God more than likely directed Jesus' gaze toward individuals in need of his merciful touch. We imitate Jesus when we, too, notice the needs around us, respond with compassionate action, and foster a genuine connection. Here's how to do these things in your neighborhood.

Pay Attention

A large crowd was gathered in front of the local Catholic Social Services office when my children and I drove by on the way to school one morning. I explained to my kids people were lined up to get help paying their rent. A little five-year-old voice piped up from





the backseat, "Can we pray for dem?" My son's heart, sensitive to the Spirit's nudge, responded to others' needs.

"Most people dismiss these promptings as foolish," explains Bruce Main, author of *Holy Hunches: Responding to the Promptings of God*. Main calls these inner cues "holy impulses" or "divine hunches." Main explains, "What actually moves people into acts of service, acts of justice, acts of compassion, is this intuitive sense" that prompts five-year-old lips to pray for the poor while hurrying off to school. Main underscores, "It is not enough to have our hearts fill with compassion or empathy for others. We really need to convert these feelings into an appropriate response." Our faithful response springs from noticing what moves God's heart.

Scripture boldly articulates God's concern for the weak and his passion for justice. We see these twin concerns embodied in the One who announced his ministry with words of justice: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (**Luke 4:18–19**).

Ideas for Action:

- Pray over local, national, and international needs delivered to your doorstep via the newspaper.
- Drive through a tougher part of town and pray over the needs you notice.





- Learn the names of the curbside servants who process your garbage and recycling.
- Get to know a cashier at your grocery store's checkout line.

Practice Compassion

In the pickup line at her kids' school, my friend Beth looks as if she's a typical soccer mom. But when she's not shuttling kids to playdates or piano lessons, she's caring for the poor and needy. A Peace Corps veteran, Beth now responds to Christ's call by tending to a neighbor with cancer. Beth's desire to serve others began early. "My parents and the church we attended instilled in me a love for acts of mercy," she explains. Today Beth notices the family resemblance in her ten-year-old daughter. "Catie cares for the homeless. When I go downtown to serve a meal, I invite her to go along. She has a real heart for service."

Beth's husband notes, "You can be involved wherever you are. Beth's made serving an integral part of her life. She thinks Christians need to be inconvenienced." Integrating practices of compassion into daily life keeps us responsive to others' needs.

Ideas for Action:

- Cook a simple dinner of beans and rice once a week as a reminder to pray for the hungry.
- Take your family with you when you serve to help develop a heart of compassion in them as well.





- Ask a friend to join you in sponsoring a needy child.
- Celebrate your birthday by requesting donations to a local food pantry instead of gifts.

Build Relationships

My friend Janine participated in her church's annual workday by volunteering at a nearby homeless shelter. She reports, "There my daughter and I met Rose, a single mom with two young daughters. Later I'd bump into them at the library or the mall." Janine smiles as she recounts, "Once my kids and I were driving past the grocery store when we saw them struggling to push a stroller and a huge cart of groceries. Together we loaded my van and squeezed in our four children, Rose and me, a stroller, and about 30 bags of groceries!" When Rose's family found permanent housing, Rose called Janine's family to help with the move. What began as a tenuous step of faith developed into a journey toward friendship—and service.

Ideas for Action:

- Orchestrate a partnership between your church's women's ministry and a nearby congregation's. Meet regularly to fellowship and serve your community.
- Tutor a child at a local after-school program.
- Develop friendships at a local nursing home.
- Volunteer with a local English-as-a-Second-Language program.





The Next Thing

As a friend and I discussed our response to a needy world, she told me, "I've realized I don't have to do *everything*, just the *next* thing." I cling to those wise words. The world isn't ours to save. Instead, Jesus invites us to experience deeper intimacy with him by obediently serving as his hands and feet, ministering to the needy around us.

So that day I slowed my minivan to a stop beside the median man, pawed through my groceries, and pulled out some peanut butter jars. Rolling down the window, I asked the man if he liked chunky or smooth. "Chunky," he said, reaching for the small token of care.

I wish I could say I no longer feel anxious when I encounter strangers in need, but I do. I've come to recognize that feeling, though, as the Holy Spirit's invitation to see and serve God's children even in the comfort of my suburban neighborhood.

Margot Starbuck, a writer and speaker, lives in North Carolina. This article was first published in the May/June 2008 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.





Prepare

• *The author felt uncomfortable when she faced the homeless man and she wrote, "I'm beginning to suspect my discomfort may be a sort of holy invitation." What situations or issues in your community make you uncomfortable or sad? What possible "holy invitations" might God be sending your way? Journal your thoughts.*

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Praying and Purling



How women are using an old-fashioned pastime to spark new ministries.

