

## Revisiting, Reinventing, and Reimagining UMW Gatherings for Recruitment and Growth

"The United Methodist Women shall be a community of women . . . "

Why is building community in our units so important?

It's because God's church on earth is **relational**.

*"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."* – 1 Corinthians 12:27

*"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."* – Eccl. 4:12

Being a community of women cannot happen unless there is a gathering of women!

Therefore, growth and recruitment must happen - but it happens because each of us becomes invitational to events. Leadership helps provide and guide events to which membership can become invitational. This article is a list of events that current UMW units can review as they are revisiting, reinventing, and reimagining their gatherings . . . in order to become an even larger beloved community of women!

### **The World Has Changed**

First, realize that the world has changed. Lay down the expectations and the comparison, and start fresh with the people who are present in your unit *right now* and the way things are *right now*. Decide that it is a new season and look for the opportunity for God to do a "new thing."

And go deeper, not just wider. Take advantage, as a unit, of church-wide, district-wide, and nation-wide studies and trainings made available by the UMW (think MissionU, and Faith Talks, and the Reading List).

### **Taking Care of Each Other – Valuing Each Other**

Importantly, before we reach out, we need to support who we have within the church!

### **Outreach to non-UMW attendees in Your Church**

Celebrate significant anniversaries and birthdays of the younger women in your church by sending out cards signed by the UMW at their monthly meetings. Let younger women know the women of the UMW are there for them. And you could celebrate major life events of your church members too! Also, try hosting a wedding or baby shower for young women connected to your church.

### **Outreach to Existing Members**

This means communication . . . make use of phone calls, cards, snail-mail letters, emails, and social media to keep in contact – along with door drops and in-person visits to mobility challenged members. In one group a member sends a weekly email on Wednesdays to get other members "over the hump" – that could include everyday happenings around the church and community, an inspiring quote, or passing on a cheery article, or even funny memes (just something short and sweet to let members know they are part of a group that is thinking about them). Maybe trivia? All part of taking care of each other.

You could also highlight a UMW member on the church website or Facebook page or in the church bulletin with a simple paragraph biography. You would be surprised at how little the general church population knows about your UMW members! You could also just compile esoteric information for this bio and read it at a meeting as a game to try to guess who the bio is about. Maybe consider recording the faith stories of the 10 oldest members of your group or church. Value each other.

Consider the intentional planning of fellowship outside of UMW meetings to reinforce current relationships.

## Some Intentional Events Outside of UMW Meetings

### (Guests may be invited to these too!)

Visit a local historic place together. Just go out to eat together.

Read a book together. Begin a walking group.

Show up as a cheerleading squad for church youth at a sporting events. (This was REALLY fun!)

Attend a movie as a group (the Monroe unit took me to see *War Room* in the theater) . . . or host a "Chosen" on-line marathon (season one and most of two are released for free viewing)!

Get together to cook, craft, sew, or serve somewhere together.

Play cards, board games, golf, or tennis together . . . or pickle ball or fly a kite! Play together!

Shop together - buy in bulk and then split contents into smaller portions. Save while sharing!

Volunteer together or take a day trip with your senior center.

Hear a lecture at your local university. Take in a recital or program at a local school.

Do something silly like get matching t-shirts and wear them to church or church event like the annual back to Sunday School picnic - people might ask questions! (T-shirts are fine, but do not move to the next step of a secret knock and handshake!)

The goal is two-fold: 1) to participate in an activity that results in a memorable meaningful shared activity for members of the UMW unit, and 2) to do life together outside the four walls of the church so the unchurched can get a glimpse of how Christian women live life fully. It is about investing in the relationships in order to encounter future members "out there."

### Outreach to the Unchurched

These are events to which you can invite prospective new members where they can meet existing members with no preaching or pressure, so a later invitation to an official UMW meeting is not so "scary." Recognize that many "unchurched" people are spiritually inclined but apprehensive about attending church because they feel unwelcome, distrust institutions, or have been hurt in the past. So, the goal is to create non-threatening venues to which existing members can invite family and friends.

