MINISTERING TO WOMEN IN 2022



FIND STRENGTH IN THE LORD FOR YOUR JOURNEY



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WELCOME TO Ministering to Women in 2022

Dear Women's Leader,

The times in which we live are extraordinary and historic, but also filled with uncertainty and loss. However, the Bible offers truth and encouragement for all we face.

Our 2022 theme is: **Rejoice! Find strength in the Lord for your journey.** Our theme verse is from Nehemiah 8:10 (NLT), **"The joy of the LORD is your strength!"** This theme reminds us we don't have to navigate these times in our own strength.

Although we are leading in unpredictable and culture-shifting times, remember: God has placed you right where you are for this very moment! We can draw courage today from Nehemiah's example. God called him to rebuild the walls surrounding Jerusalem. He faced assault from the enemy, discord from within the ranks, weakened foundations, and damaged walls. God enabled Nehemiah to fulfill his call despite all he faced.

Perhaps you are working hard to repair "broken walls," longing for God's restoration. The Book of Nehemiah reminds us of God's promises in challenging times. The joy we find in Him provides all the strength we need.

Leaders, it's time to follow God's call to rally, strengthen the weak, and restore what the enemy has damaged or stolen! Let's grab hold of God's supernatural joy and find His strength. Just as His peace surpasses all human understanding, so His joy can offer hurting people strength to rejoice and journey well in difficult times.

We pray the message of this theme will encourage you in your ministry and deepen your walk with Jesus. May the articles and ideas included in this resource magazine inspire you in fresh ways.

May we work shoulder-to-shoulder, reminding each other, "The joy of the Lord is our strength!"

Prayerfully alongside you in this journey,

KAY BURNETT NATIONAL WOMEN'S MINISTRIES DIRECTOR

God has placed you right where you are for this very moment!

WOMEN.AG.ORG PAG women @@AGwomens #Rejoice

esh podcast



Empowering Women to See Their Value in the Eyes of God ere is an inspirational, and somewhat humorous interview with Amy Flattery, the host of *Refresh* and the director of Center for Holy Lands Studies, a ministry of the Assemblies of God.

Amy, why did the Assemblies of God want to create a podcast for women?

Women are awesome, and it is fitting to encourage one another. We need each other, and we all want to be inspired and challenged in real and tangible ways. So, the Assemblies of God saw a need for a Pentecostal podcast for women, knowing it is just one of many ways to reach women. It may not be for everyone, but there are those who want to and need to take time to rest and listen or drive and listen to lessons from the Bible that apply to their life.

Why did the Assemblies of God ask you to host this podcast for AG Women?

Good question! Scary, isn't it! I warned them. I said, "Are you sure? You know me." I gave them a day to think about it, but no objections came, and now it is too late for them to back out. Perhaps it is due to some of my life experiences. I spent years living in Israel, where I studied the Bible in its context. The learned knowledge and education, and frankly, life in a foreign country, allowed for a unique insight into Scripture

INTERVIEW WITH AMY FLATTERY

"My approach is honesty mixed with the mercy and love of God"

and life. I am also a wife, mom, minister, AGWM missionary, and teacher so hopefully, I am relatable in one of those facets! Most of all, I am God's kid and am familiar with life's many challenges—and I do not mind talking about them— even if it makes me exposed to the listener.

What approach do you take when considering topics?

We are women trying to make it through real life, so let's just lay it all out there and be vulnerable with one another. More can be accomplished when we move out from behind the curtains and allow people to see each other's strengths and weaknesses. Like most people, experiences that we go through create a depth of character and bring reality amid difficult and joyful situations. So,

my approach is honesty mixed with the mercy and love of God.

Also, over the last several years, I have had many women confide that they were suffering devotionally. We are so busy! There were children home from school due to COVID-19. Jobs became challenging and everchanging. Kids came home; kids left home. Other women confided that they were lonely, weary, overworked, and stressed. Sometimes we just need to hide under the bed. in the bathroom in the car. or in our favorite chair and take twenty minutes to listen to an encouraging, challenging, and relatable word that will help steer us through our week. In that way, *Refresh* is a weekly podcast designed for all women thirsty for God's Word.

Okay. The podcast. How does it work?

Each fifteen- to twentyminute *Refresh* podcast is introduced by Kay Burnett's amazing voice. Kay is our AG National Women's Ministries

director. Honestly, it just sucks me right in. Following Kay's intro, I explore topics in life and Scripture for the weekly podcast. Each podcast is Scripture-focused and authentic, and applicable for today's women. I hope that the podcast will inspire and refresh the listeners and lead them to further study in God's Word throughout the week. This podcast is not meant to interrupt or take the place of personal Bible study and prayer. Ladies, keep that up! It is intended to be an addition for those who want to have coffee with me and the Bible over a podcast. To be honest, I actually feel like I am sitting across from whoever is listening, and we are the best of friends.

Where do we find this new *Refresh* podcast for AG Women?

You can find it at the following locations: Spotify, Apple, and refresh.ag.org. A new segment posts every Monday.

Do you have anything else you would like to say?

Always! I am looking forward to sharing God's Word and connecting with and ministering to women through *Refresh*. Several women have already ministered to me by their responses to particular podcasts. For me, a podcast is a two-way street. I want to interact with people. What's funny is that several women have asked me to read them bedtime stories. They said something about a "soothing" voice. My husband, children, dogs, fish, parents, sister, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, and classmates may disagree. However, something must happen in translation between my voice and that microphone!

Last, last, word?

Yes, one. Life takes on such new and wonderful meanings—despite our challenges and imperfections—the more we see ourself through God's perfecting eyes. •



Amy Flattery Director, Center for Holy Lands Studies



Lisa Potter

Creates New Resource to Help Women Find Identity, Mentorship, and Community

BY KRISTIN WILEMAN SHELDON





isa Potter began her ministry journey without a mentor. With two young children, life as a pastor's wife felt isolating. Older women with good intentions chided her about the dangers of making friends within the church: "You need to keep your distance." Others tried to cure her struggle with mental health with advice: "You just need to take a nap."

After several years in ministry, Potter's isolation led to depression, and she found herself in a Christian counselor's office. One of her initial assignments was to make friends; her counselor said God did not create us to be alone.

"I was in a dark place, and my counselor—guided by the Holy Spirit—helped me understand that being an effective leader required health from the inside out," Potter says. "I am so grateful she nudged me into community. It changed my life and my ministry."