By Keri Wyatt Kent

In the fall of 2005, Shirley Meisinger of Wilton, Iowa, was diagnosed with breast cancer.

When this 70-something grandmother began chemotherapy, a group of women from Shirley's church gave her a hand-knitted "prayer shawl." The simple rectangular shawl "got her through that time," says her daughter, Laura Rose, 48. "After her treatments, Mom lay on her recliner covered up with it and felt comforted."





The shawl was fashioned by members of a knitting group at the United Methodist Church of Wilton. Unlike traditional Jewish prayer shawls—tassel-edged garments worn during synagogue prayer services—these shawls are prayed over as they're knitted and are meant to wrap the recipient in love.

Inspired by the shawl her mother received, Laura decided to become a member of United Methodist's knitting group. The mom of two grown children, Laura says she and her husband attend the same church her parents do, but hadn't gotten involved. "Since I started crocheting, I feel it's rekindling my spiritual life," she says. "This ministry may bring us back into the church. And my mom and I have gotten emotionally closer."

Patterns With Purpose

Knitting is a popular pastime once again—with groups popping up everywhere, including in churches. While most groups knit, some also crochet, weave, or quilt. They gather to work and pray together, sometimes sharing Scripture verses and songs. Most knit scarves, blankets, and baby clothes to give away. But often the creative act of crafting combined with the power of giving transforms women spiritually. Meetings become places of spiritual connection.

Chris Pokorny says the Crafty Angels knitting group she leads at Edgebrook Evangelical Covenant Church in Chicago focuses on serving the poor. In 2006 alone, the group donated more than 3,000 items, from baby caps and blankets for Chicago's Swedish Covenant Hospital to hats, mittens, and scarves for Cornerstone Community





Outreach in Chicago. They're also involved in Afghans for Afghans, which collects hand-knit blankets for a women's hospital in war-ravaged Afghanistan, and Project Red Scarf for foster children. While their group consists of 10 women at the church, another 50 around the country stay in touch via e-mail and send in things they've knitted.

"The women are thrilled to do something they love to make a difference," Chris notes. "I enjoy telling them, 'You're helping people around the world.' It's exciting to see women empowered and mobilized. They realize they can do God's work through something they like to do. That's energizing."

Sidney Mosely, 80, attends Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas. She decided to start a ministry for widows by inviting them to gather and knit together. They laughingly called themselves "The Knit Wits," but the name stuck. The group grew to include women of all ages, and, like most knitting groups, is focused on outreach.

The group mostly knits caps that the church sends to soldiers serving in Iraq to wear under their helmets. They've also knit sweaters and blankets for the poor. "It's become a close group," Sidney says. "We sit in an open area in the church cafeteria. Everyone knows us. And the soldiers have sent letters thanking us for the caps."

At Country Club Christian Church in Kansas City, Missouri, a group of mostly retired women knits everything from baby blankets to scarves. The knitters in this missions-minded church of 3,300 members have





provided shawls for AIDS patients in a South African hospital, baby blankets and caps for a nearby medical center, and fancy scarves for teenage girls from low-income families.

"The Truman Medical Center near us serves a large low-income population," explains group member Joyce Minor. "Some of these single moms have nothing to take their baby home in—no clothes or blankets. So we provide those for them."

While serving others, the knitters find they also connect to one another. "I started going when I first joined the church," says Joyce. "I enjoy the fellowship. We knit a little—and we talk a lot."

Knitted in Ministry

Lia Douglas, 47, is originally from Italy, where "everyone knits. My grandmother taught me when I was six." She used to knit only for herself, but eventually was looking for something more to do with her skill. "How many sweaters can you make for yourself?" she laughs.

She started making afghans for hospice patients, but each blanket took a long time. One day Lia saw a magazine advertisement for www.shawlministry.com, a website that offers stories, knitting patterns, prayers, and advice on knitting prayer shawls. While the site isn't exclusively Christian, God used it to draw Lia back to her Christian roots.





"I wanted to make knitting a ministry that would be available to a large group of people. It became my mission, something I had to do," Lia says. "But I didn't know how to get it going."

Her spiritual reawakening led her to join St. James Catholic Church in Arlington Heights, Illinois, where she met Maggie Hayes. She and Maggie discovered they shared a passion to start a knitting group there. Eighteen eager knitters showed up for the group's first meeting in October 2005; it now boasts 30 members and has created 220 shawls not only for people going through difficulty or illness, but also for those celebrating milestones like marriage. And when the group receives thank-you notes, it's prompted to pray for those recipients.

"I always wanted to disciple others, but I wondered if I was really getting through to anyone," Lia says. "But this is different. I feel as though I'm a part of something greater than myself, that maybe I am making a difference. It's so rewarding."