#### 12 Ideas (at least one for each month) that give members an occasion to be "invitational."

**JANUARY:** The opposite of a New Year's Resolution – a celebration of what you already do right!

Bring pictures of your crafts, gardens, sewing projects, something from your place of employment, a great homemade cookie or recipe – and SHARE! Focus on what you do really well! Start the new year positive!

I also encourage you to take the *12 Challenge* – write a name on each month of your calendar and invite that woman over for coffee where you invite her to a UMW meeting or event. One woman per month for a year. Just think if the whole unit did that!

**FEBRUARY:** Valentine Tea or send Valentines out to college students or shut-ins – engage in goodie box prep, etc. – or host "a tasting" - Chocolate Night! Or gather for an evening of classic romantic comedies or really old-fashioned love story films! Does someone in your church know calligraphy or card making? You could host a Valentine-making class. Or get crazy – (if snow) build snow women on the church front lawn telling the community women are better when together! Send a message!

Host an on-site church coffee shop for one day a week all month. This won't compete with Starbucks, and it will have limited hours – but your up-front cost will be less if you already have kitchen facilities. All you need are a good coffee machine, a blender for frappes and smoothies, a refrigerator, and signage. Create a "third place" for women of the neighborhood to gather "where everybody knows (or will know) their name." Some people do this each Wednesday morning or at other set times. (Done during those dark winter months when a "pick-me-up" is appreciated.)

**MARCH:** Spring Fling – let's get ready for Spring – a "frock swap" (clothing) or accessory swap (scarves, hats, jewelry, belts, etc.) or Swap Meet – anything left over can be donated to a Women's Shelter for those to use when seeking work. Attendees can trade items with each other. You could leave the event open to any item of clothing, or choose a specific theme.

**APRIL:** Host a shower for a crisis pregnancy center, or for the local family homeless shelter – a shower in a season of showers. Or start plants early – set seeds in egg cartons in front of windows with access to sun. Plant the seedlings/plants around the church, school, shelter, or park later. Turn your imagination free with themes of new life and rain!

**MAY:** Mother's Day Massage . . . or host a spa . . . a day to rotate through a couple of professionals that give you the pampering relief you deserve or skin care tips or even essential healing oil advice you need. Or host a special UMW Saturday morning breakfast gathering with special speaker instead of a monthly business meeting. Regarding speakers – take advantage of colleges, professionals in your community, civic organizations doing good work . . . even folks with hobbies . . . card making, cake decorating, ornament and jewelry making, cooking, etc. And travelers! Allow them to present at a meeting. Host an expert who can come talk about their cause or area of expertise. Some speakers may be willing to come for free or at a discount for a nonprofit. Or host a Grant Writing Course taught by someone from the local college - so many organizations are in need of funding, this might be a hit.

**JUNE:** Book Swap for summer reading – host a book table – the unchosen books can be donated to the local library for their book sales. Participants bring their own used books, and can take one/leave one or trade with other readers to get a book new to them. Or host a Picnic Potluck in the Park where the unit gathers at a park or outdoor venue for food and fellowship. Celebrate summer. A twist on this is a "show and tell" potluck – include both members and potential members. Longtime members show and tell of their experiences in the group and why membership is meaningful and important to them. Preparation is essential (PowerPoint, videos from UMW communications, etc.), but you would be surprised that many people do NOT know what UMW is all about. Break bread and watch relationships blossom.

**JULY:** Christmas in July – want to get your Christmas Shopping done and help a great cause? Ask a Fair Trade Store to set up in your fellowship hall, or partner with an organization like Women at Risk (WAR) that rescue people from human trafficking to set up a store at your location. Have guests speak educate on fair trade or human trafficking. Or your unit could do a "Serve Saturday" together where you invite others to join a meaningful activity in your church or community. Talk about the UMW missions as you labor. If your community hosts a 4th of July parade, what about decorating a car and being in the parade as the UMW! Or if it hosts a weekend celebration consider staffing a UMW booth at the event. Visibility can't hurt!

