



## Summertime and Holidays...How We Love Them

### Leadership Encouragement

Mary Younger

"There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven..." Eccl. 3:1

We might as well admit it; ministry requires time and hard work. Random items stack up under our desks, in cupboards, and drawers. Computer files seemingly grow while we're asleep. Emails go unanswered for far too long. How long has it been since someone cleaned the church kitchen?

That's why the Lord gave ministry the gift of summertime and holidays. Mark Twain said, "Have a place for everything, and keep the thing somewhere else." So true, so true. Eventually, those things need to return to their "place."

Summer is a great time to catch up and organize for fall ministries. I was Dir. of Service Ministries for years (weddings, funerals, communion, baptisms, library, church decoration, and kitchen). I was always amazed at how messy cupboards became, how dirty some people left the kitchen, and how fast things could disappear and need replacement.

Perhaps you have heard these phrases from people in your congregation:

"This is my first time to do this, and I don't know how to put the cover back on the baptismal."

"These table clothes have been sitting on my dryer for weeks and weeks. I'm sooo sorry."

"I didn't know where to put the table decorations. I just put them on the nearest shelf."

"My husband was waiting in the car, and I figured you would wash the coffee pot."

"The library was closed. I left the books by the door."

I wanted to post a sign in every room that said,

**Your Mother does not attend this church, so CLEAN UP AFTER YOURSELF**

but I didn't.

Summer is downtime in ministry. It gives us time to breathe. Congregants go on vacation, Vacation Bible school usually only lasts one week, and people seem to have fewer problems when the sun is shining. It's time to clean up your office, rearrange the table cloths and order more, and contact the maintenance man or a plumber, to have that toilet in the women's restroom fixed.

When I first came on staff, we were a church of 700 in a small facility. Our "kitchen" was an 8x10 room with a few cabinets and a sink. Yet, we managed to serve food to hundreds of people each ministry year. Creativity is the name of the game. One year we set up a dishwashing station on the back parking lot, ran a hose from a hot water tank, and had a group of guys wash the pots and pans as we cooked on the patio. Those were fun days, and we all learned to serve and laugh together.

Building relationships and creating lasting memories also teach us lessons about the value of sacrificial service—something that Jesus demonstrated and called us to imitate.

Cleaning the church kitchen is a sacrificial service that few people enjoy, so gather two or three women and a couple of guys (to move the heavy stuff and operate a power washer) and clean together. Deepen

the relationships you have with them, and pray humor into the morning. Provide them lunch, send thank you notes, and if allowed, honor their work from the pulpit on Sunday.

The point of keeping a clean, orderly kitchen is SAFETY. Cooler boxes stacked five high can fall on a child. Boxes leftover from an event can welcome vermin. Oil/water left on a floor is an accident waiting to happen.

Refrigerators and freezers are always a quandary. No one wants to throw away a nearly full bottle of mustard. The container of ice cream—surely the high school ministry could use it. Eventually, the items stack up and outlive their "use by" date. Consider the following ideas for solving the dilemma:

Throw away anything past pull date/use by date.

Notify any ministry that might be able to use the items. Give them a deadline.

Take leftovers to the Rescue Mission or homeless shelter.

Send items home with the volunteers that work in the ministry.

Make an "Everyone, please use these" sign and place all items on one shelf.

Then check the kitchen often to make sure the fridge and freezer are clean and orderly. If the Health Dept. shows up, you will pass inspection.

Don't forget to empty and clean the ice maker; mold grows in there. The pantry needs checking; even creamer cups spoil if left too long in a hot kitchen. Spray for cockroaches and ants. Cooking utensils and knives disappear regularly (check the high school room.) Buy more pie servers since there never seems to be one when you need it. Clean the stove and oven (why does pizza make such a mess?)

Ideally, a church has teams of people to cover service areas. However, if your church is small, it could mean only one person is responsible for funeral receptions, baptisms, or communion. Take the team or individual to lunch and discuss the needs of their ministry. Give them a small gift as a token of appreciation. If money is short, a plate of cookies from your home kitchen will suffice.

Whether we are paid staff or a volunteer, Christ's example motivates us to live and work with a commitment to servanthood. That may mean cleaning up after others. There's nothing like scrubbing a moldy cooking pot to test our attitude as a servant of Christ.

Summertime and Holidays give us the time to reorganize. Now you and your ministry teams are ready for fall.

*My prayer for you:*

*Dear God of order, thank you for giving us the time to catch up with big and little things. Give the reader opportunities to build relationships as they work with others doing the necessary labor of ministry. And, when we have to clean up after others, may the work be offered as a gift to you.*

*In the name of the One who cleans up the messes in our lives, Christ our Lord, we rejoice and say, Amen.*

## Mary Younger

Mary has spent 40 plus years in Women's Ministry, first as an attendee learning about God and the Bible, then serving coffee and setting up chairs. As she grew spiritually, the Lord called her into leadership. Mary served 18 years as a volunteer before joining the staff of RiverLakes Community Church in Bakersfield, CA. She served for 18 years as Director of Women's Ministries and Service Ministries.

Mary loves to help women turn biblical knowledge into practical application for their everyday life. She has a heart for leaders and loves to mentor them.

Mary is married to Doug. In retirement, they enjoy traveling across the United States and Canada. They have three children, nine grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. She loves to read, sew and teach. You may contact Mary at [myounger.1050@yahoo.com](mailto:myounger.1050@yahoo.com)

