

Should We Do a Display? Ideas for Women's History Exhibits

Exhibits are a way to illustrate and interpret the lives of women in the church. Letters, photographs, a pair of gloves, newspaper clippings, ticket stubs, an old bulletin, and church minutes combined with effective interpretation can tell a woman's story in a fresh way.

Where can I find items to display? Look first in the church archives, but go beyond that. Members of the congregation may have items to share, and the local library or historical society may be willing to lend materials for an exhibit.

What stories can I tell? Choose a theme based on your audience, materials available to you, and the space you can use.

☼ Show what church women were reading at a specific period (perhaps at the time of the church's founding). Use Bible translations, hymns, devotional literature, local newspapers, denominational materials, and popular novels.

☼ To give an idea of women's involvement in the church, portray a week in the life of a woman (real or fictional) in the church's past—attendance at meetings, teaching Sunday school, singing in the choir, serving at a potluck dinner, and so on.

☼ Develop a photo gallery of church leaders' portraits with labels that ask intriguing questions about each person (have the answers close at hand). For example, "I organized the first woman's missionary society in our church. Do you know who I am?"

☼ Follow an active member throughout her life with baptismal and membership records, meeting minutes, Sunday School pins, bulletins, newspaper articles, and photographs.

☼ Explore the ways that secular history has affected the church. For example, what do records reveal about the church's reaction to the women's movements of the 1910s and 1970s? Possible sources include minutes of women's organizations, membership lists of boards and agencies, sermon titles, liturgies, memorabilia from the congregation (a NOW pin, a voter registration card), and articles in the secular and church press.

☼ Trace a church woman's involvement in the community over a period of years, through minutes, correspondence, newspaper articles, photographs, and records of secular organizations.

☼ Profile women in full-time church service: diaconal ministers, ordained clergy, educators at United Methodist schools, employees of general church agencies, or delegates to Annual, Jurisdictional, and General Conference. This may be part of a larger exhibit on the history of The United Methodist Church or on the denomination's administrative structure.