This experience, along with more than thirty years of vocational ministry, a master's degree from Assemblies of God Theological Seminary (AGTS), and years of focused research. led Potter to create The Collective Journey. a cutting-edge resource that leads individuals and groups toward deeper community, mentorship, identity discovery, life-giving disciplines, and intergenerational leadership. Potter currently serves as the director for the Potomac Ministry Network Women Who Lead (Women's Ministry). She ministers with her husband. Frank. who is the district superintendent.

"My lack of a mentor in the early years of my leadership journey compels me to mentor the next generation of female leaders," she says. "Women grow stronger by being together, and this proves especially true when they connect intergenerationally and learn from one another.

"My lack of a mentor in the early years of my leadership journey compels me to mentor the next generation of female leaders." *The Collective Journey* is designed to help women flourish in life and leadership."

The Collective Journey, published in 2021, is structured as a sixteen-week course that women can do individually or as a group. Potter recommends a beginning and end retreat as a time to intentionally foster community and relationships for groups working through the book. Leader guides outline best practices for hosting a retreat and conducting a mentoring session.

Angelina Olsen is a missionary in Italy and participated in one of Potter's early cohorts for *The Collective Journey* while living in Maryland during itineration. Olsen said she'd had mentors throughout different seasons of her life, but was looking for something new after completing their first term as missionaries in Europe.

"In the church, you hear a lot about finding your Paul and your Timothy; you hear about the importance of mentorship. It's hard to find someone, though, who has experience and is willing to take the time to intentionally invest," she says. "Mentorship



takes a lot of work on both sides, and *The Collective Journey* creates the structure to make that happen. It was exactly what I was seeking and praying for."

Olsen said the friendships and spiritual connections established during the retreat community time were invaluable and refreshing.

"It's hard to get away from the noise unless you're delib"The friendships and spiritual connections established during the retreat community time were invaluable and refreshing." "Throughout the course, women create story maps to see overarching themes and are encouraged to lean into the painful and difficult aspects of their journey."

> erate, but it's often in those times that God speaks to you most clearly," she says. "It's so rewarding to take that journey with other people who are seeking after the same things."

Other course participants echo Olsen's experience. One woman said, "*The Collective Journey* changed me by giving me very practical ways to first look inward and ask myself the hard questions so I could move forward with what God was calling me to do." Others have sent Potter messages saying they "couldn't believe" they went through so much of life without a mission and value statement.

Potter says this is exactly the intention of her book. After spending decades studying women's leadership and the unique patterns of women's faith journeys, she structured *The Collective Journey* into four "power" categories: The power of inward reflection, the power of your story, the power of God's design for you, and the power of your network. Throughout the course, women create story maps to see overarching themes and are encouraged to lean into the painful and difficult aspects of their journey.

"In Scripture, Jesus asked us to celebrate His death—the most painful part of His story. I think He calls us to do the same," she says. "Throughout my journey with depression, pain birthed passion. In all of it. I've found a gratitude for the nearness of God in the vallevs as well as in the beautiful moments. Where we come from is very important to how God uses us. We need to be equipped to share that story and use it as a launching point for what He has called us to do."

Potter has plans to continue developing materials for women seeking community and mentorship. In the coming months, she intends to launch a podcast where women can share their stories in digestible, fifteenminute increments. She is also writing a second book, *The Continuing Journey*.

"This isn't something I'm doing to make a name for myself," she laughs. "This is something I believe fills a profound need for all women— for those who are in vocation ministry, for those who simply haven't discovered their purpose, and for those who simply crave community and need a network of people lifting them up." @



Lisa Potter Executive Director of Women Who Lead, Potomac Ministry Network

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To learn more about The Collective Journey, visit thecollective-journey. com. Books and leader guides can be purchased on the website, through Four Rivers Media Publishing, or on Amazon. Join The Collective Journey community and stay up-to-date on new resources on Instagram and Twitter @the.collectivejourney. FIND STRENGTH IN THE LORD FOR YOUR JOURNEY

"The joy of the Lord is your strength." from Nehemiah 8:10

We all lose things—sometimes frivolous things, like a piece of jewelry, and sometimes more serious things, like loved ones.

When you're dealing with the everyday losses of life, fighting the hard battle of deeper loss, or even just adjusting to the new normal during our unpredictable and uncertain times, rebuilding and reclaiming the things God has promised is hard work.

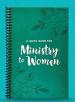
The times we're living through are especially difficult. Circumstances beyond our control that push directly against the lives we feel like we'd envisioned for ourselves can easily put us into a painful headspace. Things like anxiety and depression are more prevalent than ever, and it's hard not to face what we as women are up against and wonder to yourself: *How do I find a sense of joy, or even just peace?*

Just like Nehemiah, we are blessed to have a God bigger than anything we struggle with to turn to. He is where our joy lies. Because God is with us as our defender and caregiver, we have the opportunity to refocus our heart and remember that we can rejoice no matter what. We don't need to seek answers from the world or look for peace in our circumstances. Instead, through pressing closer to Jesus, we can remember that the joy of the Lord is our strength, in everything we face.

Find out more about the 2022 theme, the companion resources, and the book *Reclaim His Promises* through the pages of this magazine, or visit Women.ag.org. You can also join our online community when you follow AG Women on Facebook and @agwomen on Instagram.

sunday, february 27, 2022 National AG Women's Day

Assemblies of God churches across the United States and worldwide will celebrate the women of their congregations.



How Effective Is Your Ministry to Women?

Start building an even more effective ministry, right now! With this *Quick Guide*, you'll get the need-to-know info on:

\$12.99

- » Women's unique ministry needs and abilities
- » How to empower women through your ministry
- » Ministry tips, ideas, and more!

Spiral, 5¹/₂ x 8¹/₂", 112 pages. Spanish 120 pages.

English.

. 02MV4214

Visit MyHealthyChurch.com to find out more and download free leader resources.



FREE DOWNLOADABLES

We have created these **theme down-loadables**, complete with the theme graphics, free for you to download on our website, **women.ag.org.**

- » Bottle wrap
- » Name badge
- » Event invitations
- » Notecards
- » Place cards
- » Posters
- » Suggested sermon
- » And more!

REPORT

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\rightarrow Reclaim His Promises

Reclaim His Promises will help you unpack and apply the life-impacting truths found in the story of Nehemiah. In this six-week individual or group study, which includes engaging Scripture readings and guided journaling, you'll gain the confidence to hear God's voice through His Word.

