



# Creating Woman Space

## ON CAMPUS

### **Before You Begin**

This session of *Lifting Up Our Voices* is designed to help you create a women's spiritual formation group on your campus. Before you begin please refer to the introduction at [www.pcusa.org/liftingupourvoices](http://www.pcusa.org/liftingupourvoices) to learn more about about the National Network of Presbyterian College Women (NNPCW). You will also find links to download other chapters of *Lifting Up Our Voices*. One chapter is posted each month.

### **Background Information**

Why a Women's Group? Women in general, and college women in particular, experience life and faith in unique ways. Studies from a variety of disciplines point to females developing, learning and being socialized in ways different from males. Psychologists are coming to understand that women in late adolescence, generally speaking, develop a strong sense of identity, purpose, and faith commitment within communities of women. Our spiritual growth and experience in the church is also defined in part by our gender. Our questions and choices arise in part from our perceptions as women. Our understanding of God, our relationship with Christ, and our experience of the Spirit are impacted by our lives as female human beings.

### **Questions Often Asked by College Women**

How do I combine family life and career choices?

What are the particular gifts God has given me and how do I best use them in the world?

Is it possible to live a life of simplicity with less emphasis on money as a measure of success?

How do I approach biblical texts that seem oppressive to women?

How do I respond to the ongoing debate in many denominations regarding the status of women as leaders in the church?

How does Christian faith speak a liberating, empowering word to women?

How do I claim a Christian faith that empowers women when the faith of my upbringing only encouraged traditional roles?

How and when do I make long-term commitments in relationships?

How do I balance life, study, work, and family?

How does my Christian faith inform my thinking about these questions?

Many college women today seek a safe environment that will support and nurture their Christian faith. We seek a community of women where we can raise the unique moral questions and ethical issues we face. We want to reflect with other women on the meaning of our lives, our families, our vocations in light of our faith. A women's group on campus is a significant way to provide a ministry with college women. This resource, designed specifically for college women by college women, will help.



## Models of Organizing

Each campus group is unique. Each is developed primarily to meet the particular needs of women on that campus. However, existing groups fall within one of several basic models:

1. **A group within an already existing campus ministry program.** Campus-based groups may use the resources of an existing campus ministry program. Female campus chaplains or ministers can easily step into mentoring roles. Faculty members or others associated with the ministry may fill a mentoring role, as well. Such groups sponsor women's retreats, Bible studies, and/or discussion groups.
2. **A group in association with a local congregation.** This model is ideal for congregation-based campus ministries or congregations seeking ways to reach out to campuses. Local Presbyterian Women (PW) chapters, ministers, or congregation members fill a mentoring role. Retreats, Bible studies, and discussion groups may be coupled with other ministries in the congregation.
3. **A group involved in regional networking.** Students from two or more campuses may join for a retreat once a semester or plan service projects together. Participating in Presbyterian Women regional gatherings also introduces college women to the connectional church.

## Getting Started

The following set of questions is designed to help you think through some of the nuts and bolts of initiating a women's group on your campus.

1. What structure for ministry is in place on your campus? Chaplain's office? Campus ministry program? Nearby congregation? Other?
2. Are you already involved in a Christian community? A women's community? A Christian women's community? If so, do you want to start a new group, or do you want to bring the Mission, Commitments, and Objectives of NNPCW to the existing group? If you want to stay with an existing group, consider using the suggested activities in this resource to lift up concerns for women in your group.
3. Read the NNPCW Mission, Commitments, and Objectives Statement in the Introduction. Does any particular part of that statement resonate with you? Why?

### **If you are interested in starting a new group consider these questions.**

4. Is there a campus minister and/or "wise woman" mentor who would be willing to work with your group?
5. Can you think of two or three other women who would be interested in working with you to develop a group?
6. If so, gather that group together to read and discuss the NNPCW Mission, Commitments, and Objectives Statement. Determine what parts of the Statement have meaning for your group.



