

# **Introduction**

## **Women at the Oasis**

(unpublished)

This book was written to assist women in congregations to plan and hold retreats for the purpose of gathering themselves together for spiritual nourishment, to build and strengthen community, to share faith stories, to encourage and support one another, and to deepen their relationship with God.

The need for women to gather is imperative and on going. Women throughout history have lived communally - in tribes, extended families, and neighborhoods. Even when pioneers and homesteaders settled in remote areas, when possible, women gathered to do their work of preserving food, making quilts, or to celebrate major events. As women increasingly leave their neighborhoods to provide for their families, and/or to find fulfillment in careers, what is often lost to them is the time for their intimate relationships with other women. This is a need the church family can do much to address.

Although many of the heavy-labor home tasks, which previously drew women together in a common work force, have been simplified, the need to gather remains. Our society continues to be patriarchal in nature. The power that affects women's life choices - house, city, career and economic goals - continues to be largely vested in men. The need for women to hear each other's stories and gain strength from them, to network with each other to help each one reach her goals, to encourage each other and provide resources for one another is tremendous. The need to support one another during child rearing is also essential. Seldom do we have the resources of our experienced grannies or nannies to help us.

Even more imperative than those needs is the need to gather to nurture our faith and our faith community. The church community as a whole is necessary and wonderful, but our group

fellowship events and common worship do not meet all the needs of women. Women are more communal in nature than men, generally-speaking. Our style of sharing and developing intimacy is unique. We need greater intimacy and sharing with our Christian sisters to help nurture our faith. It is important to hear about the quiet struggles and successes around us to help us find the inspiration and strength to meet our own. Small struggles that women face are rarely shared in mixed groups.

Women's retreats provide an opportunity for women in the church to take time away from their awesome responsibilities to cherish and nurture themselves in community with their sisters. Through planned group-building activities and theme-related content, a group can build trust and safety. Then the magic begins, and true sharing and openness can occur.

Women's groups for years were the mainstay of the church. They planned and cooked for the church dinners. They provided meals to the sick, visited them in hospitals, raised mission money and wrote mission letters. They made bandages and knitted stockings during wars. They worked together and were friends and a support group to each other. Churches are finding other ways to get the work done. But the need for a strong women's group remains - for women! We need that connection to our sisters as a vital link to our identity as Christians. This strengthens the church as well. If all the members of a church are strong and vital, the church as a whole will be strong and vital.

But - who has time to plan a retreat? The aim of this book is to provide step-by-step guidelines for retreat planning, with a comprehensive timeline, with pros and cons as well as options for the many decisions you will need to make. The book is intended to empower those who yearn for retreats but feel it is beyond their grasp. The book is also for those who have never even thought about a retreat, but may begin to want one. This book will help you accomplish your retreat with small amounts of time, energy or resources. A small group of

inspired, interested, and spiritually hungry people can do this - the book will provide you with proven methods for holding a successful retreat.

The authors have been involved in a variety of retreat planning experiences and are both Elders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Francea Wax served on the Women's Retreat team at North Creek Presbyterian Church for several years. She has been responsible for theme development, composition of cluster group questions, cluster group facilitator, and presentations. She has written many content pieces and has hands-on experience with nitty gritty details of successful retreats. She has also served on Christian Education Teams for many years and taught adult, high school and Jr. high Sunday school. Currently she is completing her Master's degree in Transforming Spirituality at Seattle University's Institute for Ecumenical Theological Studies.

Candace Wilson served as Retreat Coordinator at Maplewood Presbyterian Church in the early 1980's, working with the Christian Educator to plan all-church intergenerational events. She has served on the Retreat Team of North Creek Presbyterian Church, participated as cluster group facilitator and has been a presenter at several retreats. She has taught 6th grade Sunday school, confirmation classes, and adult workshops on various topics.

Both have been involved with publicity, fund-raising, group building. Both writers and avowed Retreat advocates, the authors bring their knowledge, experience and excitement to this project.