7 x 91/2", 200 pages

English	02MV4250	\$14.99
Spanish	02MV4251	\$14.99

B \rightarrow Joy for the Journey Hat

Featuring the Joy for the Journey logo embroidered in white, this teal hat will keep the sun out of your eyes and remind you of the joy in your heart.

English	08MV0149	\$19.99
Spanish	08MV0150	\$19.99

C → Rejoice Water Bottle

The teal blue color plus the white imprint of the word "Rejoice" serve both as a reminder to stay joyful and create a sleek look for this metal tumbler. Features stainless steel double walls, and a wooden, spill-resistant lid. Non-slip bottom. BPA free. Hand wash recommended.

English	17MV0148	\$17.99
Spanish	17MV0149	\$17.99

$D \rightarrow Pen Pack$

Including three pens in gold, royal blue, and bright blue, these pens feature "Rejoice!", "Joy for the Journey", and "Nehemiah 8:10" respectively.

Gold Pen Ink: Black Royal Blue Pen Ink: Blue Bright Blue Pen Ink: Light blue

English	16MV7050	\$5.99
Spanish	16MV7051	\$5.99

E → Bookmark

Perfect for a Bible or to keep a place in the theme book, this bookmark includes the theme verse, Nehemiah 8:10, and a gold tassel.

English	13MV6650	\$1.99
Spanish	13MV6651	\$1.99

$F \rightarrow$ Rejoice T-Shirt

Featuring "Rejoice! The joy of the Lord is my strength" imprinted in teal on a heather mustard Tee. Crewneck cut, tearaway label.

English

Lingiisii		
08MV0125	Adult S	\$13.99
08MV0126	Adult M	\$13.99
08MV0127	Adult L	\$13.99
08MV0128	Adult XL	\$13.99
08MV0129	Adult 2XL	\$13.99
08MV0130	Adult 3XL	\$13.99
Spanish		
08MV0131	Adult S	\$13.99
08MV0132	Adult M	\$13.99

2022 THEME PRODUCTS

08MV0133	Adult L	\$13.99
08MV0134	Adult XL	\$13.99
08MV0135	Adult 2XL	\$13.99
08MV0136	Adult 3XL	\$13.99

$G \rightarrow$ Joy for the Journey Sweatshirt

Thanks to its long sleeves and air-jet (soft feel) fabric, this sweatshirt is sure to keep you warm and comfy. Featuring the Joy for the Journey imprint in the dark blue color of our theme colors, double-needle stitching at shoulders, armholes, neck, waistband, and cuffs. 1x1 rib with spandex for enhanced stretch and recovery. Crewneck.

English

=		
08MV0137	Adult S	\$29.99
08MV0138	Adult M	\$29.99
08MV0139	Adult L	\$29.99
08MV0140	Adult XL	\$29.99
08MV0141	Adult 2XL	\$29.99
08MV0142	Adult 3XL	\$29.99
Spanish		
08MV0143	Adult S	\$29.99
08MV0144	Adult M	\$29.99
08MV0145	Adult L	\$29.99
08MV0146	Adult XL	\$29.99
08MV0147	Adult 2XL	\$29.99
08MV0148	Adult 3XL	\$29.99

H → Gift Kit

With this gift kit, you'll get everything you need to bless one woman or even your entire ministry with the bookmark, pen pack, and water bottle for the Rejoice theme, plus a beautiful bag to package them in.

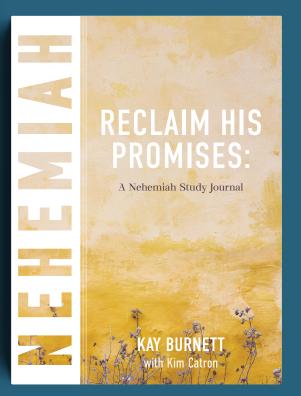
English 08MV0152 \$19.99 **Spanish** 08MV0153 \$19.99

Gift Bag Only

English 17MV0150 \$2.99 Spanish 17MV0151 \$2.99

Returns must be made within 30 days of invoice date. Please contact our Customer Service team at 855.642.2011 for your Returns Merchandise Authorization number.

RECLAIM HIS PROMISES A Nehemiah Study Journal





KAY BURNETT

Church-planter, credentialed minister, and the national director of AG Women since 2016, Kay is passionate about the Word, spending time with Jesus, and influencing others to know and love Him more. Her greatest joy is spending time with her family.



KIM CATRON

Kim Catron, M.Ed., is a teacher, credentialed minister, mentor, writer, and adult curriculum team leader for Bible Engagement Project.



Interview with the Authors

Q: What is the basic principle/heart of *Reclaim His Promises*?

KAY BURNETT: This guided journal is a tool to help women read the Bible in a way that goes beyond the surface. We focus on the Book of Nehemiah, which is included in its entirety in the journal. Nehemiah's story of rebuilding the damaged wall around Jerusalem holds incredible principles for all Christians.

KIM CATRON: *Reclaim His Promises* is about God's people renewing their devotion to worship and God's Word. It's also about the life change that happens when we authentically engage in worship and engage with God's Word.

Q: How would you suggest readers prepare their heart before reading this book?

KB: Be ready to engage with Scripture. This book is designed as a guided journal with prompts to help the reader hear from God relevant truths through the study of Nehemiah. It would be helpful to gather a few supplies to help maximize study time: highlighters, a good pen, and planning space to pray and study.

KC: I would suggest that participants in this study pray for God to help them to grow in the depth of how they study God's

Word as well as their overall knowledge of God's Word and how it relates to us today.

Q: What suggestions do you have for readers as they read the book and process its message?

KB: If you haven't read through a book of the Bible inductively, this may feel awkward at first. Just jump in, and be consistent and engaged. This might be a new way of reading the Bible for some, but it's a valuable approach to hearing from God through the Bible.

KC: Look for ways that Nehemiah's society is similar to our own. Additionally, readers will want to examine their own heart for how they are similar to or different from Nehemiah.

Q: How did you grow during the writing of this book?

KB: Nehemiah's story has been lodged in my heart for the past two years! I have read and reread it so many times and God never fails to speak to me through it. One clear message I gleaned is the fact that while Nehemiah and the families rebuilding the wall worked, they were continually threatened by their enemies. This is relevant for us today! We work, always ready to fight the spiritual battles necessary to keep God's work moving forward.