Keri Wyatt Kent is a TCW regular contributor, speaker, and author of several books, including Oxygen: Deep Breathing for the Soul (Revell). This article was first published in the September/October issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.





Prepare

◦ *Chris Pokorny said of the women in her knitting group, "They realize they can do God's work through something they like to do. That's energizing." What are your own favorite hobbies, interests, or passions? Use the space here to dream and jot down ideas of how that hobby could be used to minister to others.*



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Pampering with a Purpose

How hairstylists are bringing their talents—
and the Truth—to people in need.

By Keri Wyatt Kent

Once a month, a group of dedicated professionals ventures into their community to serve those less fortunate than themselves. They're not carrying hammers and nails to build a house, or ladles and pots to work in a soup kitchen. Rather, they're armed with blow dryers, scissors, and nail polish. Oh yes, and love.

The volunteers of HIM—Hairdressers in the Marketplace, a ministry at Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago—host monthly "day of beauty" sessions where women in need receive free





pampering, from haircuts to manicures, but also hear about God's love for them. HIM also goes to nursing homes for the poor, homeless shelters, and facilities for the mentally handicapped to provide free haircuts.

Hairstylist Teresa Russo-Cox founded the ministry in 1998 after trying numerous volunteer positions at Willow Creek, where she attended. None felt like the right fit for her skills and passions. For a while, she wrestled with God. "Why did you give me a talent that's so much about vanity?" she prayed. "How can I serve you?"

She says God answered those prayers with a vision for a group that not only communicates God's love and care to women in need but also reaches out to stylists themselves. "That's what sets us apart from other ministries that offer haircuts to the poor," explains Teresa. "We focus on evangelism to the beauty industry, which is filled with so much darkness. Its underlying message is all about external things—glamour and glitz. I want to bring the light of God's Word into our industry."

Day of Beauty events are hosted by various local salons on Sundays when they'd normally be closed. Social service organizations that help women, such as support groups for those struggling with addictions, unwanted pregnancy, or domestic abuse, provide the clients. In addition to the beauty services, HIM also sets up a boutique of used clothing and accessories, donated by volunteers and their friends, family, or neighbors, and provides a "goodie bag" to each participant.





"We start the day with a welcome and prayer, and close with prayer as well," says HIM volunteer Susan Fignar. Teresa or another leader gently shares with participants the reason for this ministry: They want to show God's love. But rather than a formal presentation, the gospel's presented through the informal exchanges between stylists and clients. The session concludes with an opportunity for clients to talk about what the day meant to them.

"I told Teresa I wasn't sure I wanted to do hair on my day off," says Melissa Carroll-Chmura, who joined the ministry five years ago and now coordinates the events with another volunteer, Susan Johnsey. "But it's not just about the haircuts, or helping the poor. It's the total experience of the day, sharing God's unconditional love, bringing them joy. *That's* worth taking a day off for."

At a recent event, the clients were teen girls going through drug and alcohol rehab. Melissa says she was surprised by the girls' reactions: "They told me they hadn't had 'sober fun' before—they'd never experienced that."

The agencies that provide the clients aren't necessarily Christian agencies, and have sometimes balked at having the volunteers talk about God. "I just tell them, I can't not talk about God," Teresa says. "It's why we do this. I tell them, 'you will hear me talk about Jesus, you will hear me pray.' But I don't do it in a pushy way. I simply tell them what Jesus has done in my life, and that he loves them."





"It gives the women more than a haircut, although a haircut means a lot," says Beth Gardham, director of community resources for WINGS (Women in Need Growing Stronger), an agency that helps suburban homeless women and children as well as victims of domestic abuse. "A lot of our women have to cut their own hair or have a friend cut it. A haircut and style allows them to feel like they used to be, or how they would like to be," she says. (Learn more at www.wingsprogram.com.)

"I had no self-esteem," says Doreen, who was invited to a Day of Beauty after she and her two preschool children left her alcoholic, abusive husband. "That day gave me a boost on the outside but it helped me on the inside, too. They made me feel beautiful, special, and deserving."

Beth says her agency uses the event as a perk for "women who are working the program" at WINGS—that means taking steps with the agency's help to become self-supporting.

She says the women are excited about the day, but some have a bit of trepidation. "Some folks don't want to talk about their situation," she explains. "So we get mixed reactions to the sharing part at the end. But often, we'll hear women ask, 'When are they coming back?'"

Everyone benefits, she adds. "It's good for the women in our program. It's also good for the professionals who volunteer. They're giving back to their community, but also, they're reminded that the women in our program





are just like anyone else."