**AUGUST:** Host a Salad Extravaganza Luncheon – a potluck of salads and desserts! Or try recipe sharing for those garden surplus items like tomatoes, zucchinis, cucumbers, etc. Or host a seasonal meal – you could even gather quarterly in a member's home to cook and share a seasonal meal highlighting recipes for seasonal favorites or trying out something completely new. Or host a Dog Days of Summer event with a pet parade, costume contest, pet toy craft making, recipes for treats, etc. And maybe even include a "hot dog bar" – complete with every topping for a hot dog! Or just in time for vacations, provide child care and have a meeting that caters to the interests of young mothers in your church. Host a car seat event – invite nationally certified technicians to check or install seats correctly. ("Car Seats in South Central Michigan" hosts free car seat check events where nationally certified technicians will ensure that child seats are in correctly and if not, they help install the seats correctly.)

**SEPTEMBER:** back to school dominates this time of year, so why not pack school backpacks with school supplies for local children, or create a back to school basket of treats for the teachers' lounge or school office. Or in honor of the "school field trip," take one of your own! Host a field trip to a historic place, church related site, visit a garden or park – create an "end of summer celebration day-cation." Host an Open House /Ministry Fair – put tables up in the fellowship hall of the church and have an open house with refreshments and let the community know what your church does - invite the local ministries that you support to have a presence there too (homeless shelter, food banks, etc.)! Of course, have a UMW presence too!

**OCTOBER:** Host a "Sock-toberfest" tree for your local elementary school. The need is great and schools are now trying to meet needs they were never designed to meet, so partnering with a school to provide underwear, socks, and winter gear can be a great help to children in need and to compassionate school staff with limited resources. There were many ideas surrounding Halloween –

from parties, trunk or treat, free pumpkins at pumpkin decorating parties and contests, to gathering to make homemade pies for shelter meals. Some groups hosted massive canning events where everyone gets together to can tomatoes, or beans with bacon, or to put up freezer corn. There is a spirit among gardening UMW members that many hands make light work and it goes faster and is more enjoyable – the more the merrier! Share the bounty!

**NOVEMBER:** All Saints Day allows space for grief and remembrance – one unit takes this month to host weekly Themed Meetings that center on everyday life experiences like chronic illness, grief and loss, life transitions and financial troubles, dealing with mental health challenges, or the "Alzheimer's Caregiver" – providing studies that give insight into what the Bible says about these things and then provide the best practical advice from current specialists in the field – letting the world know that in church is where people will find the practical tools for living the abundant life. The Church is not an epidural, but a midwife – sitting with you through the pain. Or on a lighter note, host an opportunity to meet and create a Thanksgiving door hanging (if you meet early in the month), or meet to create a Christmas tree ornament if you meet later in the month. One unit has a special crafting date on Black Friday – instead of shopping, they gather to create gifts.

**DECEMBER:** Consider hosting a shopping self-defense safety course for women. Many police departments offer safety courses for navigating the long nights of winter. Or a Christmas Cookie and "other delights" swap. Make your specialty in quantity and then trade with one another resulting in taking home a variety of treats. Host a Christmas Tea: it can be as formal or informal as your expected crowd. Include a special speaker or musical performance. Also mentioned was the annual Christmas Party. Another twist on this is a "Home for the Holidays Reunion." This can be a fun and meaningful outreach idea that can let your current unit know the value you place on everyone that has worshiped and walked, and worked with you. To pull this off, you need to be willing to invite back everyone that's left – which means you need to be willing to let bygones go. But this can be a really meaningful opportunity for healing and to communicate the importance of forgiveness and community during a time of open-heartedness and generosity.

### **An EXTRA IDEA (all year-round)**

**Work on a year-long project of gratitude together.** Make a list of 12 people or organizations in the church or community that just went above and beyond during covid and then use a creative way to show your appreciation to them publicly or tangibly – with goodie boxes or gift cards or letters to the editor, or a card, or award or plaque. Also, you could write a positive review of a local business – try to get it published – even if just in your church newsletter to help those wonderful pillars of the community who have faced economic challenges during shut downs. Recognize those who really are in ministry with you.