2022 THEME STUDY

KC: There are portions of the Book of Nehemiah where the application can require more work than others. Writing this book really challenged me to reflect on those portions more deeply, pull out things that seemed "out of place," or recognize patterns that appeared across a larger portion of Scripture. Then I asked God, "Why did you include this information? What do you want me to see here?" Every time, God was faithful to reveal a nugget of truth to me!

Q: What's one thing about you as an author you'd like readers to know?

KB: The more I read the Bible, the more I love it and the more I learn. I read the entire Bible every year. My husband and I committed to that twenty-five years ago. Since I believe all sixty-six books are inspired by God and have authority in my life, I need to be a student of every single book, not just my favorites. It only takes about twenty minutes a day to read through the Bible every year.

KC: I would like for readers to know that my passion for God's Word began with a study much like this one. It was a study that required me to set aside time for God's Word each day and then it culminated with a time to meet with a group of women to discuss what I had learned. That experience is the reason that I chose to be a part of this project.

Q: What is your prayer and hope for women who read this book?

KB: I hope every woman who uses this guided journal grows in her ability to hear God's voice for her own life through His Word.

KC: My hope for women that participate in this study is that they would learn to love God's Word more than ever before through hearing His voice in it.

LOOKING INSIDE

Reclaim His Promises: A Nehemiah Study Journal

This guided journal will help readers unpack and apply the life-impacting

truths found in the story of Nehemiah. Through engaging readings and guided journaling, you'll learn thoughtful, accurate methods of studying the Bible you can take with you and apply to any Scripture.

Features:

-Six weeks of study -Journaling prompts -Five readings per week -Reflection/discussion questions

4 BASIC STEPS TO INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

» Pray. Make it your habit to ask God to speak to you every time you open your Bible. Some passages provide volumes of insight and truths. Other passages may provide less for that day's reading. That's okay! Keep reading and asking the Holy Spirit for insight.

» Look (Observation)—Read. Look closely at the passage. Who is mentioned in the passage? What is happening or being discussed? What is the author of the book saying? Are any words repeated? What can you observe about this passage? Journal your answers to these questions or any other observations Learn (Interpretation)—Without inserting your preferences or deas, seek to understand what the passage means. What might God be saying? What is your clearest and simplest understanding of what this passage means?

» Live (Application)—How can you apply the truths of this passage? Listen for anything God may be saying to you. The reason we study Scripture is to understand who God is and to understand how to live our life according to His truth and instructions.



House of Refuge



BY KRISTEL RINGER ZELAYA

eil and Kathy Vanaria are no strangers to hard places and great challenges. For twenty-five years, they served in remote villages spread through the mountains and jungles of Papua New Guinea, an island nation north of Australia. That work culminated in 2013 with the completion of a New Testament translated into the Mesem language.

In 2016, just after the refugee crisis had gained momentum, the Vanarias transitioned to service in Sicily. They quickly took to heart the plight of those arriving in Sicily following the horrors of war in their homelands and the trauma of open-ocean voyages.

"Relief often gives way to despair," Kathy explains, "when they realize that the promises made to them by human smugglers including guaranteed income and free housing—do not exist. They find themselves trapped."

"Southern Italy is a main landing point," says Neil. "Whether

they are refugees fleeing violence or migrants looking for better economic opportunities, there is no difference in how we minister to them."

Since arriving in Sicily, the Vanarias have opened two ministry locations under the name *Casa Di Rifugio* (House of Refuge). The first opened in February 2017 close to the Mineo refugee camp, which was Europe's largest at that time.

Neil says, "At the Mineo, we served mostly Africans. We were able to minister the gospel openly. It was there that we learned about the horrors refugees face when crossing Libya. One man told us, 'Libya is a ring of fire. We get there and realize that we can't turn around, or we'll die in the desert. Or we can press on and die in the sea.'"

For women, the journey is especially brutal. Of the numerous women they have met and served, Neil and Kathy know of only two who were not stripped, raped, and robbed.

"Men and women alike are kidnapped and locked in shipping containers in the desert," Kathy says. "They are held for ransom. If their families at home do not pay, the refugee and the family are all shot."

The Vanarias worked tirelessly among the Mineo camp's arrivals until the camp was closed in 2019.

BREAKING THROUGH ISOLATION

The second *Casa Di Rifugio* opened in April 2018 in Caltanissetta, home to one of the largest populations of immigrants from the Middle East and southern Asia. The center offers laundry services, hot showers, food, clothing assistance, Bible studies, and English classes for children.

Many attendees at Caltanissetta's Casa are more strongly connected to Islam than those at Mineo, the Vanarias say. Because Islam prohibits men and women from interacting in most public settings, the Vanarias and their team have developed gender-specific outreaches.

"Many of the women who come to us have spent their whole life in Middle Eastern countries where they cannot leave their home independently," Kathy says. "In Italy, they are expected to sit in Italian language classes alongside men. They cannot do that."

To that end, Kathy has worked with Caltanissetta's language coordinator to develop Italian classes for women. Employing the remarkably effective Growing Participator Approach, classes are moving forward.

Kathy shares the story of one woman who, after living in Italy for seven years, was still unable to perform even simple tasks in Italian, such as ordering coffee.

"The results of that kind of thing are incredibly isolating," Kathy says. "Many women, particularly from Pakistan and Morocco, have never learned to read or write. They need training, help, and relationship."

Neil and Kathy believe the most effective means of sharing the gospel must be deeply relational. They cultivate strong friendships by inviting people over for meals, opening their homes to those who need rest, visiting others' homes, and helping to meet whatever personal needs they can.

This is especially effective for ministering to women, who can be extremely isolated in their

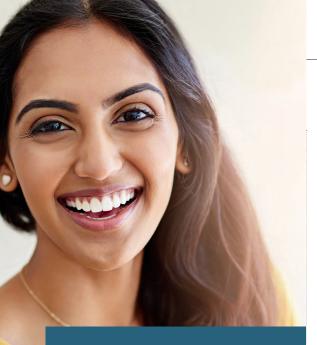


new country. Unable to speak the language, they are often home alone during the days, desperate for fellowship.

As Neil and Kathy have become known in the community, trust and a sense of familiarity have developed to the extent that Islamic women who formerly covered their heads in the Vanarias' presence no longer do so, indicating comfort, trust, and love. Building such friendships is vital to breaking through barriers created by trauma, culture, and fear, so the good news of God's love can be shared in the security of personal friendships.