Today, more than 50 stylists (both women and men) in the Chicago area are active in HIM. In addition to Day of Beauty events, HIM volunteers meet for Bible-study small groups and host professional-education seminars. With the emphasis on inviting friends to these seminars, stylists may be Muslim, Jewish, or of no particular religious background. They come to learn the latest hair-color technique or just to volunteer, but come away having heard about Jesus' love. Two such stylists, for instance, started out far from God but because of their involvement with HIM recently became Christians and were baptized.

"I've seen great things happen in our small groups," Teresa says. "I have a little flock of five Christians who've been together quite a while. They came in as scared little sheep, but they've really grown into women of faith."

Some of that growth came when ten stylists took a trip to Costa Rica back in 2003, where the church had sent other short-term mission teams. They put on an event at the Rahab Foundation, a mission in San Jose that helps rescue and provide life-training skills for women caught in prostitution, rampant in Costa Rica.

When the women who came to the mission learned Teresa's story and that they would receive free beauty services that day, "Some started crying, others didn't know how to respond, and there were a few who sat with their arms folded, secluding themselves from what





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was going to take place. But as the day progressed and love filled the room, the women were touched and experienced love in a very unique way," Teresa says.

"We became the eyes, ears, mouth, and hands of Jesus," she adds. "The women from the center kept hugging us; we weren't sure who got served more." (Read more at www.willowcreek.org/hairdressers.asp.)

Teresa, Melissa and other volunteers say that every time they serve, they receive. "The biggest reward is not what the clients leave with, although it's a blessing to bring a light into their day," Melissa says. "It's that the volunteers leave with a feeling of satisfaction that comes from giving."

Keri Wyatt Kent is a speaker, author, and freelance writer from Illinois. Visit her site: www.keriyattkent.com. This article was first published in the November/December 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.





Prepare

• *The "need" for a good haircut is typically not what comes to mind when we think of needy people. But this ministry is touching lives in an important way! Use your imagination to step into the shoes of a needy person in your community—what might be some of that person's less obvious needs? How might the church meet those needs in an out-of-the-box way? Jot down some thoughts here.*





Arloa Sutter's Aha!

One woman's radical choice to make serving others a top priority.

By Keri Wyatt Kent

Arloa Sutter still remembers the homeless man she met 15 years ago, one of thousands she's since helped. He wandered into the church-run storefront center she'd opened a few months earlier to provide hot coffee and a warm lunch for the street people in her Chicago neighborhood.

He complained that his feet hurt. So Arloa helped him remove his broken shoes and grimy, foul-smelling socks, then gently lifted his cracked and bleeding feet into a tub of warm water she'd brought over to him.



"As I knelt on the floor washing his feet, it hit me," she says. "I was in the presence of something beyond me or his stinky feet. I experienced an epiphany: *This is what Jesus called us to do, to wash each other's feet.* People try to sanitize that, but in the process, they miss out."

In the years since that "aha!" moment, Arloa, 52, has continued to meet Jesus in his "distressing disguise," as Mother Teresa once said. What started as her response to the street people who came to the church her husband pastored, asking for money or a warm place to spend a winter afternoon, has grown into Breakthrough Urban Ministries in East Garfield Park, a crime-ridden neighborhood with an unemployment rate of 23 percent. As founder and executive director, Arloa now oversees two shelters, a job placement program, outreach to women in prostitution, and a youth and family program that includes sports programs, tutoring, counseling, and Bible studies.

Growing up on a farm in Iowa, Arloa says she always wanted to minister in the city. After attending Moody Bible Institute, where she "fell in love with Chicago" and first encountered homeless people, Arloa worked with delinquent youth in the Chicago area. Then she, her husband, and their two young daughters moved to Keokuk, Iowa, to pastor a church. Five years later, they returned to Chicago to pastor First Evangelical Free Church, located in a neighborhood that had a large concentration of street people.





That led Arloa to open the storefront drop-in center. Church members sometimes brought a hot lunch for the homeless to eat, but if no one showed up with food, "I'd heat up a couple of cans of soup and serve that," she says.

Often her guests at the center asked for money, so Arloa got creative. "I noticed the street behind our church was a mess—papers blowing around, garbage. I told them if they cleaned up the street, I'd pay them."

Soon the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce noticed homeless people cleaning up the neighborhood. The chamber president told Arloa she'd sponsor her program. "That was the beginning of our CleanStreet program," Arloa says. "Now we have more than a dozen street cleaning contracts around the city, as well as employment training and placement services."

Many who received help now are part of the team that's making a difference in East Garfield Park. Some of the kids who've gone through the program not only are out of the gangs but also are going to college.