Make the UMW known for the smile it brings to the faces of people, how they value people, and how they encourage those caught "doing it right" when it comes to the values and goals the UMW embraces and celebrates. Units took "goodie boxes and bags" to all essential workers from prison staff to nursing home staff and teachers.

## Strictly Fundraising Ideas

**Fundraising Fact:** According to AARP, in the United States the average charitable giver is 64 years old, with Baby Boomers accounting for 41% of charitable giving. AND in 2019, more than \$449.64 billion was donated to nonprofit organizations.

The above tells is that givers are out there, so below are the ways Heritage UMW units have both explored and used in order to raise money for their various missions and purposes. I have grouped them into "like methods" for ease in searching the alphabetized list.

I hope you find inspiration in these ideas and try one or two in the months to come.

Note: I included ideas, but not "how to" due to the lack of space.

Keep manifesting the LOVE,

Lora Crombez, Spiritual Growth Coordinator

### SIMPLY ASK FOR DONATIONS

**A birthday fundraiser:** in lieu of sending a card or gift to fellow UMW or church members, in honor of birthdays, send a postcard saying a donation was made in their name to the Legacy Fund or a specific UMW mission.

**Donation Jar:** Talk to local businesses about placing a donation jar at their checkout counters to raise funds through spare change for a specific mission.

**Noisy Offering:** Collect change in jars and bring it or send it to the August meeting to support the World Thank Offering. This too has been quite successful to support this giving.

**Pass the basket:** ask for donations for missions at regular meetings.

**Pennies from Heaven - it's raining money:** Hang an umbrella upside down in the narthex and ask people to contribute their extra pocket change each Sunday for a month.

**Send a fundraising letter and simply ask for money.** A twist, see if current members or sponsors will match all gifts received until you raise a certain amount (like the first \$1,000 or something).

**The Quarter Mile:** Challenge your supporters to donate enough quarters to stretch a quarter mile (or more!). Start by finding a venue large enough to host this fundraiser - a church parking lot? A school track? Your best bet is outdoors. Choose a sunny day and get to work! Best of all, everyone has spare change lying around!

### SPONSORSHIP PLEDGES

**Buck-a-Pound Challenge:** Encourage supporters to lose a few pounds and gain a few extra dollars for your cause. Have volunteers join together for a weight loss challenge. Set a range of time for the challenge. A month or two should do. Then, have volunteers form teams of 4 or 5 individuals. Record each team's starting weight and compare it to their end weight once the challenge wraps up. For the best results, approach it as a peer-to-peer fundraiser by having participants raise pledges for every pound lost. Reach out to local gyms to sponsor your event, too! To rally up the most support, capitalize on New Year's resolutions by starting the challenge on January 1st.

**Funny Runny:** Take your annual run or walkathon to a whole new level by incorporating unique themes. Here's your chance to get creative. For your next walkathon or run, choose an engaging theme, such as Glow-in-the-dark walk, Turkey trot, Pet parade, Clown-walk, Pajama-walk, Apron-walk, etc! Participants will encourage their friends and families to pledge donations for every mile they run or walk. (Don't forget to set up water stations, too.)

**Summer Grandma Read-a-thon:** sponsors could donate a specific amount based on how many pages members read with their grandchildren over the summer. Or the event could be public where everyone is there in rocking chairs and people could bring their children to be read to by "professional grandmothers!" Try a real read-a-thon - 12 hours of reading!

## COMPETITIONS

**Become a "life shaver":** Find men in your church willing to shave if the UMW can raise certain levels of resources to encourage them to shave. It works best with at least three men - one maybe with a mustache for a lower amount, all the way to a long full beard to be shaved off for reaching the largest goal, or have all three commit to shave for topping the goal!

**Host a chili cookoff :** Have volunteers enter the contest, and cook up a designated amount of chili. Voters then sample each chili and vote for their favorites by donating to your cause.