SCRIPTURE FOR ALL

Additionally, the Vanarias have



"God uses Scripture to reveal himself and the keys to all aspects of human well-being."

distributed eleven thousand New Testaments in forty-two languages among Sicily's refugees and other immigrant groups. They know that God uses Scripture to reveal himself and the keys to all aspects of human well-being, and they continue to distribute Bible portions as widely as possible.

The Bibles (whether as audio files or PDF written format), a copy of the *Jesus* film, and other study resources are loaded on to SD (Secure Digital) memory cards for use on cell phones and other electronic devices.

Neil explains, "The great thing

with Scripture on SD cards is you can personalize the card to include what matters to that person. It's like a 'portable witness' because people can bring it with them wherever they go, and refugees are a very transient group."

For those who will not accept Bibles, and even for those who do, the Vanarias include other literature to support and help make Scripture more familiar.

"Many of the people we meet have heartbreaking stories," Kathy says, "and we pray they will be looked on with favor and granted asylum. While they wait, though, we do all we can to make their lives better, and to listen, encourage, train, and prepare them for the future. Above all, we share the truth that God can use even the worst circumstances for good. The Word of God does not return void."

THE DEEPEST NEED

While striving to earn the trust of hurting refugees and migrants, the Vanarias have faced deep personal loss—since coming to Sicily they have lost both of Kathy's parents. They've also moved their household multiple times to keep up with their ministry. But they are resolute.

"We are very concerned with getting the work established and in the hands of the next generation," they say. "We want to see provision made and the team mentality developed. Even if believers aren't missionaries on the field, we want to see them living like missionaries—sacrificially and prayerfully. We have one friend who will not retire until he is sure he can continue to support missionaries in retirement at the same rate he has throughout his career."

Neil and Kathy rejoice in the team members who have served with them. They urgently pray for more to come and find their place of ministry among the continually arriving displaced multitudes, particularly as *Casa di Rifugio* reopens with a women's breakfast on October 21, 2021, for the first time since having to close in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kathy says, "Being a stranger in a strange land is always an isolating experience, but women worldwide especially long to connect with others. Please pray for the women of Caltanissetta, that as they learn Italian and find friendship and trust with Jesus followers, they might also find the One of whom it is written, 'There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12, NIV)."

Kristel Ringer Zelaya

contentment for every situation



xperiencing St. Mark's Square in Venice, Italy, with my husband as we celebrated our thirtieth wedding anniversary was pure bliss. We dined at a little *ristorante* and enjoyed the quintessential Italian meal—delicious pasta (*perfectly* seasoned and *perfectly* al dente) followed by almond biscotti dipped into a

velvety cappuccino. The ambiance was heavenly as music filled the air, the weather was gorgeous, and the beauty of Venice surrounded us. It was a multisensory, glorious picture of contentment. While it is wonderful to reminisce about these once-in-a-lifetime moments, we should be careful about defining them as the picture of contentment.

During this extended pandemic season, most of us have felt anything but content. Everyday life has been disrupted on every level, and we are yearning (or more like screaming) to go back to normal life. Contentment is easy when the sun is shining and life is good, but is it realistic to think we can be content even when life is hard?

The experiences of the apostle Paul led him to address this question as he wrote,

I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength. —Philippians 4:11-13, NLT

If I'm going to learn the "secret of living in every situation" from anyone, I surely can receive this instruction from someone like Paul who knew both sides to the extreme—shipwrecked, beaten, imprisoned, bitten by a snake, and persecuted by his peers. The man understood bad days! However, he also knew

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the other side of having means and status as a highly esteemed Pharisee in the Jewish community and a religious leader. This is what he was teaching the Philippians and us:

Contentment is learned. Paul initiated his teaching by reassuring his audience that contentment did not just pop up overnight. It was learned. Rather than something to attain and check off the list, it is an contentment is essential for both. On tough days, let gratitude for God's faithfulness and provision patiently steer us to contentment. The alternative is a dangerous track that veers into discontent, manifesting in self-pity, jealousy, and envy. "Never enough" robs us of so much, and the Bible Book of Proverbs warns that it is insatiable.

Ironically, it is easy to

Christ's strength. One of the most quoted verses in the Bible is in answer to how we find contentment. This supernatural infusion of holy strength is given to us not just to get through life's challenges and victories, but to actually experience His peace and presence in the midst of them. For Paul, it did not matter if life was good or bad, if he had provision or was experiencing lack, if Here is the key: Paul was not self-reliant, but he was fully dependent on the Christ who dwelt within him. Paul's heart and mind were at peace, knowing that by God's strength at work in him, he could endure all things.

For believers, contentment is our superpower! In the world's eyes, it is a contrary state, yet a quality that is so attractive. To some, it may sound

"Rather than something to attain and check off the list, it is an attitude that must be cultivated and practiced over and over again. "

attitude that must be cultivated and practiced over and over again. Athletes and musicians spend hours practicing, not because they do not know their discipline, but because without daily practice, they will lose their edge. Missteps are inevitable, but repetition will help us sharpen our skills.

Contentment is for every situation. Good days and challenging days, we all have them. It is important to realize that miss contentment when life is rosy. This can happen by forgetting to live in the moment or continually striving for more, more, more. With a thankful heart, recognize the blessings of God. And yes, name them one by one! By enjoying the fruit of your labor and the work of His hands on ordinary days, it shows the Lord that we notice His favor, blessing, and goodness in our life. *Finally, we have the* ability to be content in

he was in good health or healing from a beating, or free to travel or locked in prison. Contentment was his default setting, relying on the strength of God to see him through whatever the day would bring.

The original Greek definition of *content* brings further clarification as to how Paul lived his life and endured in his calling. Surprisingly, it describes one who is self-sufficient and independent of external circumstances. passive, but it is far from that. It may even feel compromising to those who are constantly straining and striving for more. Contentment is a surrendered heart that sees the little things, experiences peace in the hard things, and can thank God for it all.



Nonda Houston Director, SoCal Women Southern California Ministry Network





Inspire Groups

BY AMY SMITH

FINDING GOD'S PURPOSE



erry Clarensau, North Texas Assemblies of God Women's Ministries director, has developed Inspire Groups for women in ministry because, in her words, "Large events are great, but it's hard to make solid connections in a large group." Kerry says the North Texas district hosts an Inspire Conference each year for women in ministry, and the small groups are a launching place from that.