Arloa says putting feet to her faith every day allows her to experience God's presence in real ways. For instance, Breakthrough saw a need for a women's shelter. They found an old brick building in East Garfield Park so rundown the sky was visible through the roof. Arloa didn't know how she could afford to renovate, but that week, she got a call from a suburban church saying they wanted to do a large-





scale service project. They donated \$350,000 and thousands of volunteer hours to renovate the building. Breakthrough signed a long-term lease on the building owned by Joshua Missionary Baptist Church. Today the building houses the Joshua Center, home base to Breakthrough's offices, women's shelter, and its youth and family programs.

Breakthrough depends on God's provision to keep its doors open. While sometimes donations are financial, sometimes they're what only God knows is needed. For example, one winter night a homeless man stopped by the men's shelter wearing only jeans and a sweatshirt. Arloa had no coat big enough to fit the man. Just as she was about to turn him away, a man from her church came in. "God told me to bring you this down coat," he said. Arloa looked at the extra-large winter coat, took it from the donor, handed it to the homeless man, and said, "Jesus sure loves you—look what he gave you."

Running a ministry like Breakthrough isn't easy, but Arloa's life hasn't been easy, either. She and her husband went through a painful divorce in 2000, and raising her children in a tough neighborhood was challenging—both her daughters have friends who are now in prison or have been murdered. Drug addicts she worked with for years sometimes relapsed, never to be heard from again.

"So many times it's been tempting to quit. But it's a calling. I know I'm supposed to be here," Arloa says





with a joyful smile. "I've got a family of coworkers. We laugh, we struggle, we work really hard. But it feels so good at the end of the day. And we see miracles every day. Being a part of this has transformed us all!"

Arloa says working with the poor is "loving Jesus. We can't love him with just our personal piety or prayer. That's needed, but it's not enough. We need to follow him to the fringes of society, bring his love to the masses. While we aren't all called to live in East Garfield Park, we're all called to reach out in love to our neighbors. You can't be a Christ follower and not care about people without coats."

Keri Wyatt Kent is a TCW Regular Contributor who lives in Illinois. For more details about Breakthrough Urban Ministries go to www.breakthroughministries.com. This article was first published in the January/February 2007 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.





Prepare

◦ *What's your initial reaction to Arloa Sutter's story? Can you see yourself serving others in this way? Why or why not? Write some of your honest thoughts and feelings.*





Making a Mark

7 ways your women's group can serve your community in Jesus' name.

By Sue Skalicky

Do you feel inspired to serve but aren't sure where to start? Check out these specific ideas for ways you and the others in your group can make a difference.

Create an Encouragement Basket

Each person sitting in your group touches the lives of many people each week. Their sphere of influence may include co-workers, fellow students, teammates, neighbors, or family members. Ask your group if they personally know of an individual or family enduring a particularly difficult situation. After selecting a person or family in need, request that your group bring items such as candy, baked treats, packets of hot chocolate, or small gifts to your next meeting. Take time during that meeting to write personal notes of encouragement, Scripture, and/or written prayers. Surround the gifts with



the notes in a large basket, then pray for the people and their situation. Determine when the basket will be delivered and by whom. If more than one situation was discussed, your group can make two smaller baskets at the same time or commit to blessing one individual or family each month in this manner. Make sure that your group follows this activity up with continued prayer and notes of encouragement to those enduring the difficult situation. When appropriate, offer them an invitation to visit your group.

Community Clean Up

Spend some time as a group picking up trash in an area of town with several businesses and/or restaurants. Preferably, plan this time for a Saturday when the area is busy with weekend customers. Before you start, talk with the managers of the businesses and restaurants. Let them know that you are cleaning up their parking lots as a service project to show the community the love of God.

Begin your clean-up time with a short prayer, then work in groups of two or three. Encourage each group to pray for the employees of the businesses and customers they see as they pick up trash. Enjoy the odd looks you may get from customers and be prepared to give an answer if they question what you are doing. The simple words of Steve Sjogren, "We just want to show you God's love in a practical way," may open up an opportunity to share your faith in Jesus. Conclude your service time with a visit to one of the restaurants for some iced tea or ice cream. Give everyone a chance to share what he or she experienced during this time.





Visit a Nursing Home

Psalm 71:18 says, "*Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God.*" Yet many of the elderly in our culture do feel forsaken—at least by family members. They may spend day after day alone, without close friends, and without hope of a visit from a loved one. Plan a time for your group to visit a nursing home and minister to its residents. Showing nursing home residents the love of God can break through the trappings of their age or illness and release a long-awaited joy. Currently there are about one and a half million men and women in nursing homes throughout the U.S.; 60 percent of them never have a visitor.