7. Decide how you want to focus your group. Do you want
  - to start with spiritual formation needs, such as prayer and Bible study?
  - to focus on community service projects?
    - topical discussions on women's issues?
    - social/campus activism?
  - to build a support group where you can share concerns, frustrations, and joys?
  - to have all or some of the above?
8. Develop a mission statement for your group that relates to your focus. A mission statement may be as short as one sentence or as long as a full page (usually, shorter is better).
9. How do you want to be structured in terms of leadership? Do you want to have one person who prepares activities for the group, or do you want to share leadership? Do you want to ask a campus minister or another "wise woman" to lead the group?
10. Decide how often you would like to do programming: once a week/biweekly/once a month/once a semester/quarter. Then plan at least a semester/quarter ahead, if possible.
11. Do you want to have a retreat for college women? Do you want to plan a regional retreat?
12. Determine a name for the group. A popular one is "Sisters in Spirit." Others have named themselves "Daughters of Eve," "Women of Faith," or just plain "Women's Group." You do not have to include NNPCW in the name in order to be affiliated with the national organization, nor does your group need to be primarily Presbyterian in order to be affiliated. NNPCW recognizes the ecumenical nature of campus ministry and is committed to working ecumenically with all college women, whether they be Presbyterian, from other denominations, or seekers.
13. How closely related to NNPCW does your group want to be? Do you want to be an official campus chapter? Do you want to be affiliated but not necessarily a chapter? Do you not want to be affiliated at all?
14. Once you've determined how to organize the group, think about publicity. You might recruit participants through an already-established campus ministry program, or through the Women's Studies department, or dorm residents. Be realistic. You probably won't have fifty people show up at the first meeting. Most small groups begin with anywhere from five to ten people. In fact, some of the best groups never have more than that many participants.
15. Once you've started, invite new people into the leadership so that the group will continue once the originators have graduated.

### **Developing Your Leadership**

In order to maintain the group, it's important to develop student leadership. While each campus environment will require unique leadership, we recommend one of the two following methods of leadership:

1. Select a core councilor or a coordinating committee of at least three women, preferably from different classes. For example, your coordinating committee might include a first-year student, a junior, and a senior. The term of service on the coordinating committee



might be for a semester/quarter or a year. You may wish to stagger the terms of service (have some members rotate on at the beginning of the fall semester/quarter and others rotate on at the beginning of the spring semester/quarter. The coordinating committee might plan the activities for your group, while taking into consideration the wishes of the group members. We recommend using the *Consensus Model of Decision Making* at [www.pcusa.org/consensus](http://www.pcusa.org/consensus).

2. Select a “wise woman” to mentor the group. Perhaps a campus minister, faculty member, PW member, or another wise woman mentor is able to devote more time to study and preparation for gatherings of your women’s group. The group may wish to share ideas with the mentor and ask her to lead bible studies, social outreach, and faith sharing with the group.

### Small Groups 101

For honest questioning and dialogue to occur, Christian educator Carol Lakey Hess encourages us to develop small groups that are “ ‘a community of support’ and a ‘community of inquiry.’ A community of support provides a safe-house where people can come in honesty, voice, and freedom for difference—expecting to be listened to and (to the best of others’ abilities) understood. . . . A safe-house is affirming and tolerant of a variety of perspectives, but it contains within it the doors and windows of inquiry. . . . To be a community of inquiry means that in conversation people seek truth together, question unexamined assumptions, and challenge one another to go deeply into the search.”<sup>1</sup>

Small groups of women should aim to recover women’s experience of caring and connection while also promoting women’s capacity for voice and difference.