A heart's desire for quite some time, Kerry was prompted to move forward with the creation of Inspire Groups after a conversation with a fellow female minister. "A young woman in ministry came up to me after a meeting and shared that her husband had his tribe, a group of men who encourage him and meet together on a regular basis," says Kerry. "But she didn't know how to con-

nect with other women in ministry to establish her own tribe."

Kerry began with nine women and facilitated the first group herself. Those nine women, in turn, became facilitators and conducted the next session of classes with six women in each group. It's mandatory to participate in a group before a woman can become a facilitator.

To join an Inspire Group is a six-month commitment to read, study, and discuss an assigned book; it also involves a forty-minute monthly group meeting as well as a one-on-one meeting with a fellow participant. So, there are two different connection points each month.

The first meeting is always inperson, but after that most groups hold their monthly meetings online. The meetings start with each woman sharing for five minutes what she gleaned from the month's reading assignment. "It's amazing what you can learn about someone in just five minutes," says Kerry. Kerry prayerfully chooses books "Large events are great, but it's hard to make solid connections in a large group." "The one-on-one meetings give each woman the opportunity to meet and share whatever she wants to with another woman."

that she feels will both encourage and challenge women ministers. "I look for books about connecting with the Lord, and things that sustain us in ministry," she says. The book assigned to the first class was *Soul Keeping* by John Ortberg. The book currently being studied is *The Settled Soul* by Jodi Detrick. The cost of the class is \$45 which includes the book. Facilitators are provided with the resources as well as some helpful guides.

Inspire Groups has a twofold purpose: to encourage and inspire women in their personal walk and areas of ministry, and to foster relationships that provide support and accountability.

The one-on-one meetings give each woman the opportunity to meet and share whatever she wants to with another woman. Kerry says that while some women meet online, most meet in person if possible. Some just meet for coffee, and some spend hours getting to know one another over lunch. Kerry is praying that lifelong friendships will be formed by those participating in the groups.

The group she is currently facilitating has one member who is a fulltime missionary presently at home itinerating and raising financial support. She related to Kerry that it is often very difficult to connect in meaningful relationships since she is only home for such short periods of time. The group also has two Christian counselors, one of whom is CEO of a nonprofit. Kerry is adamant that the groups do not focus on the skills or leadership abilities of the individuals, but rather be open to all women in ministry, whatever their area of focus.

Another woman testifies that the first Inspire Group she attended was, "God-sent during this difficult time." She goes on to say, "The friendships established have been very precious to me." Although she hesitated at first because of where she is in life right now, she decided to commit to leading a group this year and shares that, "God has truly looked down on me and placed just the right people in my life."

Another ministry leader wanted to help connect women who live in close proximity with one another, so she invited only those who live in her section. Because of the location closeness, two of the women have become fast friends, as did their husbands. Now, they enjoy fellowship as couples.

In addition to meeting as a group and one-on-one, Kerry encourages all who participate to spend a day with God. She has developed guides to inspire women to spend some extended time with Him and says, "The testimonies from the women who have done so have been very precious. It has been a really good thing."



Kerry Clarensau Speaker, mentor, inspiring leader for women, and published author

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Those who sign up to facilitate an Inspire Group can recruit women to be in their group, or those wanting to participate can reach out to the district for help in connecting to a group. Although the ministry is currently only being utilized in the North Texas district, Kerry will consider opening the groups to any women in ministry who are interested. For more information, email Kerry at kclarensau@gmail.com.

Caring for the

BY EMILY THARP

idowhood can be an extremely difficult and lonely road to travel.

That's why Marlene Craft created Widows Link ministry: to connect widows with others who are traveling the same road and to empower widows to continue their lives with purpose and meaning.

According to Marlene, this mission didn't come from her, it came from God's Word in James:

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress." — James 1:27, NIV

This ministry's main goal is to partner with churches and organizations to help connect widows together and walk with them as they pick up pieces of their lives and put together a new life that God has laid down before them. From cruises to annual retreats, Widows Link works to give widows opportunities to break away, take a deep breath, and meet others who are walking the same road.

Marlene Craft knows all too well that road of widowhood. In January 2011, she lost her husband of thirty-two years. Suddenly, she was left alone, searching for her purpose after being a pastor's wife for almost her entire marriage. She couldn't help but think, *What now*?

Shortly after the funeral, God began laying a ministry to widows on her heart. It began with a small group at a local church and now Widows Link's footprint spans across the country. Because of this ministry, Marlene became the first fully appointed missionary to widows for the Assemblies of God.

Now Marlene travels around the country speaking, teaching churches and organizations how to effectively help the widows of their communities, leading the Widows Link team as they continue to expand the ministry across the country.

Emily Tharp Marketing strategist and freelance writer

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discipling women









Women of Valor retired high school teacher, Assemblies of God Kansas Ministries Network Women's Director Jane Heeke had been writing church Sunday

School curriculum for years, but eight years ago the Lord impressed on her to create a study that is changing lives not only across generational lines, but ethnic cultures as well.

"Six-week studies are good, but they are like an appetizer. Women are hungry to go deeper," says Jane. After several attempts to find a women's Bible study that could meet the needs of her home church, Encounter Church in Great Bend, she set out to develop one herself.

Women of Valor is a nine-month Bible study centered around four core values and nine tools that aid in spiritual growth. It is taught in a small group setting and focuses on Bible reading, journaling, and developing a life-changing, intimate relationship with God as well as close bonds with other women.

The core values that are presented include: meditation and application of God's Word, developing a prayer life, being a faithful steward, and developing a heart to serve.

The nine tools utilized are: reading the Word of God, Scripture application through journaling, developing an effective personal prayer life, memorizing Scripture, curriculum to aid in applying godly principles, accountability to others, praying corporately with other believers, meeting in small groups and worship services, and serving others in the church and outside the church.

Since its creation, *Women of Valor* has been developed into *Teen Women of Valor*, and four years ago, Jane and her husband launched *Men of Valor* as well. The curriculum has also been translated into Spanish and Romanian. Currently being taught in six states, it crosses demoninational lines and ethnic barriers.

The impact on the lives of women who dedicate themselves to the study are so remarkable that friends and colleagues who see the difference in their daily walk literally ask to know more.