Call a local nursing home ahead of time to schedule your group's visit. After determining the place and time, decide what you would like to do during your visit. Many residents love to be read to while others need help writing letters to friends and family. Singing is usually very welcomed and appreciated, as is a simple game of cards. Probably the best expression of God's love to these men and women however, is a listening ear and a warm touch.

Don't worry about what to say. Simply talk about your everyday activities or ask the resident questions about his or her family history, childhood memories, work experiences or hobbies. Even those that are not mentally alert can respond to the warmth of a smile or a reassuring pat on the hand.





Before you leave, ask for the names of some residents to whom your women's group members can write. Encourage your group members to continue building a relationship with a resident through letters and follow-up visits.

Afterwards, meet together at someone's home for a time of refreshments. Invite those in your group to share their experiences, and then end with prayer for the men and women you met.

Throw a Baby Shower

Have you ever thought about what a young teenage girl today endures from the moment the pregnancy test comes back positive until she gives birth? The looks she gets from total strangers can kill her confidence and stone-cold words spoken carelessly can severely damage her ability to hope, trust, and love herself and others.

As a group, throw a baby shower for an unwed teenage mother. If your group members don't personally know a pregnant teenage girl, call your community's crisis pregnancy care center or social services agency. Explain your group's intention to bless the young mother and obtain their permission.

Before planning the shower, spend one of your meetings discussing Jesus' interaction with the woman at Jacob's well in John 4:4–30, 39–42. Discuss what impact Jesus' words and actions had on this woman who was shunned by others for her





poor choices. Then pray together for God to lavish His love on the teen mom through your words and acts of kindness.

Collect clothes, diapers, pacifiers, toys, etc., for the baby and bubble bath, movie tickets, restaurant gift certificates, a Bible, etc., for the mom. After the items have been collected, place them in a large basket lined with a receiving blanket along with your personal notes of encouragement and prayers. Decide as a group whether you will deliver the basket to the mom or invite her to your meeting for some cake and fellowship.

Invite the young mom to come to your women's group. Continue to offer her love and support as she and her new baby adapt to their new life together.

Offer Some Elbow Grease

This month, challenge your group to put on their old clothes, break out the cleaning supplies, and meet the nitty-gritty needs of a person(s) unable to deep clean their home. Together, select a working single mom, an elderly widow, an injured or sick friend or family member, or a low-income family whose home you can tackle with Pine-Sol and prayer. Once you've selected someone, follow these steps to successful spring-cleaning:

Begin with prayer—This is a very humbling act for those receiving the help. Pray ahead of time for them to be receptive to the idea before you ask.





Set a day and time—Be on time and leave at a set time. Respecting their time and property shows you value them.

Bring all your own cleaning supplies—Bring a basic kitchen and bathroom cleaner, toilet cleaner, furniture polish and dust rags, vacuum cleaner, large garbage bags, glass cleaner, lots of paper towels, broom, and mop. Don't expect to use their supplies.

Offer a prayer—Before you leave, ask if you can pray with them. Pray for their specific needs and praise God for his spring-cleaning transformation in your own life.

Invite them to your women's group—Extend the invitation to your group and an offer to be available if they need further help.

Continue the relationship—Pray for this person(s) each week in your group. If they don't come to your group right away, keep in contact by taking turns writing notes or calling.

Touching someone's home with purpose and prayer will also touch a soul in need of God's loving care.

Adopt a Mom

Encourage your small group to begin a relationship with a single mom. If no one in your group knows a single mom, ask the secretary at your church or a local organization for teen moms or abused women. Prepare your group for this long-term outreach by emphasizing the practical needs of a single parent: babysitting,





money, food, car repair, yard maintenance, household products, clothes, diapers, and especially time and a listening ear. Evaluate the resources of your women's group then match the individuals with the single mom's needs. Initially, you will need to build trust with the mom. Help meet her needs with no strings attached. When asked why you are doing what you are doing, simply respond that you are sharing the practical love of God. Over time, the mom may desire to know more about the God you serve, but be patient.

Serve a Hot Meal

Call your local rescue mission or homeless shelter and ask if your women's group could come prepare and serve a meal for the residents. Because many rescue missions and shelters are staffed by volunteers, your offer should be welcomed. Consider serving at the mission or shelter three to four times a year. Meet briefly at one of your homes afterwards to share your experiences. Pray for the people you served that night. Pray for an opportunity to invite a resident to join your women's group. If it is possible for a resident to attend your regular meetings, you will need to obtain permission from the mission director and you will need to provide transportation. For everyone's protection make sure that at least two of your members go together when transporting the resident.

