



Sisters of Grace Ministry

Grace Covenant Church, PCA, Dallas, Georgia

"A Sweet Friendship Refreshes the Soul"

Proverbs 27:9

As I look around the multi-purpose classroom we use for Youth Sunday School, ESL, and other ministries during the week, my heart is warmed as I see women of faith, or as we refer to them, 'big sisters' sitting with the young women and girls of our church, now their 'little sisters,' decorating cookies for next week's ESL program. While they work diligently to finish this month's outreach, they are talking about school, family, hobbies, their likes, and dislikes, but mostly their favorite flavors of icing and sprinkles! Today, the "Sisters of Grace" are forming relationships to last a lifetime.

How did we get here?

A ministry with the overarching purpose of connecting women of faith with our younger sisters in Christ, called the "Secret Sisters Ministry," sprung from the hearts of a few women in our church about six years ago. Women of the church were invited to participate, while the twelve girls in the church, ages five through college, were automatically included in the program. The expectation was to form lasting Christian relationships as they encouraged the younger sisters 'secretly' with prayer and the giving of notes, cards, and small gifts.



The young sisters (or their mothers) completed questionnaires with information about the girls. The ministry facilitators then provided the completed questionnaires to each of the girls' randomly chosen big 'secret' sisters, who remained unidentified until the end of the program eight months later. The women were encouraged to pray for their young sisters on a regular basis and to send a note or card or give them a small gift each month. In return, the young sisters were encouraged to write back to their yet-unknown big sisters and provide their notes to the facilitators for delivery.

The fun ensued and it cannot go without saying that keeping a secret for that long is not easy! The young sisters were eager to know who was leaving them notes and gifts, comparing handwriting samples with each other and quickly turning into 'mini-Nancy Drews!' As the girls excitedly opened gifts left for them, big sisters would look on from afar,

almost ‘spilling the beans’ to identify themselves. Notes to the girls contained encouraging verses from scripture; however, in many cases, their notes in return to their big sisters seemed generic (remember, the girls had no idea which of the women was their ‘big secret sister’). Big sisters wanted a deeper relationship with the girls, but building those intergenerational relationships was difficult as long as their identities remained a secret.

Then what? Count it all joy!

While we waited and planned for the next season of the ‘Secret Sisters Ministry’ to begin in Spring 2020, women continued to communicate with their assigned young girls. But then, Covid-19 happened. Sadly, during that year and the next, there were not enough girls to provide little sisters for all the women who wanted to participate and had a heart for the ministry. Girls moved with their families, left for college, or married, making it very hard for an older sister to engage with her assigned younger sister from the first year and more challenging for the younger sisters once their social and academic calendars became full. Some of the initial relationships were cemented and thankfully still exist, but others fell quickly to the wayside.

In hindsight, having a hard stop, with time to reevaluate the ministry, was a gift from our



loving heavenly Father. Did we clearly state our purpose? Did the girls appreciate the provision of undeserved gifts, and did they relate them to His unmerited grace? Did we glorify Him through the ministry? Was there something deeper missing? We prayerfully sought answers to these questions, and the ministry began to evolve.

Our treasury of young sisters had dropped from eleven to six during the pandemic. When we resumed the ministry, it was still 'secret'; however, the objective became more relational with youth bonding as Christians with each other and the women and youth spending time in group sessions to nurture lasting Christian relationships with each other. Activities based on God's Word, including devotional content provided by adult female leaders, and community outreach such as "Bring a Friend to Church Day," helped grow the ministry. Albeit fun, we discouraged monthly gift-giving and encouraged creative gifts from the heart, including notes and homemade cards with heartfelt messages or Bible verses.



Yet, there remained a vacuum that needed to be filled.

While "Young Sisters" again waited many months to find out the identity of their "Big Secret Sister," it was still awkward for the women to fulfill their helper design as nurturers while remaining 'unknown.' Spiritual mothering, as defined by Susan Hunt, is "When a woman of faith and spiritual maturity enters into a nurturing relationship with a younger woman in order to encourage and equip her to live for God's glory."¹ She goes on to tell us, "When two women join together in the study of God's Word, prayer, and praise, they enjoy an eternal bond that is possible only because of God's grace."² The seeds of "Secret Sisters" had been planted and it was time to cultivate our garden. By His grace, the "Sisters of Grace Ministry" bloomed.

Now what?

The ministry no longer contains a 'secret' component. Built upon the foundation of Ephesians 4:7-16, which gives a beautiful picture of how members of the church help to build up and equip one another in the work of the church, the "Sisters of Grace" Ministry sought to facilitate intergenerational relationships between "big" and "little" sisters, encouraging community while seeking to obey the Titus 2 mandate for women to disciple women and girls.

It has continued to evolve in ways that we did not expect.

We now have monthly gatherings after worship service that include a time for fellowship between 'big and little' sisters, a bag lunch, and a lot of wonderful conversation around the room. We devote time to learning about the ministries our church supports and how we

can serve and pray for them. We teach the young girls to observe the needs of those around us—the widow, the homebound, the vulnerable—and discuss ways to lend a hand.

In the past few years, twelve girls have participated in the “Sisters of Grace” Ministry. They have not all been the same young women each year, as some things don’t change – they still move, go off to college, and get married. Big sisters, little sisters, and now their mothers work together to be conduits of Jesus’ love to neighbors in our community. They write notes to our missionaries, decorate bags for lunch programs to let children in our community know that God loves them, make blankets, and fill welcome bags with baby booties and lip gloss for new moms, all while they build loving relationships and lasting friendships with each other. There may only be a dozen girls in the program, but there are close to thirty sisters in the room growing together in love and building generational bridges in our church.

Some of the young women and girls who first participated in the “Secret Sisters Ministry” regretted seeing the ‘mystery’ disappear, but ending that aspect yielded other benefits. The ‘little’ sisters no longer wait for the monthly gathering to share news with their ‘big’ sisters. Our “Sisters of Grace” now share with each other much, much more—they share a sweet friendship, and that refreshes the soul (Proverbs 27:9).

If you would like to know more about the “Sisters of Grace” Ministry, please do not hesitate to contact the Women’s Ministry Committee of Grace Covenant Church, PCA, Dallas, Georgia at wmc@gracecovenantpca.com.

¹Hunt, Susan, *Spiritual Mothering: The Titus 2 Model for Women Mentoring Women* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1992), 99.

²Hunt, Susan, *Spiritual Mothering: The Titus 2 Model for Women Mentoring Women* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1992), 101.