Jane relates that an eighty-sixvear-old woman witnessed such a transformation in a friend who had participated in a *Women of Valor* study that she inquired as to what had impacted her life to such a great extent. When the friend told her. she made an appointment to meet with Jane, and in her golden years came to understand the difference between religion and relationship with God for the very first time. She truly came to know Jesus as her personal Savior and followed up by joining a *Women of Valor* study group.

Teen Women of Valor is impacting younger women as well. While facilitating a teen group, Jane says that an eighth-grader came to the group confessing that while she was journaling and soaking in the Word, the Lord impressed on her that she was prideful. She acknowledged that at times she even thought she was smarter than God, wanting to do things her way instead of following Him in obedience. In addition, she confessed that she often badgered her siblings with how dumb they were. Her testimony impacted the entire group.

Jane goes on to say that after teens go away to college, they often return testifying as to how the Scriptures they had memorized and habits they had learned through the program helped them navigate campus life successfully and even helped them to disciple other students.

Jane says that those who have been mentored often immediately sign up to mentor others. "It's fulfilling the call to make disciples," she says.

"When you sit before the Lord, and He lays something on your heart to do, you need to run with it," declares Jane. "It's been said that our mission as Christians is to find out what God is doing and then get involved doing it."



Jane Heeke Creator of Women of Valor and Director of Women's Ministries, Kansas Network

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Women of Valor curriculum is self-published. The curriculum can be accessed at https://www.valordiscipleship. info/. YouTube videos are also available at Jane Heeke Valor.

connect with your district

Leading AG

Women's Ministries directors have led the way in thought-provoking times to bring ministry to women to the forefront across the nation. They have found creative ways to connect with the women of their districts and networks through webinars, Facebook live events, in-person events, and more. Visit **women.ag.org** to find your district director soon!





FALAVIA AVA Samoan District

Falavia (Via) Ava is the Samoan District Women's Ministries director. A fairly new district in the Assemblies of God, the Samoan District stretches from Alaska to the Hawaiian Islands and encompasses the State of Alaska, the Northwest District including Washington State, as well as the Northern California-Nevada, Southern California, and Hawaii districts.

Directing women in congregations that cover such a vast amount of distance, as well as coping with several different time zones, imposes challenges making it nearly impossible to hold in-person meetings. However, these obstacles have been compounded by the restrictions imposed from COVID-19 mandates. "We make it work," says Ava. Through email, texts, and occasional Zoom meetings, she stays in contact with her team and visits the sections in person when invited.

Her leadership team is comprised of the sectional presbyters' wives. "They connect with the women in each section," explains Ava, "I delegate and let them run with whatever the Lord puts in their hearts for the women in their section."

The presbyters meet annually in September, and Ava makes the most of the time she has with faceto-face interaction with the other women. "I check in with everyone and see how they're doing," relates Ava. "This is also the time we tighten down anything needed for District Council in April, the time when we would normally all gather together in person."

However, Ava says that because of the COVID-19 restrictions, some churches are still hesitant to hold in-person gatherings. "I see football stadiums full of people in the other states, but that is not how it is here. We need proof of receiving the COVID vaccine to eat in restaurants here," she says. "Otherwise we must eat outside."

Because the West Coast has such severe restrictions, small, intimate

groups have replaced most of the big gatherings. However, Ava has noted that this intimacy has created closer relationships for the women in local churches. "I tell them to feel each other's pain. Don't just hear it and add it to your prayer list. Treat it like it's your own burden," instructs Ava.

Although she says some women long for the big gatherings, Ava reports that she has heard much conversation about spending time in the Secret Place. "Where the presence of God is, you feel the genuine unity of God's people," she says.

Because of the way life has changed since COVID-19 hit the United States, Via says that things



are no longer taken for granted. A two-hour service at District Council has been the only time she has been allowed to meet with the women of the Samoan District, and she still has not had the opportunity to hold a Samoan District Women's Conference.

"I delegate to my lead team, and it's working," reports Ava. "They go back and do their own thing and report back to me their challenges and struggles as well as their successes."



SHERRY WELCH Southern Missouri District

"I believe God is using women today more than ever in ministry. All they have to do is say yes, because He is calling them," says Sherry Welch, Southern Missouri District Women's director and lead pastor of Seymour Life Church in Seymour, Missouri.

Sherry says that the reason women's ministry exists in the Southern Missouri District is to help and equip women to pursue God and their influence in the world, and to help define their giftings. Serving as lead pastor for the last seven years has complemented her ministry as women's director and vice versa.

"Being a pastor the past seven years has added a new freshness to ministry," declares Sherry. "Women who are being credentialed are talking to me more and more about what it's like to be a lead pastor. And I encourage them that if God calls them, it will be good for them to step out of their comfort zone and do some ministry."

With a team of thirty women, Sherry aspires to reach each demographic of women in her district through coordinators who help initiate and facilitate ministries in the local churches. Because single women are the fastest growing group of women, especially those ages eighteen to twenty-five, Sherry and her team take special care to offer sessions that pertain to their lives at each function and offer a blog where the women can connect. Widows and young mothers are additional groups of focus, as well as missionaries.

The Southern Missouri District provides The Compassionate Heart Room where missionaries can shop free of charge for items they need that might not be readily found once they enter their field of service. Under Sherry's direction, the thirteen sections in her district sponsor Christmas project events each year with the proceeds being divided evenly among the retired missionaries, retired ministers, and the widows of ministers.

Sherry says that as the women's director, she has led young wom-

en and women her own age who believe in themselves and are doing things for the kingdom of God. She explains, "I believe when God calls us, He equips us; of course, we know that. I also believe when we know who we are in Christ, what we need to do is our ministry to the best of our ability with excellence, and then we know that God gives us favor, and He does the rest."

It is Sherry's belief that the key to raising up women in ministry is to first find what someone's giftings are and then find a place where they can minister using those gifts. She then encourages them to minister first in their home and church, saying that as they grow in their calling, God will open doors for ministry in their workplace and in the world.

Under Sherry's direction and leadership, the women of the Southern Missouri District are changing the lives of women and children in their communities, their state, and around the world.



ROSA RAMOS South Central Hispanic District

To say that Rosa Ramos wears many hats is a great understatement. In addition to her role as South Central Hispanic District Women's Ministry director, she is also a pastor's wife, mother of four,



and Bible teacher at The Refuge School of Ministry. Rosa is also a student herself, pursuing her master's degree in Leadership and Organization in Church Ministry from Southwestern University.

