

Can you remember the last time you received a party invitation and didn't have to RSVP... or bring your wallet, or disguise a store-bought dessert as homemade, or ask for directions? Where you could come just as you are?

Kim Bowman Newlen's Sweet Monday ministry creates just such an environment. With her Southern charm and a heart committed to God, Kim takes delight in encouraging women of all ages and stages by hosting simple and sweet small group gatherings in her neighborhood – and showing others how they can host one in theirs...

Sweet Loneliness

My husband and I met while serving with different ministries – he on staff with Fellowship of Christian Athletes and I with Campus Crusade for Christ. After we married, we accepted full-time teaching positions, and when our daughter was born, I continued to teach part-time. But when my daughter turned two, I decided to give up my teaching position to stay home with her.

I had never been lonely before, but the abrupt change from part-time teacher to full-time mother left me struggling with loneliness. And I thought... if I, a Christian who loves the Lord and knows that in Christ I'm never alone, can feel lonely, how magnified the loneliness must be for those who are not believers.

A Beauty-Full Evening

God led me to host an evening event in my home out of a need for fellowship, yet I knew that I didn't want to just entertain. I also didn't want to do so much cooking and cleaning that I wished the company wasn't coming, so I planned a simple dessert. Then I invited every woman I knew: the women in church, all my neighbors, women I met when running errands. Vowing to keep it simple, I called it *Sweet Monday* to help busy women remember the day, and scheduled one for the first Monday evening of each month. Same time. Same place.

On my first *Sweet Monday*, 30 women came; the walls of my home could barely

contain our joy! I wanted them to have a wonderful time, to laugh and to feel comfortable, but I also wanted to share something from God's Word. I planned a short devotional called "A Beauty-Full Evening" and encouraged my guests to share their favorite beauty tips. Then I matched each one with a Bible verse. For example, when we apply foundation, we can remember that Jesus is the foundation of our lives (1 Cor. 3:10-11). When applying blush, there's Luke 6:29: "If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also." (Then both your cheeks will be the same color!) Lipstick is my favorite... there are over 115 biblical references to lips.

for their family, or have great ideas for organizing a closet, or have an eye for fashion – things that interest other women. *Sweet Monday* provides a place for them to use their God-given gifts and abilities in ministry while spurring other women on toward love and good deeds.

Above all, *Sweet Monday* creates an environment where women are exposed to genuine fellowship and the claims of Christ – relational evangelism in a lonely world. Anyone can host one. You can make it your own, though it may take a step of faith to start. I recommend starting with prayer. Ask God how to design yours. Start by inviting two or three neighbors, scheduling a pair of *Sweet Mondays*, and going from

sweet monday

Loneliness drove Kim Bowman Newlen to start a ministry to women that God has since blessed with sweet success.

By Deborah Milton with Kim Bowman Newlen

Seeing Women Shine

That was seven years ago. I've had 30 to 60 women in my home every *Sweet Monday* since. I don't make phone calls, but I do provide a schedule card listing the next few months of *Sweet Monday*, with directions to my house on the back, for women to take as they leave. Women use the cards to invite friends.

Listening to women, discovering their interests and passions, helps me plan each month's program around them. Many women will never lead a Bible study, or teach a Sunday school class, but they make mouth-watering cakes, or set a lovely table

there. You can adapt them as God leads, for two women or two hundred. Keep it simple and sweet, then trust God to stamp it with Kingdom significance.

B-Y-O-M (Bring Your Own Mug)

For your first *Sweet Monday*, a *Mug and Muffin* is perfect. Simply provide warm muffins and ask each guest to bring her own mug. Decide together who should win mug awards in categories such as most feminine or funniest.

A Proper English Tea Party is another great idea for *Sweet Monday*. It can include fancy cupcakes and a basketful of tea bags,



or an elaborate high tea that's substantial enough for dinner. Crafty groups can also bring odds and ends to design frou-frou hats. My homemade hat comes complete with real candles to light for birthday parties.

One of my all-time favorite *Sweet Mondays* is "The Clutter Auction," which I do once each year because the women love it so much. I lead a ten-minute devotional focusing on steps we can take to unclutter our minds and schedules, then I reserve the rest of the evening for an auction. Each woman contributes one item from home and draws an envelope containing play money for bidding. It's pure fun.

Wearing Many Hats

I have been faithfully flying by the seat of my pants ever since *Sweet Monday* started. I now accept numerous speaking engagements, and I've written a book filled with *Sweet Monday* ideas and devotions to help women start their own. Life can get tiring and my over-commitment alarm bells ring when I get bossy with my family or try to put them on my schedule. To guard against this, I begin each morning in God's Word, listening for Him. When I'm committed to God, I'm better prepared to accept all those unexpected interruptions during the day, and stay focused on the things that count for eternity.

I wouldn't be doing *Sweet Monday* if God wasn't in it with me. In the past, my fear of failure held me back from stepping out in faith, but now God has given me Christ-confidence. I want so much for women to know how He can use our smallest efforts for His eternal glory – that He can bring something sweet out of our loneliest times, even when we think nothing is happening. Just as He did for me.

To contact Kim, or to order her book *Sweet Monday: Women's Socials on a Shoestring Tied to a Generous God*, write: Kim Newlen, c/o Sweet Monday, P.O. Box 29603, Richmond, VA 23242, or visit her website at www.sweetmonday.com. ■

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