**Online Cutest Pet Contest:** Allow supporters to show off their fur babies and vote for the best with a pet contest. Everyone thinks their pet is the cutest – but whose really is? Let your audience decide by hosting a virtual pet contest! Encourage supporters to submit their best photos of their furry friends and feature them on your website for voting purposes. Be sure to ask for a brief background on each pet (including their name, age, breed, favorite activities, etc.) so that voters can get a better idea of each animal. You can either charge a small fee to submit a photo, or have supporters cast their votes on each pet by donating! This fundraiser is easy and effective because everyone loves looking at pictures of cute animals.

**Paper Airplane Competition:** Length of time in the air or distance travelled. Everybody gets the same sheet of paper. Set it up in your organization's parking lot or go to a local park. You can have participants line up one-by-one and see how far they can throw their airplanes. Reward those with the furthest throws with a prize (like an ice-cream shop gift card). In any case, give them colorful paper, and all the time they need to design their creative planes. Make sure they remember to mark their creations with their names. You'll be shocked at how many unique airplane designs people create! Enter planes with an entry fee or have the event sponsored.

**Penny Wars:** Where each church organization – classroom or committee or any group – compete to have the most pennies in their jar at the end of a given amount of time. Teams can sabotage other teams by adding in dollar bills, which cancel out 100 pennies in their opponents' jar. Either way, the money in the jar goes toward the organization in the end that sponsored the jar. Challenge another group in the church like the UMM, administrative board, trustees, the choir, or a prayer group to a friendly interorganizational fundraising competition.

## SELL SOMETHING

**A one-item, made in bulk, Bake Sale.** Sell a baked good at a community event – like large \$1 chocolate chip cookies at a 4th of July parade or Fall Festival – or cinnamon rolls or quiches at Christmas or Thanksgiving (provide folks a no-cook breakfast/brunch during busy holidays).

**After Church Sale:** Take your "Hobby to the Lobby" and sell homemade items and crafts created by your unit in the narthex. Others units mentioned that they added gently used scarves and jewelry to their craft shows – easy to add small items hardly take up any space. One unit said children loved shopping for Christmas gifts then!

**Best Seat in the House Auction:** Reach out to a local sports team – even a high school or college team – and ask if they would be willing to auction off the best seat in the stadium for your cause for a particular season.

**Build a better world "Buy a Brick" fundraiser:** For a donation, supporters can have a brick engraved on a wall or walk at your location.

**Charity Auction:** Request used or new item donations from community members or local businesses to auction off for fundraising. Add a twist – White elephant items welcome – to prompt defensive bidding the one who outbid everyone else has the right to re-gift their hard-won item. Re-gifted item goes home with the one who received it! Items can only be re-gifted once!

**Have a rummage sale** and even host a free market as opposed to flea market (3 local units do this in Spring, August, or early fall Dundee, Adrian, Brighton, etc.) Could also host a **Swap-n-Shop:** Attendees pay an entrance fee to raise money for your cause, and upon entering, can trade items with other supporters. You could leave the event open to any items, or choose a specific theme.

**Hold a Bake-less Bake Sale** (donate the funds usually required to bake items for a bake sale.)

**Host an ice-cream social:** Wellsville UMC is the smallest licensed creamery in the State of Michigan and is part of the Heritage District – they make ice-cream and provide toppings and homemade pies and then charge for this event on Father's Day – it supports missions!

**Luxury Drive:** Partner with a local luxury car dealership to offer test drives to raise funds for your organization. (Contact your local dealerships to see if one would be willing to partner with your nonprofit. Of course driver's license and insurance etc. required.) Or try a classic car, sports car, muscle car, or antique car?

**Pancake Breakfast:** Bring participants together through pancakes! Sell tickets to raise money, and include pancakes, toppings, and coffee.

**Partner with a local business to partner a fundraiser:** a nursery or restaurant? The restaurant or nursery gets business and the group gets a donation from the sale of coupons or gift cards to that nursery or restaurant.

**Sell a skill:** UMW Seamstresses host a "minor repair" day: everyone brings in clothes in need of repairs and they are fixed for a fee. (Repair hems that have fallen out, sew on buttons, stitch up a simple side seam, etc.) or any skill people would pay for.