When asked how she juggles it all, her reply is simple, "Prayer," she says. "Always seek direction from God." Open communication with her husband and children is important as well, and knowing she has their support. But, Rosa says, "If I know it's a God-thing, I'll go for it." She says you can't call something a dream unless it is bigger than you.

At the age of seventeen, she was helping her mother, also a women's ministry director, with an event and heard a missionary, Carla Marroquin, quote Luke 1:45, "Blessed is she who believed." The words took root in Rosa's heart, and she bore witness that God was calling her into deeper service. After she met Jesus, Rosa says, "I felt so indebted to Him that I just wanted to get plugged in and do anything I could to serve."

Rosa jokes that when she tells her team, "I've been praying," then they know they're getting ready to do something big. "I know that if I'm hearing from God, He will make a way," she says.

Because acts of service are Rosa's

primary love language, delegating duties didn't come easily at first. But she remembered that along the way, she had some great mentors who delegated to her, and eventually realized that if she enjoyed helping others by serving, other women would probably enjoy it too. She also notes that new converts keep her young spiritually.

Blessed with a great team, Rosa says she is surrounded by women who are open and willing to pour into others. She challenges women not to limit themselves, saying, "Sometimes women cut themselves short because they don't' feel equipped." But she reminds them about the promise Jesus made concerning being faithful in small things and encourages women to serve with an open heart.

Although she has learned there are times she must say no, Rosa says it is still a struggle because she loves blessing others. Planning and organization are paramount to being a successful leader and must include scheduling time for her husband and family.

Rosa shares, "God wants alone moments with us. Just like the *Abide* theme for Women's Ministry in 2021 challenged us, we need to be alone with Jesus for Him to empty us and then let Him fill us back up. When we are weak, He is strong. We must be still."



LIZ DEFRAIN PennDel Ministry Network

Liz DeFrain. PennDel District Women's Ministry director. is truly a mentor at heart. From adopting a floor of the women's dorm at the University of Valley Forge, to raising up leaders to serve in the twelve PennDel sections, and eventully passing the baton of her own role as district director, Liz likes to see the potential people have and help them find opportunities to use it. When mentoring others, Liz says, "I'll jump in when needed, but if they can run with it, I'll let them and try to stay out of the way and let them lead."

Her style of leadership is very hands-on, and she says she would never ask her team to do anything she wouldn't do. "I prefer to work right along with others rather than being off somewhere with the special guests," she says. "I believe the best way to lead people is to be next to them. And I like people, so I like working with people."

Each of the twelve PennDel sections has its own women's director. These leaders, plus four specialty directors for communications, social media, graphics, and missions, make up Liz's team. This team is then divided into two subteams: the Lead Team, consisting of four sectional directors and the director of social media, and the Dream Team which is made of all the other leaders. Liz meets with each team once a month via Zoom, first with the Lead Team and a week later with the Dream Team.

"I think leading by serving is the most important principle you can ever teach somebody," says Liz. She believes that serving should be fun and wants her team to always remember that they represent Jesus and set the atmosphere for the women who attend their events.

When conflict arises, Liz prefers to deal with it head-on. "If you don't deal with conflict, it doesn't go away, it just comes up somewhere else," notes Liz. "As I've learned, I've had to apologize for things, they've had to apologize. It's just the nature of getting along with people."

Liz always tries to surround herself with people who are smarter than she is. "They bring stuff to the table I cannot," she acknowledges. Her philosophy is simple, "I am the director of this. I am not the queen." From that vantage point, she directs what happens around her, stating, "It does not always mean that I have to be on the stage or that I am the big shot. I think a director makes sure everybody else shines."



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ABUSE AND/OR ADDICTION RECOVERY

Abundant Life Ministry Center Directed by Sue Willis Visit AbundantLifeMinistryCenter.org.

Adult and Teen Challenge Directed by Gary Blackard Visit teenchallengeusa.org.

Project Ignite Light Directed by Pebbles Thompson Visit www.ignitelight.org.

Pure Life Ministries Directed by Steve and Kathy Gallagher Visit purelifeministries.org.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESCUE

F.R.E.E. International Directed by Michael Bartel Visit freeinternational.org.

Global Center for Women and Justice Directed by Sandra Morgan Visit gcwj.org

Project Rescue Directed by David and Beth Grant Visit projectrescue.com.

Protect Me Project Directed by Carla Marroquin Visit protectmeproject.org.

ADOPTION/FOSTER CARE

COMPACT Family Services Directed by Jay Mooney Visit compactfamilyservices.org.

COMPASSION

Convoy of Hope: Convoy Women Directed by Doree Donaldson Visit convoyofhope.org/what-we-do/ womens-empowerment.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS

God's Transforming Grace Directed by Darla Colinet Visit godstransforminggrace.com.

MARRIAGE

Marriage Encounter Directed by Mark and Becky Rhoades Visit agme.org.

Teaming Life Directed by Robert and Pamela Crosby Visit teaminglife.com.

PASTORAL CARE/COUNSELING

Emerge Counseling Ministries Directed by Dr. Robert Crosby Visit emerge.org

SEXUAL IDENTITY

Linda Seiler Visit lindaseiler.com.

ReStory Ministries Restoryministries.org.

Joe Dallas joedallas.com

SPECIAL NEEDS

CompassionLink Disability Ministry Coordinated by Thomas and Angelia Carpenter Visit compassionlink.org.

WOMEN AND GIRLS

Ministry to Muslim Women: Say Hello Directed by Lynda Hausfeld Visit sayhelloinfo.com.

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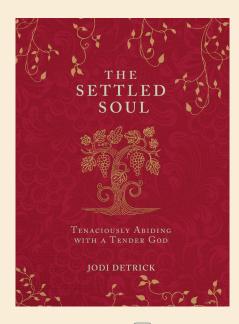
Ministry to Widows Directed by Marlene Craft Visit widowslink.org.

AG National Girls Ministries Directed by Lori Warning Visit ngm.ag.org.

WOMEN MINISTERS

Network of Women Ministers Directed by Crystal Martin Visit womenministers.ag.org.

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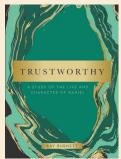
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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2022

National AG Women's Day

Assemblies of God churches across the United States and worldwide will celebrate the women of their congregations.