### Suggested Areas of Focus

1. **Bible study.** There are many resources available to facilitate a study of women in the Bible, Jesus’ relationships with women, and scriptural role models, as well as the whole of the biblical narrative. Some women’s groups have met weekly to study “Women in the Life of Jesus” or “Empowered Women of the Hebrew Bible.” Learning about biblical women can be an important experience for college women. It is important to note, however, that the whole of the biblical text speaks to women and men, and we do not wish to push women to the margins of the Bible by studying them separately from the text in its entirety.
2. **Topical Discussions.** Use this discussion resource to focus on a particular topic from a faith perspective. You may want to focus on particular issues of concern to women or on how a broad-scale issue, such as globalization, affects women in particular.
3. **Social Justice Advocacy.** This is an area that is at the heart of many General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC) ministries. There are various resources available throughout GAMC in social justice area. You can start by contact Young Women’s Leadership Development office for more information.
4. **Spiritual Formation.** Gather for prayer, meditation, spiritual direction. Spend some time countering the notion that a woman’s work is never done. Relax, reflect, rest in the knowledge of the Creator’s love.
5. **Women’s Retreat.** Get away for a long weekend or school break, perhaps with women from another campus or with high school women from a local youth group.

1. Carol Lakey Hess, *Caretakers of Our Common House*, Abingdon Press, © 1997, p. 190. Used by permission.



6. **National and Regional Events.** Send representatives to national or regional events and have them share the experience with your group.

### **Connecting with NNPCW**

We hope your women's group will want to be affiliated officially with NNPCW. NNPCW is always looking for ways to support ministry with young college women in our church. Membership in NNPCW is open to any college woman and/or campus ministry program. College women of any denomination may become members of NNPCW. Membership fees are not required; however one-time donations will be accepted to offset the costs of resource development. From campus groups we accept up to \$50, and from individuals we accept up to \$10.

### **How Faith Speaks**

Fundamental to the Reformed tradition is the notion that God's will for humanity is best discerned in community. While individual study, prayer, reflection, and action are essential for spiritual formation and justice-making, no woman is an island. Our tradition holds firmly to the principle of the priesthood of all believers (meaning that each individual is able to relate to God without the mediation of another); we also stress that the mystery of God is too great for anyone person to ascertain. Women need to reclaim biblical texts that empower women, wrestle with those that seem oppressive, and rejoice in the good news of God's empowering love. Women need to learn about the ways Jesus empowered women and to claim his vision of a society of equals.

### **Faith in Action**

Choose among these suggested activities.

1. Read about NNPCW's Mission, Commitments, and Objectives at [www.pcusa.org/liftingupourvoices](http://www.pcusa.org/liftingupourvoices). Which of these themes resonate with your group? How can you live out these themes in your group and on your campus?
2. Discuss and envision a model that will fit your group and your situation. Contact the Young Women's Leadership Development office for more assistance.
3. Gather students together and share this discussion resource with them. What issues would they like to study? How would they like to supplement the material that is presented? Contact YWLD office for ideas.
4. Sign up with NNPCW if you want to be officially affiliated with the network. [www.pcusa.org/nnpcw](http://www.pcusa.org/nnpcw)



## Additional Resources

Young Women's Leadership Development office  
(800) 728-7228, ext.5848  
nnpcw@pcusa.org  
www.pcusa.org/nnpcw

*Horizons Magazine* and Bible Study published by Presbyterian Women  
Subscribe to *Horizons* magazine (six issues per year plus the annual Bible study) by calling (866) 802-3635 or visiting [www.pcusa.org/horizons](http://www.pcusa.org/horizons). \$18, 1 year; \$32, 2 years; \$45, 3 years.

Order individual copies of the annual PW/*Horizons* Bible study (available in English, Spanish, Korean, English large print, English audio, and ecumenical versions) by calling (800) 524-2612 or visiting [www.pcusa.org/store](http://www.pcusa.org/store).

## References

Hess, Carol Lakey. *Caretakers of Our Common House: Women's Development in Communities of Faith*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

## Notes

## National Network of Presbyterian College Women

Young Women's Leadership Development



General Assembly Mission Council  
100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202