*These ideas were first published online at **SmallGroups.com** in January, February, August, and October 2002; February and April 2003; and May 2004.*





Explore

Use these discussion questions to explore evangelism further with the women in your group:

- *Think of a time you were able to participate in an act of service, whether it was a planned church-related event or something you did on your own. What was the experience like? What was challenging about it? What was rewarding?*



○ *Participating in intentional acts of service can give us really good feelings—it just feels nice to do a good deed! But sometimes people are too motivated by these feelings, seeming to serve others purely for the purpose of feeling good about themselves afterward. What role do you think feelings, good or bad, should play in service? What's the right balance?*

○ *When has someone else served you in a meaningful way or met a specific need in your life? What was it like to be ministered to in that way?*





◦ *Read **Luke 4:16–21** together. In this passage, Jesus speaks from the Book of Isaiah as a way of announcing his mission as the promised Messiah. What stands out to you most from this passage? How central is this mission of Jesus to your own sense of what it means to live as a Jesus-follower?*

◦ *In her article, Margot Starbuck writes that "Our faithful response [of service] springs from noticing what moves God's heart." Based on **Luke 4:16–21** or other passages of Scripture that are meaningful to you, what do you think moves God's heart? Name some specific situations, people, or needs you've noticed in your community that you think God is concerned about.*





◉ *Read John 13:1–15 together. In this passage, Jesus performed a lowly and unpleasant act as an example of servanthood. What aspects of service can be unpleasant, distasteful, or emotionally difficult? If you can, think specifically of service that might meet some of the needs you've just discussed.*

◉ *Sometimes serving others involves doing things we don't really like. But as the articles about the knitters and the hairstylists demonstrated, service can also involve using your own specific talents, vocational skills, and personal interests to meet others' needs. As you read and thought about those articles, what ideas came to mind of your own skills, hobbies, or interests that God may want you to use to serve others?*





◉ *In the article about her ministry, Arloa Sutter said, "We can't love [Jesus] with just our personal piety or prayer. That's needed, but it's not enough. We need to follow him to the fringes of society ... You can't be a Christ follower and not care about people without coats." What do you think of Arloa's words? Why?*

◉ *Service is meant to be a distinguishing mark of a disciple; read Jesus' words in **Matthew 20:26–28**. How does your own life measure up to Jesus' standard here? How do you feel inspired to change as a result of what you've read in these articles and in Scripture?*



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Live It

How can you live more intentionally with a Jesus-style service mind-set?

Take some time over the next seven days to explore the topic of service on your own and apply biblical principles to your everyday life.

Day 1

You're likely serving others many times throughout a given day without even realizing it! Today, mentally transform a regular task into a purposeful act of service. For example, household cleaning or meal preparation are practical ways of serving and blessing your family. Or an act of kindness at work—such as a coffee refill for a coworker or cleaning off a table in the cafeteria—can significantly touch others' lives. Invite God to give you a servant's heart as you perform that daily task.





Day 2

Read and meditate on Jesus' words in **Matthew 25:31–46**. As you read, invite God to stir your heart. Ask God to point you toward a person in need whom you can bless in Jesus' name.

Day 3

Spend time today praying about a specific ministry in your church or community that's seeking to address the needs of the poor. For example, you could pray for your church's food pantry, for a homeless shelter, or a local Habitat for Humanity chapter. Ask God to strengthen the people who lead that ministry and to provide for that ministry's financial and practical needs.

Day 4

Grab a piece of paper and then take some time to read through your local newspaper today or go to a local news website. As you do, be on the lookout for needs in your community. (For example, families affected by crime or gangs, poverty-related issues, and so on.) Take notes about any issues that you think God might want you or your women's ministry to get involved in.

Day 5

Read **Mark 9:35**, then write the entire verse out on an index card. Try to memorize the verse by repeating it to yourself several times throughout the day. As you store the verse in your mind, ask God to imprint its meaning onto your heart.





Day 6

Sometimes we don't serve others because we're too selfish and protective about our time and space—we don't want to be inconvenienced. At the other extreme, it can be very tempting to stretch yourself way too thin in an effort to serve others and address problems in your community. Take some time to think and pray about God-honoring, healthy limits. Ask God to reveal attitudes in your life that might be too selfish and confess them to him. Also, ask God to guide you and strengthen you in your understanding of the healthy "limits" to set for your involvement in ministry work.

Day 7

Use your imagination to step inside the story of **John 13:1–15**. As you read the story, imagine you are one of the disciples present with Jesus that night. Imagine what the setting might have been like: the sounds, the smells, the sights, the conversation. What would it have felt like to literally have your feet washed by Jesus? What thoughts and feelings would come to mind for you? Prayerfully invite Jesus to speak to you in a special way as you contemplate this story and its meaning in your life.



For the Leader



Interact

Use this bonus idea during your group's meeting time.