**Sell an item from a fund-raising specialist company:** Many companies work with non-profits to sell items like coffee, candy, candles, popcorn, and cookie dough.

Sell **personalized Church logo travel mugs** for a profit.

Sell **pre-made recipes for soup or baked goods** in decorated canning jars. (See North Lake UMW for recipes.)

**Salad and Soup Luncheons - Spring & Summer** – offer at least three soups and a variety of salads and accouterments!

**Sell Super Bowl Sunday sub sandwiches** (take orders and make them on game day for pick-up).

**Spaghetti (or whatever) Dinner:** Get together a group of volunteers to cook and serve pasta meal. Donors are treated to a meal and table service. Take out only dinners are easier and take less members to staff. (Units do swiss steak, meatloaf, turkey, pulled pork, etc.)

**T-shirt sales:** Branded t-shirts are a great way to raise money for your organization and spread the word about your cause.

**Wreath or ornament sale:** craft things to sell, or host a clinic where people - for a fee - make their own!

## HOST AN EVENT

**Host a Christmas Tree Festival** (if you have the space) and charge \$1 per person admission - and \$5 to put up a tree - best tree in certain categories gets bragging rights and a prize, it is a one weekend event. Get 100 trees you make \$500 and your church is beautiful AND your expenses are covered by the guests coming to view them. Families from the church can put up trees in memory of loved ones using things they loved or their professions themes. Community Groups can use the event to publicize their organization and holiday events. It is a beautiful win-win.

**Host a Classic Car Show:** Reach out to members of the community to see if those with classic cars would be willing to join your event. Choose a location, and request a donation for entry.

**Host a concert for a cause :** enlist church and local musicians - Talk to a local band and venue about hosting a concert for your cause. You can sell food and drinks, and make sure to talk about your cause in a few announcements throughout the show.

**Host a fashion Show:** Participants put together outfits and show them off on the runway, and audience members can donate to vote for their favorites. This works well if your organization can use clothes from a local store . . . or has large closets!

**Host a Food Truck Night** . . . Food trucks are one of the hot current trends. If your nonprofit has a local space to host a food truck night, this could be a great way to bring supporters together and fundraise and share profits.

**Host a Taste of UMW Event:** have participants purchase tickets, which they can redeem to try food from different tables or booths. If local restaurants are willing to participate, you can use their food as the center of the event, and you can have individual volunteers cook their best dish or dessert to add to the main event.

**Host an art show** and help local artists to sell their nice art, gain higher visibility, and take a percentage of the sales in lieu of registration fee or table fee to help a great cause. To change up a typical art show, have pets make all of the art! Ahead of the show, your organization can set up paints and paper. Participating dog owners can come to have their friend make "paw art."

### MISC.

**A "Mustached!" fundraiser.** If you donate a small amount to the group, you can have someone's church directory picture "mustached" on the church website or Facebook page for the week.

**Bottle Drive:** Collect bottles from congregation - return for 10 cents each in Michigan. If ladies don't want to take them back, split the money with the church youth group, Scouts, or UMM if they will take the bottles back. UMW publicize and collect - the other group takes them back.

**Pajama Sunday:** If the UMW take over the service for one Sunday in their church they could ask for a donation to come VERY CASUAL, or wear Pajamas (or some other clothing like t-shirts or hats).

**President or Pastor Punishment fundraiser** - With everyone on board, you put "punishments" up for a monetary vote. The punishment that wins (raises the most in donations) is the one done to the willing "victim" - your UMW president or the pastor. Could be dying their hair, running laps, wearing long fake nails, shaving off a mustache, wearing a temporary tattoo, etc. (The punishments are thought up by the hosts of the event and victims, and must be agreed upon by the victims.)

**Start an online viral fundraising campaign** like the cold ice-bucket challenge – what else could be done? – "an embarrassing happy dance!", "recite something" on the Facebook page. Just find something unique to your church that could be done on-line. Give a donation and do the action and challenge someone else to do the same.

So here they are, the ideas I've manage to collect thus far. If you have others please share them with me at [lora.crombez@gmail.com](mailto:lora.crombez@gmail.com).