At the end of your "Explore" discussion, have the women in your group form smaller groups of five to six. Give each person an "Our Service Strategy" worksheet (p. 51) and a pen, then have small groups follow the instructions on the worksheet to help them creatively zero in on a specific service project they can do together during the next month.

Allow about 20 minutes for small groups to finish the worksheets, then invite each group to share what they decided to do and why.

(Be sure to follow up with the women, encouraging them in their project. Later, invite each small group to share what they did and how the service experience affected them.)



Our Service Strategy

1. On your own, brainstorm up to 10 areas of need in your community and list them in the space below. When you're all done, share your ideas with your small group and add some of their ideas to your list.

NEEDS:

2. Next, on your own circle up to five of the areas of need that you personally resonate with—issues that tug at your own heart strings or weigh heavily on your mind.

3. As a small group, compare what you each circled and together select one area of need that you all (or most of you) circled. This is the need you'll target together.

4. Now, pair up with someone in your small group and, in the box below, jot down as many practical and specific ways as you can think of that the selected need could be addressed. (For example, if the need is "teen pregnancy," you could write things like: supply diapers, help with babysitting, donate maternity clothes, support with prayer, and so on.) Take just five minutes (or less) to create your list together.

AVENUES OF ACTION:

5. Gather back together with your other small group members and talk about the avenues of action you came up with. Select just one (or a few that fit together) that your group will try to do in some way during this next month.

OUR ACTION: _____

6. Now, get down to the specifics. What needs to be done to plan this act of service and pull it off? List some of the important details below (like selecting a date, contacting a ministry center, etc.) and assign tasks to the various members of your group.

TASK:

NAME:

7. Most importantly, spend time praying as you prepare to serve others in this way! Take a few minutes now to pray together—and be sure to pray regularly on your own as the date of your act of service approaches.



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Connect

Use email or a phone call during the week after your group meets to check in with the women in your group, encouraging them to do the “Live It” life application steps!

Combine fellowship, exercise, and breakfast in a service-oriented prayer walk. Invite the women in your group to meet at the church on an upcoming Saturday morning. (Arrange for a few women to bring light breakfast food and drinks to share.) Start your time together with a short prayer, expressing your group's desire to serve the needs of the community that surrounds your church.





Then walk together around the community; for exercise, keep a nice pace and encourage women to talk and have fun. Just encourage them to be attentive to what they see and observe as they walk; when they feel led, women can silently address God in prayer about the community needs that come to mind.

End your time together back at the church for a light breakfast and time of corporate prayer. Encourage the women to pray about what they saw or which particular needs God brought to mind for them as they walked.



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Go Deeper

Want to explore this topic further? Or are you looking for resources to recommend to the women in your group? Check out the following books and web resources:

Books:

Conspiracy of Kindness: A Unique Approach to Sharing the Love of Jesus (Gospel Light, 2008; 256 pages). Servant evangelism enables every follower of Christ, from brand-new to mature believer, to become an effective evangelist through unassuming acts of kindness. In this book, Steve Sjogren offers a proven vision, simple strategy and real-life stories that show the amazing impact servant evangelism has had throughout the world.





Field Guide to Neighborhood Outreach (Group Publishing, 2007; 144 pages). This guide contains 90 specific ideas for ways Christians can connect with their neighborhood and community.

The Hole in Our Gospel: What Does God Expect of Us? by Richard Stearns (Thomas Nelson, 2009; 272 pages). *The Hole in Our Gospel* is the compelling true story of a corporate CEO who set aside worldly success for something far more significant, and discovered the full power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to change his own life. He uses his journey to demonstrate how the gospel was always meant to be a world-changing social revolution, a revolution that begins with you.

Holy Hunches: Responding to the Promptings of God by Bruce Main (Baker, 2007; 160 pages). No matter what their walk of life, everyone wants a sense of purpose and of being part of God's plan. God often gives ordinary people "holy hunches" that, when acted upon, accomplish the miraculous. We've all felt a nudge, a feeling, and wondered if it was God trying to tell us to do something or say something. Full of amazing real life examples to inspire and practical advice to guide readers, *Holy Hunches* shows us how to see the miraculous possibilities in the everyday and uncover the divine in the mundane.





Bible Studies:

“From Personal Faith to Social Action”—a study from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**. This one-session study guide explores some of the Bible's most compelling passages on service.

“How Salvation Leads to Service”—a study from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**. This single-session Bible study looks closely at the natural link between salvation and service to others and explores servanthood as a necessary aspect of discipleship.

“Missional Evangelism”—a six-session Bible study course from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**. In these six studies, you'll explore the relationship between evangelism and service to the community.



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